Performing the Township: Pantsula for Life

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Abstract

Pantsula dance is a performing art born from the townships of Johannesburg. It is a dance form performed across South Africa, in a variety of contexts; in theatres, music videos and competitions in community halls, on national and international stages and on television, and in the streets of townships, cities and suburbs across South Africa and abroad. Its performance is widespread, but it has its beginnings as a dance form born in areas created to marginalise and oppress.

There is a scarcity of academic scholarship related to pantsula dance. This thesis aims to be a contribution to that pre-existing body of knowledge in the hope that there can be further engagement on this important, and increasingly mainstream, art form. I have focused my thesis on analysing pantsula dance as a performance of 'the township'. This has been attempted through an ethnographic engagement with pantsula dancers based in different township areas of Johannesburg and Grahamstown: various members of Impilo Mapantsula, Via Katlehong, Intellectuals Pantsula, Via Kasi Movers, Dlala Majimboz and the cast of Via Katlehong's *Via Sophiatown*. The research was conducted between 2013 and 2016 and serves to represent various moments within the ethnographic research process, while coming to understand various aspects of pantsula dance. An engagement with notions of 'the township', the clothing choices of the pantsula 'uniform', the core moves, inherent hybridity in the form itself, and the dedication to the dance form as a representation of the *isipantsula* 'way of life', are addressed throughout the thesis. As well as engaging with the memory and representation of Sophiatown as an important component to pantsula dance. Pantsula dance, an intrinsically South African dance form, provides a celebratory conception

of ‘the township’ space and allows people from different backgrounds to engage in an important part of South Africa’s past, present and future.

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All the people who have a passion for pantsula dance and who have taken the time to sit and talk with me.

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I would like to dedicate my thesis to Thozamile 'Rocky' Mngcongo, whose spirit lives on in all who knew him and loved him. His passion for pantsula dance helped me to continue with my research and it is his memory that has encouraged me in the most difficult times of this process.

Chapter 1
Introduction

> *The street he moves in is dusty. Clouds of sand kick up alongside the blur of his red, Converse All Stars. His knees bend and stretch in his beige Dickies pants but one hardly notices; the focus is on the navy blue spotie he deftly manipulates*[1]*. The hat flies and lands on his head, shoulders, knees and hands with the 'pops' and 'locks' he makes, visible through the contractions of his red and black, buttoned-up, tartan shirt. This is a man in control of himself and his environment.*

The description above of a pantsula dancer dancing in a township street, is the product of my imagination; an attempt at a description of the prototypical pantsula dancer, compiled from my research experience in pantsula dance. The relationship to the moving body of the pantsula dancer and the township environment, within which he interacts, is the central concern of my thesis. My thesis aims to understand how 'the township' is imagined by pantsula dancers and how their conception of 'the township' is embodied through the performance of pantsula dance.

In this introductory chapter I intend to acquaint the reader to the nature of my research; In particular, how I have come to understand pantsula dance as a performance of 'the township'. Who I have met and engaged with throughout my research is integral to my understanding of pantsula dance. The lack of academic research on this dance phenomenon precipitates an ethnographic approach to the research field and an engagement with literature based in a variety of disciplines such as literature, social geography and dance studies. What follows in this chapter is a discussion of my research, situated in a particular context.

1.1 Context of research

Ayanda Nondlwana is the first pantsula dancer I met. I was in the midst of a group of young, Rhodes University, Ethnomusicology students, where we interviewed him about pantsula

[1] A panama or bucket hat.

dance for an exercise in interview skills (see Appendix A for interview). Ayanda[2] is a well-known figure in the Grahamstown community[3]. He is, like many pantsula dancers, an artist, a performer and entertainer. He is the director of the pantsula dance crew, Via Kasi Movers, and a member of UBOM!, the Eastern Cape Drama Company. It was only two years on from this initial, brief meeting with Ayanda, that we would meet again and I would enter the world of pantsula dance research for three years. My first, proper introduction to pantsula dance was in 2013 with Ayanda, in a workshop he was conducting with the Via Kasi Movers, in Fingo Village, Grahamstown:

Figure 1: Ayanda Nondlwana in 2013, dressed in a Sophiatown gangster costume.

Ayanda took us on a walk around the area dressed in an outfit we were to find out later was reminiscent of the tsotsis of Sophiatown[4] [5] (see figure 1). He explained that in order to be a pantsula dancer one has to 'know the township'. He said that you

[2] Throughout my paper I refer to most of the dancers I have engaged with by their surnames. In some cases I refer to the dancer by their first name. There are a number of reasons for the choice of whether to refer to someone by their first name, nickname or surname. My relations with some dancers was friendlier than with others, due to the amount of time spent with different individuals and crews, and this allowed for me to feel more comfortable referring to them by name than by their surname. For some dancers, their first name or their nickname is how they are known by most people and so for the purposes of recognition I refer to this name. When information is given in interviews I make use of surnames in respect of the use of surnames when referencing scholarly sources.

[3] My thesis focuses on two geographical areas of South Africa: Grahamstown and Johannesburg. Grahamstown is a small town in the Eastern Cape Province, where Rhodes University, the university I attended, is located. Johannesburg is one of the largest cities in South Africa, in the Gauteng Province. Both cities will be discussed in further detail throughout the thesis.

[4] The word, *tsotsi,* originally a subcultural style in the 1940s is now a colloquial word in South Africa for a criminal/gangster, discussed further in Chapter 2.

[5] Sophiatown is a suburb in Johannesburg that is most known for its vibrant history as a multicultural freehold suburb during apartheid. Sophiatown will be discussed extensively throughout the thesis.

cannot be a real pantsula dancer if you have not grown up in, or have an understanding of township life. As we walked, he taught us how to walk like a pantsula. The walk involves a very confident stride with a slight bounce. One could describe it as a 'township swagger'. Ayanda was adamant that the walk was one of the most important aspects of pantsula dance and if we did not have it right then we could not learn to pantsula dance properly. The dancers then performed a show that explained the history of pantsula dance, from the tsotsis of Sophiatown to the fast dance that it is today.

In a documentary by two Rhodes University journalism students, Ayanda describes the importance of the township in pantsula dance:

> You must live in the township to understand this pantsula, 'cause everything that we do, and choreograph, and dance, we see it here in township. It's what is happening. It's our life. (Perros and Brazic 2013)

Ayanda's voice features throughout the thesis. As do the voices of pantsula dancers I met throughout my research process. My initial introduction to pantsula dance, described above, characterises my understanding of the phenomenon of pantsula. Every pantsula dancer I have engaged with has emphasised the importance of the township. How does a young white woman, born in the suburbs of Johannesburg, have any claim to an understanding of this dance form, and consequently write a thesis about it? I am indebted to the pantsula dancers, whose ideas about pantsula feature as the main focus of my research. Many of these men and women are leaders in the field, each has their own opinion and expertise, and it is the variety of knowledge about the dance form that proves to be its definition.

1.1.1 What is pantsula dance?

My entire thesis aims to answer this question from a variety of viewpoints but first a generalised discussion of what characterises pantsula dance is necessary. The description of a prototypical pantsula dancer, provided at the beginning of this chapter, comes from a generalised understanding of the distinguishing features of pantsula dance.

Pantsula dance is a performance art born from the townships of Johannesburg. It is mostly performed by males; however, there are a growing number of female dancers. It is characterised by a straight-backed movement style, and the footwork determines the movements along with gestures of the arms, hands and face. The most common modes of performance are either a solo style or in a group. The group style usually consists of physical gestures in 'formations' where precision and uniformity are the aims in the routine. The solo style is usually more fluid and can involve contortion, 'popping' and 'locking', depending on the skills of the dancer[6]. Some duos and trios can be performed closer to the solo style rather than the group formation style. Dancers are usually grouped in 'crews' that can be made up of any number of individuals who are most often from the same area[7]. Crews rehearse routines that have been choreographed either by joint participation within the group or by an individual who is identified as the choreographer. If there is a choreographer in the group he or she is often perceived as the most talented dancer. Each crew has a distinct name and some kind of 'uniform' to distinguish them from others.

Leballo 'Lee' Lenela of 'Intellectuals' told me, in an interview in September 2015, how crews often name themselves after the place they come from, by their shoes, by their clothes or where they shop, and that there is a 'trend' to start the name of the crew with 'Via' (a word that indicates a kind of movement of going between, or coming from). Some examples of names of pantsula dance crews are: Intellectuals Pantsula, Via Volcano, Via Katlehong, Via Vyndals, Soweto Junction, Red For Danger, Real Actions Pantsula, Via Kasi Movers, Dlala Majimboz, Dlala Mapantsula, Via Lacosta, Vaal Important Pantsula (VIP), Future Pantsulas, Alexandra Rockstars, Ugie Pantsula, Shakers and Movers, Skeleton Movers, to name a few. The name of the crew indicates the characteristics of the crew that define them from others. Along with the name, a crew is often associated with a particular 'uniform', using colours as a further form of differentiation and identification.

The typical 'uniform' of a pantsula dancer involves a *spotie,* a long sleeve collared shirt or a golf shirt, chinos (formal pants) and 'All-Star' sneakers. Some crews use one colour, or two

[6] Popping and locking are styles of movement that developed in hip-hop dance, where an isolated part of the body moves rapidly away from its joint to the body.

[7] There is not much research into the use of the word 'crew' in dance contexts. I believe the word, which is also used in hip-hop culture, symbolises the importance of group cohesion amongst members, similar to that of a gang.

contrasting colours, across the entire outfit to create a striking uniform. Real Actions Pantsula is known for their orange and yellow uniform, where one leg pant is orange and the other is yellow. Red For Danger is known for the red, tartan-like shirts, *spotie* and All-Star shoes. Intellectuals crew members wear red chinos, white golf shirts, white All-Stars and white *spoties* with a turned up green underside, and a 'bobble' on top being a distinctive feature of their *spoties*. Colourful overalls are also used as a uniform for some crews. The style of dress is a very important component to pantsula dance and is discussed in depth in the chapters to follow.

These generalised characteristics described above are features that provide an idea of pantsula dance, although bear in mind that pantsula dance is varied in its expression across individuals, crews and places. My interview with Lenela in Soweto, helps to illustrate how there are some basic features that help to distinguish pantsula dance from other dance forms, while every crew attempts to differentiate themselves from other crews. It is best to present her words here, as I will continue to do with many other pantsula dancers' views, since it is through their understanding of pantsula dance that I have come to understand much about the origins and practices of the form:

> *In order to be able to spot a pantsula dance even though it is different according to the places where we come from, in Orange Farm, Soweto, Vaal wherever, there are basics. We have 'isiparapara', that's actually the most important basic, it's the first thing they teach you when you want to dance pantsula. Then you can also spot it by footwork as well, because pantsula is more on the feet than any other body parts. In Intellectuals we try to be different, we don't want to be like all the other pantsulas. You can spot that, okay this is a pantsula group, because we have the basics and even the footwork but we try to modify it to suit us and our personalities. (Lenela 2015)*

A discussion about the basic steps, like *isiparapara*, is provided in detail in Chapter 2. The notion of modification is an important one, and something I have felt myself, while learning pantsula dance as a woman. Unfortunately, there is a lack of female voices in my thesis. Pantsula dance is mostly a male dominated performance art and all the dancers I have engaged with have been male, with three exceptions: Leballo 'Lee' Lenela of 'Intellectuals',

Nthabeleng Rahlabaki of 'Real Actions' and Boitumelo Tshupa of 'Via Katlehong'. From my own experience of learning pantsula dance, I noticed how the movements are not created with the female body in mind. The movements usually rely on straight, long bodies where a woman's hips might be in the way. I felt I had to adjust the movements I was being taught to suit my body. Lenela is a well-known female pantsula dancer who expressed to me how she has to claim her femininity and allow for limitations in what she can perform, where the men she works with will push her to try harder.

Intellectuals is known for their acrobatic movements, their modification of the dance form is discussed in further detail in Chapter 4 from conversations with another member of the Intellectuals crew, Bongani 'Vetboy' Mthombeni. While there is a personal expression of the form on one's own body, there is also a need to establish a style specific to a crew that can lead to easy identification by others. Guzman-Sanchez' book, *Underground Dance Masters*, about the development of street dance styles in the United States, helps to explain some parallels I found in pantsula dance and other urban dance forms.

Guzman-Sanchez (2012, 15) explains that dancers of street dance styles reinterpret what they see and elaborate it, "to make it an individual statement of expression". Guzman-Sanchez adds that the modification of dance in this way is an attempt at "making it your own, while staying true to the essence of the original concept." In this case, the 'original concept' of pantsula dance is related to the footwork and the 'basic steps' that Lenela describes, but even this concept, as will be seen in the following chapters, can vary across different areas.

When I began my research in 2015 in Johannesburg, I realised how varied the experience and performance of pantsula dance can be across different township areas. 'Impilo Mapantsula' is an umbrella organisation managed by some of the most well-known directors of various crews around Gauteng; Sello Modiga of 'Real Actions Pantsula' (Orange Farm), Sicelo Xaba of 'Red For Danger' (Mohlakeng), Vusi Mdoyi of 'Via Katlehong' (Katlehong) and Joshua Mokoena of 'Ezomdabu Young Entertainers' (Vosloorus). Daniela Goeller, who is an academic originally from Germany, also manages the company. She has been conducting research on pantsula culture since 2011. On their website they explain that they started the company to,

> Unite our talent and create a structure to support our various activities related to Isipantsula culture and dance, embracing dance festivals, theatre and film production, education and academic research. (Impilo Mapantsula 2014)

Each of the men above has become successful, in varying ways, through promoting pantsula dance. This will be discussed in Chapter 4 to a greater extent. These men provide a microcosmic example of the variation that exists within pantsula dance. Each of them comes from different areas and promote and perform pantsula dance in different ways, yet what they have in common is that they have all come from a background where they identify with *isipantsula* culture. The various forms of cultural expression in pantsula are expressed in different ways, across different areas. The one common element is that this expression takes place and has originated in townships.

1.1.2 Situating myself as researcher

The proposal phase of my research in 2015 saw my goals of the research as follows: (1) to investigate the history of pantsula dance; (2) to record and describe dance moves and gestural features intrinsic to pantsula dance; (3) to analyse the importance of 'the township' as a social and geographic space in which pantsula dance comes to life; and (4) to understand and describe the relevance of 'style' (features other than dance) in relation to the performance of pantsula dance. Although I answer these goals to some extent, the impossibly broad scope of these goals was realised upon encountering the variety of expressions in pantsula dance across Gauteng, the province where Johannesburg is found.

My prior knowledge of pantsula dance, before I began research in Johannesburg, was limited to what I had learnt from two pantsula dance crews based in Grahamstown, where the township areas are close together[8]. In Grahamstown I mostly engaged with members of Via Kasi Movers and Dlala Majimboz; Ayanda Nondlwana, Thozamile 'Rocky' Mngcongo, Nceba Njadayi, Thanduxolo 'Banana' Kilana and Likhaya 'Petite' Jack were the dancers I conversed with the most. My understanding of the dance form was based on what I was told by these dancers. When I came to Johannesburg to conduct my field research I realised

[8] Similar to Soweto, Grahamstown's township is divided into many areas that are closely linked. Fingo, Hlalani, Vukani, Tantyi and Joza make up some of the different areas of the Grahamstown location. Joza is also made up of a number of extensions going from extension 1 to extension 9. There is no clear indication on a map or in the areas themselves of where the one area or extension ends and the other begins but anyone living in the township knows which is which.

how little I really knew. I was lucky to meet Daniela Goeller who had been doing five years of research on pantsula dance in Gauteng. When I showed her my proposal, she told me to change my plans. Two years of research is not enough to fully understand the complexity of the history or the present nature of pantsula dance, let alone five.

What I have since come to realise is how the performance of 'the township' is the central point to my initial goals, and I elaborate upon this relationship in subsequent chapters. The history of 'the township' space informs the history of pantsula dance. The intrinsic steps and gestural features of pantsula dance are created within and across different areas based on the experiences of individuals who have grown up in a township space. And the 'stylish' features of pantsula dance, like the clothing, are related to an expression of features of township life that pantsula dancers feel are important to relate to other people.

In returning to the question I posed earlier, and to Ayanda's assurances, being an individual who has not lived in a township may problematize my understanding of pantsula dance. Although I grew up in Johannesburg, the city considered to be the birthplace of pantsula dance, in my first eighteen years of living in the small suburb of Parkview, in the middle of Johannesburg, I was unaware of the existence of pantsula dance. It was only in my fourth year at Rhodes University in Grahamstown, approximately 801km away from the city considered to be the birthplace of pantsula dance and my hometown, where I would learn about pantsula. My initial, eager education was thanks to Via Kasi Movers, whom I conducted ethnographic research with, for a paper in completion of my Honours degree in 2013.

My paper focused on pantsula dance in two ways; Pantsula as 'a way of life', and features of the dance form itself. It became clear that the dancers I engaged with were performing an idea about township life that had its history rooted among the Sophiatown gangsters of the 1950s. Although the dancers would say it was their 'way of life,' it became evident that there was a staged performance of the stylistic qualities of this lifestyle rather than an actual dedication to it. The dance form drove their livelihoods, much in the same way a ballet dancer is dedicated to ballet (see Midena 2014). Over the course of the year I came to witness Via Kasi Movers (VKM) reach the top 8 of 'Step Up or Step Out' on television, open their Pantsula Academy with the aim of teaching pantsula dance to people from varying

backgrounds and go through a break up and split between VKM and a new crew called Dlala Majimboz. My current research experience has shown that fights between individuals, and consequent divides in crews, are not an uncommon occurrence. After completing the description of the 'Intellectuals' crew, described in Chapter 4, I learnt that Bongani had left the crew to join Soweto Junction. This volatility among crews is another aspect to ethnographic research that I have had to come to terms with, especially when dealing with something as dynamic and innovative as pantsula dance; my research is a description in a moment of time.

Another very important aspect to deal with in my research, especially as a South African conducting research in South Africa, is how one cannot necessarily escape the questions of race and class that arise. The fear of participating in an exoticisation of 'the other' in my research constantly plagued me to question my motives and my interest and excitement in the dance form. Being a white woman from the suburbs, researching a dance form characterised by its performance by black males from the townships, in the legacy of the segregationist policies of apartheid, made us binary opposites. Throughout my thesis it is necessary to engage with the notion of 'race' as defined by the legislation of apartheid, legislation which did much in its power to divide people based on the colour of their skin. The legacy of this kind of oppositional 'social engineering' that took place continues to have an impact on South African society today. Gaylard (2008, 16), who writes about 'black' short story writers, underlines, "ours is (or was) a society permeated by the ideology of race and divided at every level and in every way along racial (and ethnic) lines." Therefore it is necessary to use the differentiating terms of 'white' and 'black' that apartheid helped to solidify.

I am fortunate to have grown up after the end of apartheid; I have only had to learn about apartheid but I am still aware of its effects on South African society. My position as a white woman in South Africa is a privileged one and my research in different townships in Grahamstown and around Johannesburg was partly possible because of this privilege. The creation of relationships with individuals would not have taken place if I had not chosen to conduct this research. It was in the conversations that I had with people who have a passion for pantsula dance, where I could learn about a dance form, and find a similar passion within myself.

I believe that pantsula dance can help to renegotiate the boundaries set up by apartheid in South African society. By celebrating 'the township' space, pantsula dancers help to transform its intended purpose as a space of uniformity, degradation and separation. Ayanda, in Perros and Brazic 2013, puts this sentiment in his poetic way:

> *And there are those who are now bringing the dance and the joys, the unity in people, cause pantsula dancers, they bring all people together. Today we pantsula dancers, we are not tsotsis or thugs. But we are doctors and our medicine is entertainment.*

To be a part of this 'medicine' in my capacity as a researcher and to be able to write about and speak about what I have learnt about pantsula dance, through sharing some of the stories of the people I have encountered, is another privilege for me.

1.2 Methodology and research design

I have previously stated that my research is based on ethnographic research methods. Buckland (2010, 335) outlines that dance ethnography involves the aim to understand a dance form from the 'emic' (insider) perspective. She further explains how the researcher's "principle focus of enquiry" is formed by the practices, conceptualisations and values of people who participate in the dance form being researched. She adds that "according to the research aims of dance ethnography, all movement systems are viewed as socially produced by people in specific temporal–cultural circumstances". Buckland thus situates the participants in a particular dance form as the primary focus of dance-related ethnographic research. My research has followed these ideas where my focus has been informed by my engagement with particular pantsula dancers in specific places and a specific time.

My research was conducted in 2013 in Grahamstown and between 2015 and 2016 in Johannesburg. In Grahamstown, my research was mostly characterised by participant-observation methods. I spent time with the dancers in rehearsals, at performances and in workshops in a variety of forms of participation and observation. In Johannesburg the research became more difficult and participant-observation methods were not as easily used as in my research in Grahamstown. Semi-formal interviews, which were mostly conversational rather than with a specific set of questions, thus characterize much of my research in Johannesburg, with two weeks of participant-observation with Via Katlehong in

Via Sophiatown rehearsals in October and November 2015 (See Appendix C for example of interview with Steven Faleni of Via Katlehong). I was also able to attend some events, the Just Stand Up and Dance Battle in Katlehong in September 2015 and the competition in Mohlakeng in November 2015, being the most prominent. The research process in Johannesburg can be understood as varied and diverse, where there were many different experiences with a variety of people who engaged with me on different levels. I shall briefly describe some of these people and experiences that have stood out the most and are discussed in varying degrees in the chapters to follow.

The first person I met in Johannesburg was Sello 'Zilo' Modiga. While researching pantsula dance in Johannesburg online, I found his contact details and proceeded to make contact with him. I conducted two interviews with him in Orange Farm in January 2015 and January 2016. Through Modiga, I was invited to attend a pantsula dance workshop, where I met three other members of 'Impilo Mapantsula', Daniela Goeller, Joshua Makoena and Sicelo Xaba. I would later meet the fifth member, Vusi Mdoyi, through his crew Via Katlehong. Besides the semi-formal interviews with Modiga, I also conducted interviews with Leballo 'Lee' Lenela in Soweto, after I had met her at an exhibition in which she featured at the University of Johannesburg, and with Steven Faleni, Vuyani Feni and Tshepo Nchabeleng in Katlehong as well as some of the other members of Via Katlehong. My observation and participation in Via Katlehong's rehearsals of *Via Sophiatown* led to many informal conversations with all the cast members involved: Nomathamsanqa Baba, Thembinkosi Hlophe, Tshepo Nchabeleng, Vuyani Feni, Vusi Mdoyi, Mbali Nkosi, Boitumelo Tshupa, Nthabeleng Rahlabaki, Bongani Mthombeni and Angelo Mokenenyane as well as the musicians Muzi Radebe and Jackson Vilikazi. These are a few people who I met and conversed with, who are, in some way or another, connected with the performance of pantsula dance. Reverting to the discussion of Buckland's conception of dance ethnography; they are the 'insiders' of pantsula dance, whose 'emic' perception of the dance form I hope to bring forward in this thesis.

The focus of this paper is mostly on Johannesburg, however, my research in Grahamstown has influenced some of the ways in which I have come to understand pantsula dance. The smaller size of Grahamstown and the closeness of the town and the township areas allowed for more intimate and frequent research relationships. I was thus able to spend more time

with dancers and create deeper connections with the dancers. The size of Johannesburg created a challenge in its variety. The complexity and vastness of Johannesburg meant that it was more difficult to create research relationships with people. Dancers were also used to dealing with 'outsiders' doing research and thus more sceptical. Below is an extract from a reflective period of 'fieldnotes' where I attempted to make sense of the difficulty of conducting research in Johannesburg, compared to the relative ease I had encountered in my research in Grahamstown:

> *Theresa Buckland articulates that "the fieldworker must remain flexible, allowing experiences in the field to shape the principal lines of inquiry" (Buckland 2010, 336). Her sentiment sticks with me as I negotiated the terms of my research with Sicelo Xaba at the opening of an exhibition at the University of Johannesburg. This was my first meeting with Sicelo although a few weeks before we had planned to meet but it had not worked out. He reminded me, like Sello had on our first meeting, that he has been approached before by people wanting to write a book or an article. How is my research going to be any different to what has already been done? And more importantly why should he give up his time and his hard-earned knowledge to me? These questions are a constant reminder of how different this field work has been to the work I did for my Honours degree in Grahamstown. Although Rocky and Ayanda knew a lot about pantsula, the magnitude of support and interest they received by 'outsiders' was on a significantly dimmer scale to the men I have approached in Johannesburg. With the Via Kasi Movers I had one day where I could help with a lift to Port Elizabeth and from then on our journey began together. The 'fieldwork' came so easy. I was able to spend time with them and forget that I was actually working. It still brings so much pain to think of how that time is gone along with Rocky's murder in 2014. Last night while watching the performances I could not help think about how much he would have loved to be there, to be a part of it. The determination the Via Kasi Movers had, could have been pushed so much further with the support and competition of Johannesburg. A reminder of the unfairness of circumstance and geography, I was wholly unprepared when I embarked on my field work journey during my Honours degree research, however, my lack of knowledge was what somehow helped me remain flexible.* (September 2015)

The confusion, illustrated above, I often felt during my research is the consequence of researching "people's conceptualisations, values and practices" (Buckland 2010, 335). As a person with my own set of values and conceptualisations and as an 'outsider' to the practices of pantsula dancers, negotiating relationships became an important part of the

research process. Although there is a tendency for the romanticisation of my previous research experience in Grahamstown in my fieldnotes above, there were equally difficult times where negotiating the implicit terms of my research were necessary. The notion of flexibility for me was a way to allow myself to accept the confusing difficulties of the nature of this kind of research. Some comfort comes from knowing this is not unusual for ethnographic research. Van Maanen (2011, 2) illustrates how 'fieldwork' opens people up to "episodes of embarrassment, affection, misfortune, partial or vague revelation, deceit, confusion, isolation, warmth, adventure, fear, concealment, and always possible deportation." In the reflection of my research experiences I feel I can relate to many of these sentiments, with nostalgic humour, although with the exception of possible deportation.

With my experience in the research process being acknowledged, it is my hope that what is presented in the following chapters is devoid of these moments of emotional difficulties. Although they are a part of the research process what remains the most important is the stories and experiences of the people who taught me about pantsula dance and with whom I conversed and negotiated several arrangements. Some literature has helped me to further understand what I have learned from people along the way. As my chapters provide more thorough discussion of the literature in the context in which they were useful, below I provide acknowledgement of only a few sources that have been key texts in my understanding of the varying aspects important to pantsula dance.

1.3 Literature

Most of the literature is discussed within the text of the following chapters. In this chapter I focus on acknowledging the key texts that provided an understanding of various aspects to pantsula dance. There are a few texts that were essential for a general understanding of urban dance forms and pantsula dance. These key texts will be discussed before I acknowledge texts that were important in my discussions within each chapter. Each chapter to follow focuses on the various aspects to pantsula dance and so each chapter makes use of different key texts that I acknowledge below.

Myburgh's (1993) Honours degree thesis is the longest study on pantsula dance thus far[9]. There is only one copy of Myburgh's paper available in a library at the University of Cape Town (UCT). Some online articles reference Myburgh's paper (see Klein 2013); these are among the many "opinions and nonvalidated data found on the Internet and presented as fact" that Guzman-Sanchez (2012, xi) discusses. Guzman-Sanchez (*ibid.*) calls this 'web mythology' and discusses this notion in relation to people's understanding of hip hop dance. The occurrence of a web mythology could be ascribed to the oral histories of both hip hop dance and pantsula dance. The paper is an analysis of case studies that Myburgh presents through interviews with a number of pantsula dancers. Myburgh was a dancer with the Johannesburg Dance Theatre and received the Honours degree through the proficiency course with the Johannesburg Dance Foundation. There is little rigorous, academic analysis in the paper, but as it is the longest study thus far on pantsula dance, it provides an interesting source of information on the differences and similarities between what some pantsula dancers said in the 1990s and now.

Guzman-Sanchez's (*ibid.*) book, *Underground Dance Masters,* was a useful study in understanding the parallels between the origins of b-boying and pantsula dance. The need for writing the book, in order to acknowledge the original 'masters' of b-boying, was in relation to the commercialisation of the dance form that had forgotten its importance as a form in resisting an oppressive life in certain gang-run suburbs in American cities. Imani Kai Johnson, who has conducted ethnographic research on 'b-boying' or 'breaking' communities, writes about the importance of acknowledging the space from which a dance form, born from a need to resist unequal power relations in society, has come. B-boying is a dance form that was created among the youth of the South Bronx in New York, USA.

There are some similarities between the performance and development of b-boying and pantsula dance; both forms are considered to have developed around the late 1970s and 1980s and were performed in the streets in marginalised areas, both are also characterised as mostly being performed by men. 'Battles' and competitions are an important component to innovation within the form. While 'b-boying' started as a marginal dance form it has now become an internationally recognised form, where international competitions and 'battles'

[9] There is soon to be a book published on pantsula dance, however, on the research conducted by Sicelo Xaba, Daniela Goeller and Chris Saunders.

are held annually. Shapiro (2004) writes about the institutionalisation of breakdancing in France[10]. Johnson's (2011) article entitled, *'B-Boying and Battling in a Global Context: The Discursive Life of Difference in Hip Hop Dance',* is concerned with issues of differences in understanding the importance of the historical position from which b-boying developed. While I do not include much discussion of b-boying in relation to pantsula dance, the similar trajectory of the forms is important to acknowledge. Pantsula dance is at a point of entering the interest of mainstream audiences in much the same way b-boying has become an international phenomenon. At this potential, crucial point of change, understanding the importance of what pantsula dance means to its practitioners is critical in allowing their interests to be the driving force of commercial and institutionalising endeavours.

An extremely important factor for many pantsula dancers is its history. A large part of my thesis discusses the various ways in which pantsula dancers look to the history of creative resistance in township environments during apartheid as a source of inspiration. Ballantine (2012), Coplan (2007), and Glaser (2000) helped me further understand the abundance of creative resistance that took place in township spaces in Johannesburg from the 1900s. Each of these texts provide different viewpoints on these challenging times and their impact on theatre, music and dance. Glaser looks more specifically at gang-life in townships in Johannesburg from the 1930s onwards, while Coplan and Ballantine focus their research on music in townships across South Africa. Maylam's (1990) article, "The Rise and Decline of Urban Apartheid in South Africa," helped to provide a historical overview of the creation of townships and the effects of apartheid on Johannesburg. These sources are mostly discussed in Chapter 3 under my discussion of the history of creative resistance forms during the 'vibrant era' of Johannesburg. The sources helped in providing a general understanding of this important historical context throughout my thesis.

In my second chapter I discuss the concept of 'the township'. Findley and Ogbu's (2011) online article, "South Africa: From Township to Town" was integral to my understanding of the construction of townships and township areas after apartheid. Ellapen's (2007) article discussion on post-apartheid cinematic representations of townships, was also useful in

[10] Breakdancing is another term used for b-boying, which is less popular amongst most b-boying professionals, according to Guzman-Sanchez.

understanding the effects of the construction of the township areas on modern conceptions of 'the township' space. Cresswell (2009) was central to my understanding of how 'place' can be conceived, while Tuan (1979) and McCormack (2008) rounded my understanding of the bodily experience of space and place. Also in my second chapter is the discussion of the general characteristics of pantsula dance, and how 'the township' is performed through fashion and the core moves in pantsula dance, as well as through pantsula dance being an inherently hybridised dance form. In these discussions Bogatsu's (2002) article, "'Loxion Kulcha': Fashioning Black Youth Culture in Post-Apartheid South Africa," provided much insight into how fashion performs aspects of 'the township' and how pantsula dancers, who are a part of Generation-Y ingenuity, can celebrate these aspects. Maqoma's (2011) article also discussed the importance of fashion and the expression of subcultural styles in townships. Maqoma, a well-known South African contemporary dancer and choreographer, provides notions of the possibilities in various influences of dance forms on township residents.

In Chapter 3, I discuss the history of creative artistic forms in township and freehold areas. Sophiatown is very important to my discussion and there are many texts that have helped me to understand the complexities of Sophiatown as a place in South Africa's collective memory. Gready (1990) and Lodge (1981) were especially helpful in helping me to comprehend the history of Sophiatown, while Gaylard (2008), Allen (2004), Fink (2015), Hannerz (1994) and Baines (2003 and 2005) provided understanding of how Sophiatown can be conceptualised in a variety of ways. Fenwick's (1996) discussion of gangsters in *Drum* magazine along with Allen (2004) and Gaylard's (2008) discussions of *Drum* magazine and its writers were integral to my understanding of how *Drum* magazine influenced a conceptualisation of Sophiatown.

My fourth chapter mostly consists of an engagement with the voices of pantsula dancers I had spoken with throughout my research. Rani's (2012) article helped to establish an understanding of the development of dance forms created in townships, while Samuel (2001-2002) helped to understand pantsula dance's shift onto stages that helped it to become considered as a performing art. Interviews and films have also helped to provide voices of dancers whom I have not had the privilege of meeting or interviewing. Bryan Little's *African Cypher,* is a dance documentary on South African street dance forms in which

pantsula dance is a significant feature. Robyn Perros and Ashley Brazic created a short documentary about Via Kasi Movers (VKM) which has been useful in quoting some of the members of VKM in their discussions of pantsula dance. Both documentaries present voices of pantsula dancers which have been useful in my discussions about pantsula dance, along with voices of dancers I have interviewed.

These articles, books and documentaries are among the key texts in my thesis. I discuss these texts further, along with other texts, throughout the ensuing chapters. All these texts have provided context and insight into this intruiging dance form, inherent in the life experiences of so many South Africans.

1.4 Chapters

This thesis focuses on pantsula dance as a performance of 'the township'. My aims that follow involve understanding how pantsula dancers conceive 'the township' and how this conception is performed. The three notions that are important to understand are 'the township imaginary', performance and pantsula dance. Each of the following chapters attempts to discuss these elements in different ways.

Chapter 2, entitled, *Kasi, Loxion, Township: Pantsula dance as a performance of places specific to South Africa,* provides a general overview of pantsula dance as a performance of 'the township'. It looks at what 'the township' is, as a notion and physical space historically constructed to separate people based on racial characteristics and how the idea of 'the township' has been transformed. How people conceive space and place is another important discussion in my second chapter. And then a general discussion of how the moves in pantsula dance and the choices of clothing are expressions of the pantsula dancer's conception of 'the township'. Finally the chapter discusses how pantsula dance is a hybridised dance form of global and local (spaces), and past and present (time) influences.

Chapter 3, *'Via Sophiatown': Memory and Representations of the History of Pantsula Dance,* focuses on the conception of 'the township' by pantsula dancers, influenced by a historical understanding of the township spaces. The history of township spaces, in which Sophiatown is described as a form of embodiment, is a very important component to the conception of 'the township' in pantsula dance. The 'performance' of the township in pantsula dance takes place in the choice of clothing and by productions that provide a narrative of the

history of the dance form. How we conceive space through memory and create space for means of telling a particular story, especially stories that are marginalised, is discussed as an important element in this chapter.

Chapter 4, *Adaptation: Redefining 'the township',* examines the idea of pantsula dancers redefining existing notions of 'the township' through the performance of their conceptions of 'the township' in the variety of ways these performances manifest. Every pantsula dancer and every crew has a different way of performing their conception of 'the township' through their performance of pantsula dance. Their collective action in providing multiple ways in which pantsula dance can be performed, helps to recreate 'the township' as a space of opportunity and celebration, rather than the space of oppression for which it was initially created.

Chapter 5, *A Complex and Varied Celebration,* is my concluding chapter where I hope the reader will have found some ideas of the variety of ways in which pantsula dance is a performance of the township. Each of these notions having a multitude of meanings and allows for a variety of ways in which they may be interpreted and reinvented. It is this variety that allows for pantsula dance to continue being a complex and intriguing dance form that is an important part of the history and future of South African creative forms.

I have had the privilege to meet and spend time with a number of people whose lives have been dedicated to an art form born in South Africa. This thesis is my contribution to the growing literature on the dance form.

Chapter 2

Kasi, Loxion, Township: Pantsula dance as a performance of places specific to South Africa

In *Stylizing the Self,* Sarah Nutall (2004) discusses the integral role that billboards have in the cityscapes of Johannesburg and Soweto. It is true that billboards are signposts in the city and its surrounds, but the gold mine dumps are equally a unique, symbolic marker when travelling around Johannesburg. As one leaves the billboards on the highway traversing the city, the dry, yellow, gold mine dumps and factories dominate the changes in the landscape. Whenever I drive towards a township, mine dumps seem to follow as if they are watching my progress. My privileged upbringing in the city intermingled with the oppression and hard labour of another history, are forever coalesced with the sand and silt of these odd, rectangular hills. Nadine Gordimer (1954, 14) writes about the mine dumps in the area of Gauteng where she grew up. She says of the Witwatersrand, "that any feature of the landscape that strikes the eye always does so because it is a reminder of something else; considered on its own merits, the landscape is utterly without interest–flat, dry, and barren." Johannesburg is incredible because, with the exception of the ever-growing landscape of Sandton[11] and the northern suburbs, most of its characteristic buildings and areas have a unique history.

Johannesburg started as a mining town, after the first recorded discovery of gold in 1884, and is the largest city in the world that is not built on or near a main water source (Di Serio 2007; SAHO 2011). The common perception of Johannesburg held by potential tourists from other countries is that it is extremely dangerous. The questions like, "Is Johanesburg safe?", or, "How dangerous is Johannesburg?", on the forums of various travel sites like TripAdvisor and Lonely Planet are evidence of this concern. Most of the answers to these questions would inform the reader that the city is in fact safe (if one keeps their wits about them). There are, however, certain areas that one does not enter. The townships are, in particular, areas that tourists are advised not to enter unless it is through an organised tour. This essentialization of 'the township' as a dangerous and undesirable place to visit is a result of

[11] Sandton is one of the wealthiest metropolitan areas of Johannesburg, with many businesses and retail outlets located in the area.

the nature of 'othering' that took place through the creation of the townships by the apartheid government (Ellapen 2007). Dance forms such as pantsula dance help to break these essentialisms by telling a different story to the commonly held ones of abject poverty and violence.

2.1 The township

The 'township' is a specifically southern African social and urban construct (Mbembe, Dlamini and Khunou 2004, 499). There are many names for it; township, 'location', 'loxion', 'kasi'. The term 'location' was first used during the frontier war of 1835-6. The Mfengu people in Grahamstown were allocated demarcated areas of land that acted as "human buffer zones" in the war over who had rights to the land (Robinson 1996, 45). They lived under the supervision of a British superintendent on the pretext that they were being kept safe from the warring sides: "The Governor of the time (Sir H.G Smith) was suitably impressed with this scheme of 'dividing them [the Mfengu] into four townships', under the charge of a British superintendent" (Robinson 1996, 46). The use of 'locations' as a system of migrant control continued, as the term was used later to describe areas outside of the cities that were designated for black people coming to the cities to find work. In 1923 the Natives (Urban Areas) Act gave local municipalities authority to create separate locations for black people in the fast emerging cities (Molamu 2003, xx). This was an attempt by the government of the time to establish and maintain control of the black people of South Africa.

Findley and Ogbu (2011) discuss the architectural legacy of the creation of the townships where "architecture and planning were critical to implementing apartheid policies" (Findley and Ogbu 2011). Their article argues that spatial segregation still remains in Johannesburg, regardless of the official end of apartheid. My own experience of Johannesburg tends to agree with their argument. The dot map constructed from a 2011 consensus (See below, figures 2, 3 and 4) showing the distribution of 'race', 'language' and 'household income' is illustrative of the continued existence of racial segregation in Johannesburg. One can see by the concentration of colours on the map showing racial distribution (Figure 2), that most areas in Johannesburg are staying true to their apartheid construction. Areas in Johannesburg that were deemed as areas for 'White' people still have a high concentration of 'White' people according to the census. Most interestingly, dots that show people who

identify within the 'Black African' category are highly concentrated in specific areas. These areas with high concentrations of 'Black Africans' are township areas; areas that were designated for black people during apartheid. The racial distribution is also significantly linked with the 'household income' category.

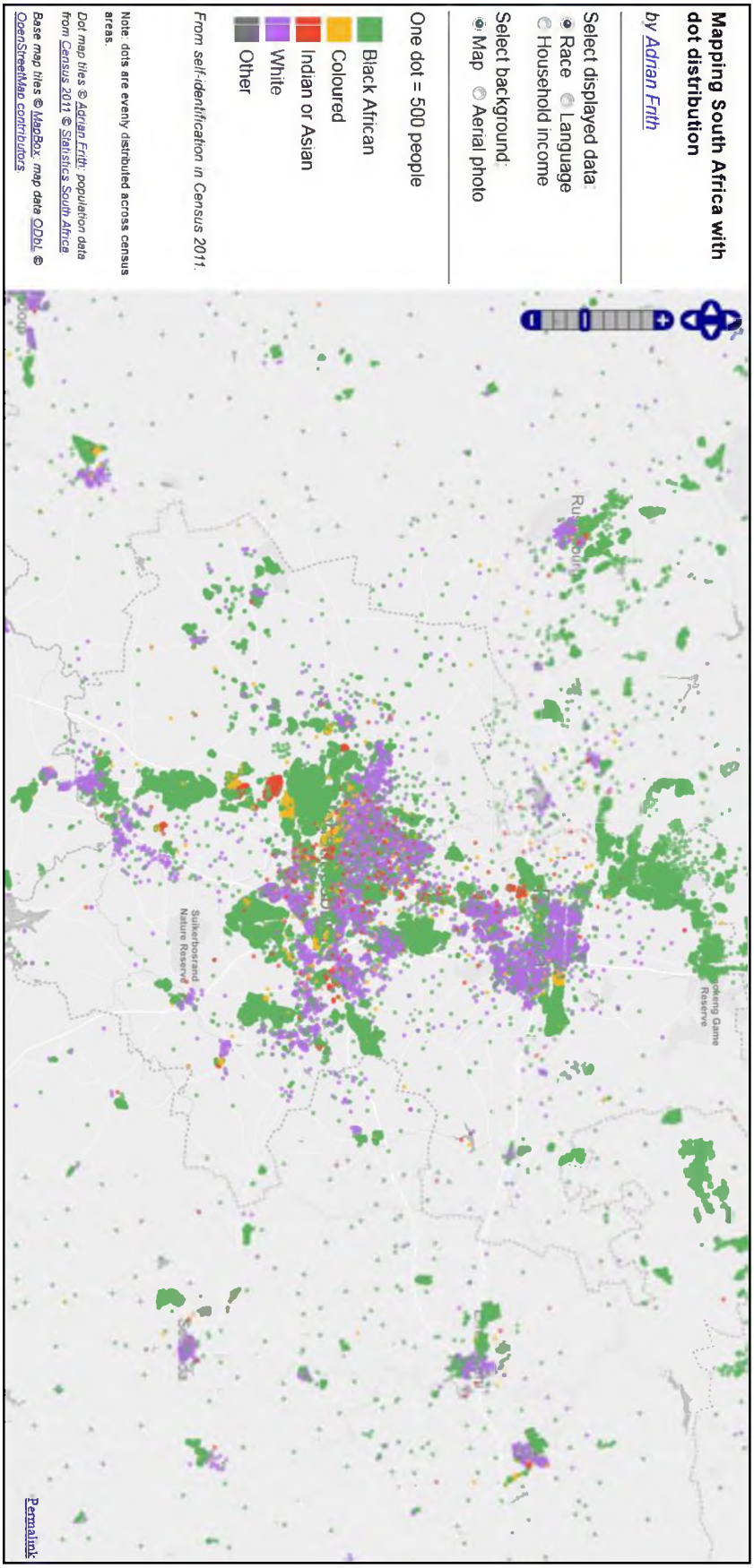

Figure 2: dot map of racial distribution in Johannesburg according to 2011 Census (Frith 2013)

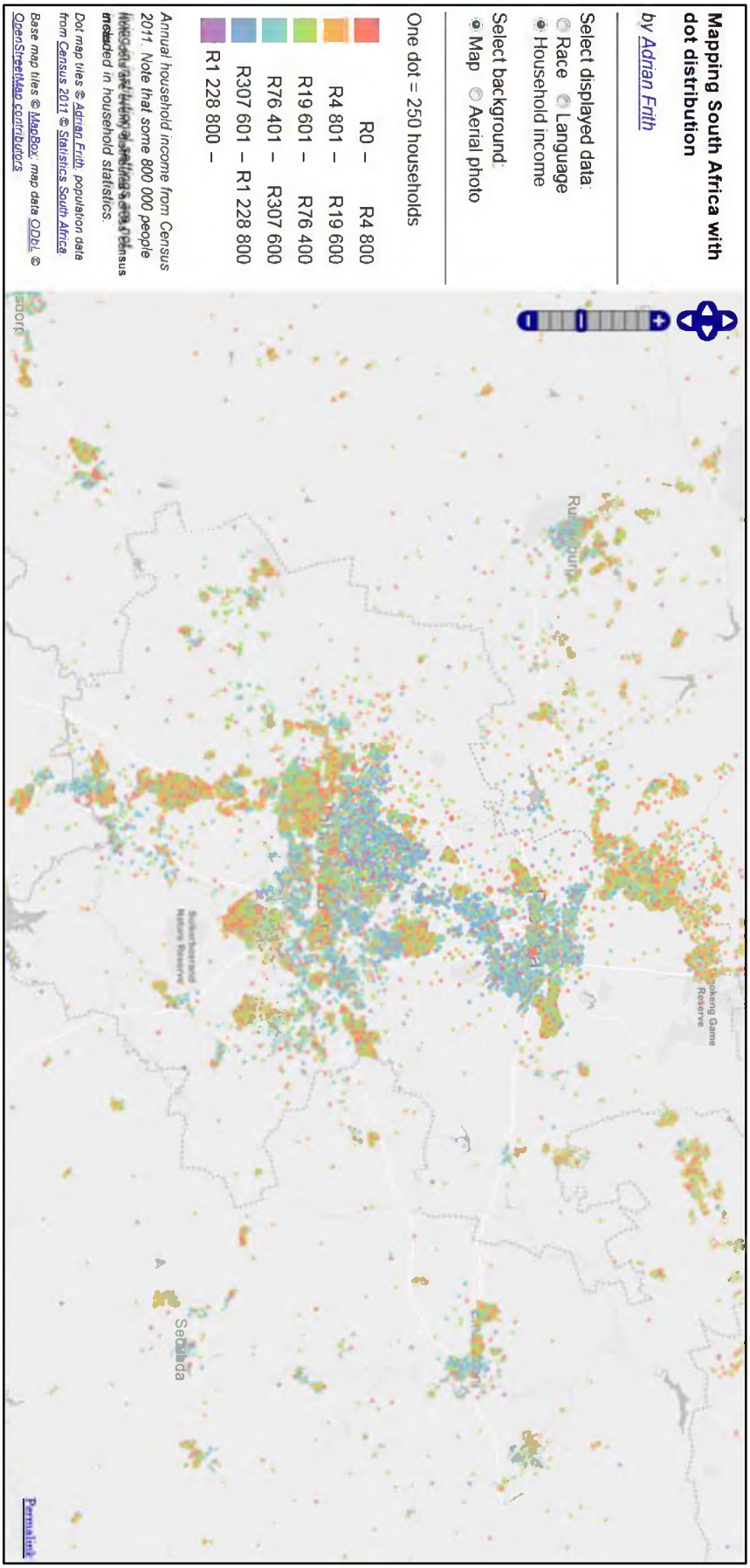

Figure 3: dot map of distribution of 'household income' in Johannesburg according to 2011 Census (Frith 2013)

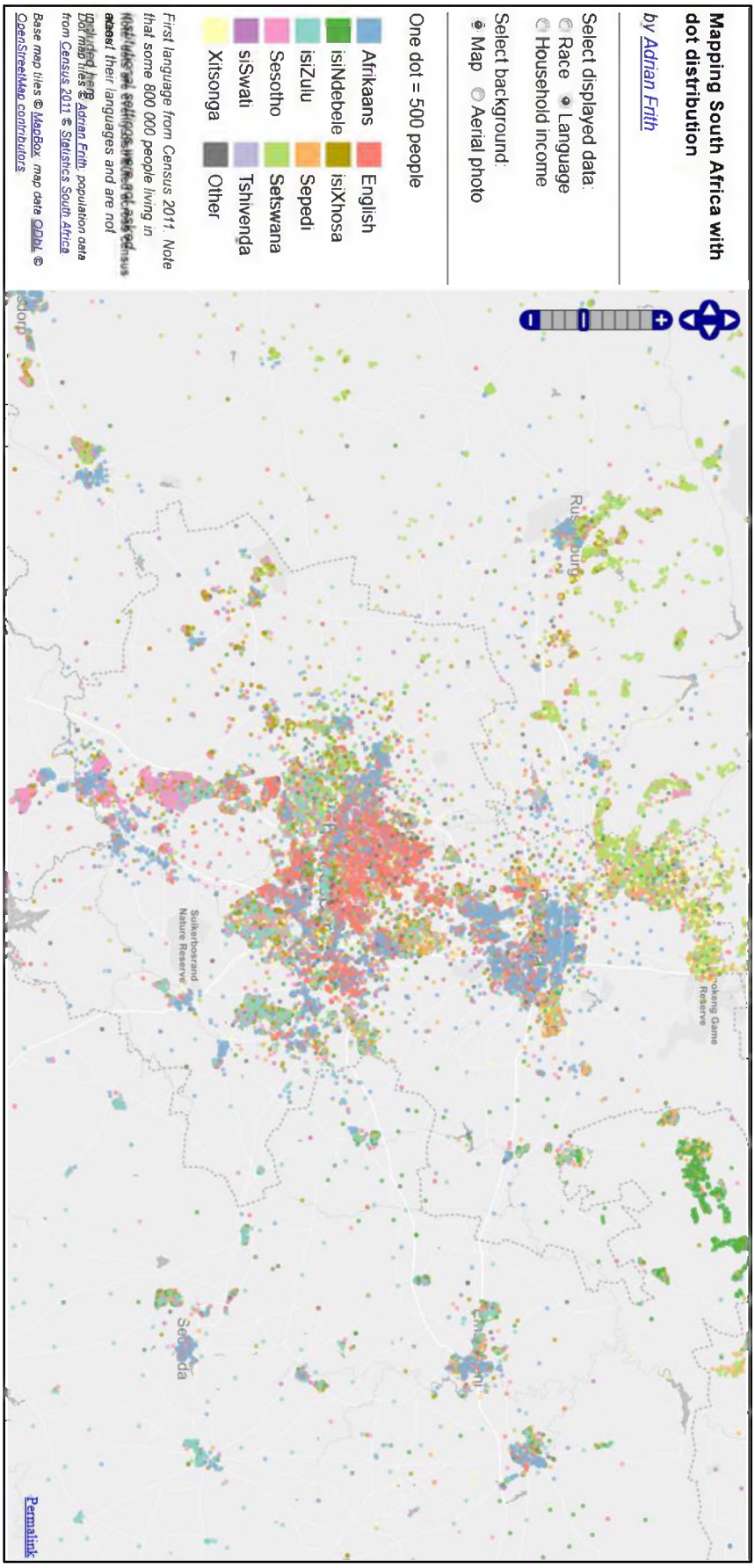

Figure 4: dot map of language distribution in Johannesburg according to 2011 Census (Frith 2013)

According to Findley and Ogbu (2011), Soweto contains forty percent of the population of metropolitan Johannesburg, despite occupying only ten percent of the land. 'Soweto' is not one place but a collection of over twenty-five townships, "bordering Johannesburg's mining belt to the south", the name is an abbreviation of 'South Western Townships'. In the dot map of Figure 2, Soweto is an area with a high concentration of 'Black Africans'.

The lived reality of the racial segregation shown in the dot map in Figure 2, was often felt when I entered a township area for my research. When I was in high school, I rarely encountered township spaces. I went to Soweto for a school tour to visit the Hector Pietersen museum[12] and occasionally visited a friend who lived there, as well as to Maponya Mall for a party. My experience of townships in Johannesburg was limited to certain areas in Soweto, areas that are characterised as 'middle-class' and suburban.

On beginning my research in Johannesburg, I drove to Orange Farm to meet with Sello Modiga, the director of Real Actions Pantsula crew. We planned to meet at Eyethu Mall, which is the easiest, more distinct place to pinpoint on a GPS system. From my home in Parkview it took about forty-five minutes to reach Orange Farm. On subsequent meetings I had with Modiga, I would wait to meet with him at Eyethu Mall, and would often be approached by patrons of the mall who were eager to welcome me to the area and find out why I was there. The surprise at my presence in a township space was not an uncommon occurrence; my experience of meeting with Leballo 'Lee' Lenela of 'Intellectuals' crew in Soweto was also characterised by moments of being welcomed by residents of the area. While Lenela showed me where she stayed, her landlord greeted me profusely, invited me to come again whenever I liked and enthusiastically insisted on taking a picture with me. These surprised, and often excited, reactions to my presence in a township, and there were many more, were directly linked to my being white. The rarity of people like myself highlights the distorted reality of Johannesburg's segregated legacy.

[12] The Hector Pieterson Memorial and Museum is situated in Orlando West, Soweto. The memorial was erected in the early 1990s to commemorate youth who were killed by police in the student protests on 16 June, 1976. Hector Pieterson was one of the first students to be shot and killed. The iconic photograph, taken by Sam Nzima, of another student carrying his body, while Pieterson's sister runs beside them has become symbolic of the terrible consequences of that day and of the youth struggle during apartheid. The museum, where images, oral testimonies and audio-visual displays are presented, was opened in 2002. (Gauteng.net n.d.)

To reach some township areas, from my historically 'white' suburb, I often had to drive for longer than thirty minutes. The suburban areas closest to the city centre and to the CBD (central business district) in Sandton are predominantly 'white' areas. It is no coincidence that the highest 'household incomes' are situated closer to these areas and the areas with the lowest, which are usually township areas, farther away (see figure 3). Findley and Ogbu (2011) explain what it was like for most township residents during apartheid:

> Under apartheid, the townships were highly controlled bedroom communities, often located at some distance from the "white city." While in a few cases, like Alexandra, older townships were close to white enclaves and separated only by walls and fences, in most places a vast zone of uninhabited land separated the townships from the city. Getting to work often involved a long and expensive commute to a job that could be three hours away.

Findley and Ogbu (2011) continue by adding that transport for township residents was limited to buses and trains operated by the state. To fill the transport need, privately owned minibus taxis, known as 'black taxis', started to transport people to and from the city. Minibus taxis still have an integral role in transporting people around Johannesburg and its surrounds and have come to signify a South African cultural phenomenon in as far as they provide a mobile space for much interaction among people of different backgrounds. The lack of adequate and affordable transport due to the distances from township areas to the city is still in need of address.

While distance may be a primary issue for township residents, the characterization of townships as dangerous, poverty stricken areas is another problem worth addressing. Although the basic infrastructure realized during apartheid remains intact (Maylam, 80). Ellapen (2007, 114) argues that "the township is actually a heterogeneous or hybridised space" where many areas do not look much different from the suburbs of Johannesburg. The small, homogenous houses that were created in the locations have been modified by residents, by "personalizing the houses with incremental upgrades, cultivated gardens, and the inventive use of scavenged materials and lively paint schemes" (Findley and Ogbu 2011). This is in contrast to representations of the townships in the media that depict fixed representations of 'otherness' and "informal squatter camps and decay" (Ellapen 2007, 114). A well-known example of these kinds of representations can be found in the Academy Award winning, South African film, *Tsotsi (2005)*.

Ellapen (*ibid.*) argues that 'the township space' was created to "construct black identity and culture as pre-modern." He adds that "the 'township space' mobilised myths associated with the 'otherness' of black identity. These myths made the townships seem to outsiders as a place "characterized by underdevelopment, poverty, unemployment, decay and death". The imposed self-containment, created by the distance of townships from the city, might be an indicator as to why the kinds of myths that Ellapen (2007) talks about are continuing to persist. This is not to say that the township areas do not experience a myriad of social and political issues. The mine dumps that I think of as a marker, moving towards a township area are an immense health hazard for residents who live nearby[13]. Unemployment is rife in many townships which then encourages the excessive drinking of alcohol and gambling. Service delivery is a constant issue in many township areas leading people to protest violently in order to be heard. The legacy of the past government's efforts may remain in some instances; however, people who live in townships surrounding Johannesburg are constantly striving to transform the marginalized areas "into important hubs of commerce, political power and diverse social agendas" (Findley and Ogbu 2011).

Pantsula dance is a powerful tool in helping to transform conceptions of township spaces by representing aspects of township life in creative ways and forms. The choice of clothing, dance moves and its inherent variability create symbolic references that speak to the history of township spaces and the diversity of township life experience in an entertaining and accessible manner. Before I examine this notion in detail, it is important to discuss what a conception of township space might entail.

2.1.1 Conceptions of space and place

Cresswell (2009) understands 'place' as a combination of location, locale and 'sense of place'. He describes location as the 'where' of place. It refers to the specific coordinates and measurable distances between other locations. How we conceive of places on a map and understand their relation to each other by the measure of distance is indicative of this notion of 'location'. 'Locale' is the physical aspects of an environment, the buildings, parks, trees and roads where social relations take place, what we see in a space. 'Sense of place'

[13] See article in the guardian that talks about the dangers of mine dumps for people that live near them. See the site: http://www.theguardian.com/cities/2015/jul/06/radioactive-city-how-johannesburgs-townships-are-paying-for-its-mining-past

refers to the more complex, emotional, intangible aspects to a place. These can be shared or individual, depending on personal memories or representations through film, literature and advertising, for example.

From Cresswell's three notions of how 'place' is produced and constituted, one can see that there are a variety of ways in which we conceive of space which is related to how we experience space. Tuan (1979) regards space as a general concept in which humans relate to the world around them. The observation of objects, for example, can imply an understanding of space by one being able to feel the distance between oneself and the surrounding objects. Tuan's conception of 'space' is something that is experientially understood, the assumption underlying this notion is the integral link of 'the body' in space. In order to experience space, one needs to have a body in which the experience can take place.

McCormack (2008, 1823) writes that "bodies *move*: they walk, crawl, gesture, run, stumble, reach, fall and embrace". He adds that bodies do not only move physically but "they move affectively, kinaesthetically, imaginatively, collectively, aesthetically, socially, culturally and politically" as well. These ways in which bodies 'move' can be reflected in how bodies dress, walk, talk and use gestures, for example. He then adds that these moving bodies can 'create' space: "The quality of moving bodies contributes to the qualities of the spaces in which these bodies move. Put another way, spaces *are* – at least in part– as moving bodies *do*". McCormack (*ibid.*) gives an example of a football pitch to illustrate his point. The shouting, moving bodies in and around the pitch, transforms the pitch in many ways; socially, imaginatively, affectively and sonically. Other recreational spaces could be seen in the same way; a theatre is an empty space without the performers and the audience. Although the space has been created for a particular purpose, the bodies that move within it are what allow the space to fulfil that purpose. Without people, the theatre is merely a big room and the pitch a large, open field.

McCormack's conception of bodies creating space enables an understanding of how pantsula dancers may create conceptions of the township at the same time as their conceptions being informed by their experiences of 'the township' space. However, when

considering Cresswell's notions that make up 'place', notions of 'the township' space become even more complex.

The 'location' of a township can be seen on a map, as a variety of co-ordinates with measurable distances that make up a particular area. The 'locale' of a township space characterise the area through its buildings, trees, parks and roads, for example. The consideration of the 'sense of place' necessarily complicates an understanding of a township space. A 'sense of place' can be individual or shared, and due to the complexity and diversity of thought in individuals, people can have more than one 'sense of place'; one that is informed by a collective understanding, and one that is understood through individual experience. Someone can have a 'sense of place' without ever physically experiencing it. I know many people, who have conceptions of 'the township' based on films and collective presumptions influenced by hearsay of other people's experiences, who have never physically experienced a township space. The idea of 'the township' as a dangerous environment, characterised by poverty, decay and death, discussed earlier in the chapter, is a particular 'sense of place' often based solely on representations of townships in film and other media.

'The township' is a notion that is a complex phenomenon of place and space. The physical, lived experience of 'a township' is diverse and based on a particular area with its own 'location' and 'locale'. Katlehong is a very different place to Orange Farm or Soweto and yet all are considered townships. In my interview with Modiga, he told me how, "here in South Africa we differentiate according to our township":

> *This is Orange Farm, the background of Orange Farm [influences] my footwork. The footwork from Vaal, if you can go to Sebokeng, they have their own type, their own style of dancing. They are also doing pantsula but they have their own taste. Which is then influenced by the township. It's the same here [in Orange Farm]. Even if you go to Soweto they have their own footwork. They do things their own way because of their background. Also, your home language influences you a lot, it gives pantsula more power. Pantsula is a fast-paced township thing. So anything that you can think of, it can also be pantsula but only if it fits into the moves.* (Modiga 2016)

Modiga illuminates how, in the performance of pantsula dance, different areas influence the dancers in different ways, and yet there is a common aspect that has to be maintained in the performance of pantsula dance in order for it to be considered 'a township thing'. This

abstract notion of 'the township' is largely determined by historical implications, and characteristics that grew from them. The construction of townships was intended to homogenize the life experience of black people in order to gain and maintain control of their movements. This homogenization ensured that townships, despite being varied in a multitude of ways, share in a variety of similarities. These similarities are celebrated as being 'a township thing'. Taxis, *shebeens* and *spaza* shops (small convenience stalls often run out of people's homes) are some examples of characteristics of locales of many township environments. The history of resistance to the homogenizing effects and distortionary, oppressive tactics of apartheid legislation is also a characteristic that is now celebrated by post-apartheid youth as characterising township life. The lore of gangsters or *tsotsis* that operated in townships, played an important role in providing young township residents, with a 'way of life', that is often referenced in a celebration of 'the township' space.

2.2 Performance of the township

Chris Saunders, a renowned photographer, has been documenting pantsula dance for six years. He writes on his blog:

> Pantsula is a way of life epitomised through an incredible fast paced dance which tells stories about the life in the townships of Johannesburg. It's something intrinsically linked to a place which is my home [South Africa], intrinsically linked to its history and adapting to continue to exist into the future. (Saunders 2016)

Saunders' observation gets to the heart of the meaning of pantsula in Johannesburg and throughout South Africa. The 'intrinsic link' to a place and its history, and the adaptation that takes place for a continuation of future existence, are the fundamental characteristics of this dance form. Saunders also observes that pantsula is a 'way of life'. Most of the pantsula dancers I have worked with refer to it as such, or alternatively, as a tradition or culture.

Sicelo Xaba, one of the five directors of *Impilo Mapantsula,* is a pantsula dancer from the 'older generation' of dancers. He started dancing in around 1988, when he was eleven years old (Xaba 2016). He has a keen interest in the history of *isipantsula* and has been conducting

research with Goeller and Saunders for the last five years. This research has culminated in a photographic book which is in the process of being published.[14]

In Bryan Little's film, *African Cypher,* Xaba describes how a culture of pantsula developed:

> *People were looking for identity. The oppressive system never allowed them to identify themselves as real people. So they were looking for identity, the objective of pantsula was identity. When they were looking for identity they had to dress a certain way that will identify them; OK these people are different from the rest even though they live in the same area. They speak a different language, they dance a different dance, they listen to different music. Then culture is created around those elements, dance, music, dress code and so forth.* (Sicelo Xaba, in Little 2012)

Xaba shows how the 'way of life' of pantsula involves various aspects that developed out of a necessity for differentiation. The end of official apartheid led to many changes in the expression of the culture to which Xaba refers. Although they had developed out of a necessary desire to counteract the oppressing attempts at the homogenisation of black identity, they eventually became a way to celebrate and reinvent these resistant forms of self-expression. One of the most important expressive forms to understand the development of pantsula dance is the dress code.

2.2.1 Dress code

In an article about the fashion label, Loxion Kulcha, Mpolokeng Bogatsu (2002) provides a detailed discussion of the concept of the township within a contemporary milieu. The relationship between the old and the new, between Sophiatown and Soweto, is significant in this regard and especially significant to the development of pantsula dance. Loxion Kulcha (LK) is a fashion label created in 1998 by Wandi Nzimande and Sechaba Mogale. Pantsula dancers were known to use the label because of the way it "asserts and celebrates the notion of township life and the social environment of black experience in South Africa" (Bogatsu 2002, 1). The label mostly focuses on men's clothing. LK had two designs that were exemplary of a combination of a reference to South Africa's past and a new, contemporary, global style. These designs consist of LK-branded overalls and LK men's suits inspired by the suits that the *tsotsis* wore in the 1950s:

[14] See the site, https://crowdbooks.com/projects/pantsula/, to support the project.

> Another feature of this new collection was its conscious invocation of the suits, coats and hats favoured by the suave and style-obsessed pantsula gangsters of the 1950s. The LK suits maintain this pantsula style, with the suits being made from fabrics that are popular in township street culture. Silk pants, linen jackets and shiny leather shoes, as with the 1950s pantsula era, are regarded as signs of one's wealth and one's ability to maintain that wealth. The LK suits, with their gloss and implied good quality, echo the concern with smart-dressing and the assertion of one's presence through stylish dress. (Bogatsu 2002, 9)

Bogatsu's use of the word 'pantsula' in relation to the gangsters of the 1950s, is a common misplacement of terms that occurs due to a lack of sufficient knowledge about the origins of pantsula. According to Glaser (2000)[15], there is no evidence to suggest that the term 'pantsula' was in use before the 1970s. What Bogatsu is referring to as 1950s pantsula style would probably be the distinctly urban subcultural styles called 'clevers' and/or the *tsotsis* of the 1950s. 'Clevers' is a term originating from the 1930s, used to describe the distinctly urban youth, the 'city slickers', who grew up with no rural affiliations in the growing cities. *Tsotsi* was a label used to describe a youth subculture from the 1940s (much like the 'clevers') that would later become associated with gangsterism.

Glaser (2000, 2) explains that "a powerful, largely apolitical, gang culture dominated the world of the township from the 1930s to the early 1970s". He adds that a significant feature of township life in Soweto during this time was the social tensions, mostly along gender and generational lines that the gang subculture provoked (*ibid.*). The term *tsotsi* came into use in the townships in the early 1940s. The word was a reference to a popular style of narrow-bottomed trousers that many urban youth from the townships wore. The association with gangsterism came about as many youths who wore the *tsotsis* were involved in a gang but it was not necessarily the case for all. Pantsula dancers today try very hard to eliminate the association with gangsterism that accompanies the pantsula 'way of life' and dance. However, it is difficult to do so when its history is rooted in the anti-establishment attitude of youth gangs.

[15] Glaser's (2000) book, *Bo-Tsotsi: The Youth Gangs of Soweto 1935-1976,* provides in-depth discussions about the history of youth gangs in the Witwatersrand from 1935 to 1976 (and beyond). Amongst many things, he describes the development and use of the terms 'clevers' and *tsotsis* within a time of complex youth expression, characterised by youth gangs.

Tsotsis aspired to the levels of comfort that one would experience as a middle-class citizen, yet "*tsotsis* rejected middle-class methods of [wealth] accumulation." This led to a refutation of steady employment and instead it became a celebration of "robbery, gambling and bootlegging". The few important dance moves in pantsula dance, *kwraips* and 'gambling dice' can be seen as a direct reference to this lifestyle. "Ostentatious style items and free spending symbolized success" among the gangs and most youths in the townships, observes Glaser (2000, 7).

The exact time of the emergence of the term *mapantsula* is unclear; Glaser (2000) suggests that the term emerged in the late 1970s. The *mapantsula* continued in the same style as the *tsotsis* and 'clevers' in the 1970s, with a few contemporary shifts. It would seem, according to Glaser (2000) and Lunn (1986), in the 1970s the term *mapantsula* came into use to distinguish the modern *tsotsis* from the emerging popular styles of the time. Maqoma (2011, 70) differentiates these subcultural styles as 'Hippies', 'Ivies' and 'Mapantsula'. Lunn (1986, 195) notes that the emergence of new sub-cultural groupings became clear in the early 1970s. She argues that these groupings emerged at this time due to "a greater fluency with urban and Western standards" as well as the need for young people who want to differentiate themselves by aligning to particular group identities. She says that "the most widespread and loosely identifiable group, namely *mapantsula* … were recognisable by clothing and the use of the vernacular, as well as employment" (Lunn 1986, 195-197).

In response to the apartheid system, many young people found ways to define themselves against the dominant consensus in the apartheid view that black people are a source of cheap labour. The youth gangs that followed the subcultural styles of the 'clevers', *tsotsis* and the *mapantsula,* throughout apartheid history, deliberately used clothing and language to challenge the status quo. The deliberate use of these behavioural aspects also meant that anyone who did not employ them was not considered as a part of the 'culture'.

Ratele's (2012) discussion of the ability of clothing to perpetuate township masculinities provides an interesting insight into the importance of style which can create exclusionary practices or challenge societal values. Ratele (2012, 113) quotes a passage from Bloke Modisane's book, *Blame Me on History*, where he emphasises the importance of labels and imported clothing to a Sophiatown man:

> The well-dressed man about Sophiatown was exclusively styled with American and English labels unobtainable around shops of Johannesburg; the boys were expensively dressed in a stunning ensemble of colour: 'Jewished' in their phraseology; in dress items described as 'can't gets'; clothes sent for from New York or London. Shoes from America—Florsheims, Winthrops, Bostonians, Saxone and Mansfield from London; BVD's, Van Heusen, Arrow shirts; suits from Simpsons, Hector Powe, Robert Hall; Dobbs, Woodrow, Borsolino hats. The label was the thing. (Modisane 1963, 52 quoted in Ratele 2012, 113)

This is the style that is often alluded to in theatrical representations of Sophiatown. In *Via Sophiatown* the performers wear clothing that signifies this style of dress. It is this image of the stylish, carefree gangster that pantsula dancers refer to as the ancestor of the pantsula 'way of life'. The style was a direct antithesis to the previous, conservative generation as well as the apartheid government's expectations of black people. By flaunting style and money, the gangsters were deliberately rejecting the social structure of apartheid that was imposed upon black people. This rejection includes an affiliation to any rural ethnic groups that the government was encouraging people to align themselves with to legitimise the existence of the homelands. American styles that were seen in the cinema were a model for a distinctly urban style of dress. Bogatsu finds parallels in this obsession with style among youth of the 1950s and many young people today. He believes it "parallels the black township youth's fixation on clothing and fashion as a site of self-expression" (Bogatsu 2002, 10).

Township history has many examples of youth using style as a site of self-expression. Glaser uses the term 'subcultural style' which incorporates "clothing tastes, social values, leisure activities, and street argot" (Glaser 2000, 6). Glaser argues that the concept of subcultural style operates on two levels:

> First it represents a withdrawal of social consent; an angry refusal to participate in a social consensus. Second, it insulates and defines the boundaries of a world with its own status structure and routes of accumulation. (Glaser 2000, 6)

The need for 'subcultural styles' within the apartheid system makes sense if one considers these levels of operation. Young black people were refusing to cooperate in the systematic oppression that was imposed on them by the government, and so they created their own world that could operate on its own, outside governmental restrictions. When one considers

the word 'subculture', one might think of Dick Hebdige's famous book about punks in Britain and the essentialising work of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies. I argue that there is value to considering the use of the word 'subculture' when discussing the stylistic groups that formed among the youth in townships. Williams (2011, 4) understands subcultures as the antithesis to the 'normal' social order. He does not view subcultures as problems or dysfunctions as a criminologist would (as in Atkinson 2014); instead he views society as the 'problem' for the subculturalist. Where the 'normal' social order in South Africa was the systematic oppression and segregation of many people one can understand how young people would view society as being a problem and express the desire to reject it.

Maqoma (2011) illuminates the concept of 'subcultural style' in a simple fashion, using the word 'identity' as a marker for one's preferred style in line with Glaser's second level; "Identity in Soweto was an important social marker. Your dress code, your way of walking, and the way you conducted yourself in public was enough for people to know your identity" (*ibid.*, 70). It is evident that how one is viewed by others became a very important factor to young people within the townships. One has to perform by walking, talking and dressing in a particular way in order to communicate a specific message to other people about how they choose to be regarded.

This history of subcultural styles rooted in the self-expression of township youth, is what pantsula dancers identify as the legacy from which the 'way of life' of *isipantsula* comes. In this way, the dancers refer to *isipantsula* as a 'tradition' or a 'culture'. Young men and women growing up in the township, saw their parents and their grandparents dressing and dancing in a particular way and took it on for themselves while adapting it to suit their needs.

2.2.2 The moves

While fashion is an important component to pantsula dance, 'the moves' within the dance form are also representative of the conception of 'the township' that pantsula dancers perform. The variety of performances by pantsula dancers, as illuminated in an earlier observation by Modiga, is influenced by a dancer's direct lived experience of the space in which they live, whether it be Orange Farm, Soweto, Mohlakeng or Katlehong, every area is expressed in a different way by different individuals' 'sense of place'. One feature that

Modiga alluded to that characterises the difference in expression, is language. The dot map (figure 4, page 24) showing the distribution of languages in Johannesburg shows the variety of languages that are spoken across Johannesburg. Difference in primary languages spoken by pantsula dancers works to change the way movements can be conceived. There are, however, some basic 'moves' that are characteristic of most pantsula dance routines. These are moves that I have been taught in pantsula dance workshops in Grahamstown and in Johannesburg (in different ways) by different pantsula dancers, as being important steps in the performance of pantsula dance. My description of the moves is mostly informed by my learning obtained through Rocky and Ayanda in Grahamstown.

The most important move is called *isiparapara*. The step can be identified as a performance in which the sequence for the feet is numbered "I,2,3". It is made by stamping the right foot and then quickly stamping the left foot twice. Making the sound 1 (right foot)-2 (left foot)-3 (left foot) in quick succession. It is believed that the move recalls the importance of the train in the lives of people who live in the townships, especially the young gangsters who terrorized many neighbourhoods. Glaser (2000, 136) observes that "Soweto residents, unlike those of Sophiatown, were largely dependent on trains to reach their places of work". The sound of the move when repeated not only sounds like a train but imitates the jumping on and off of trains as in the behaviour of many Soweto residents[16].

Another move that is important is called *kwraips*. Also referred to as 'C'. This move is made with the right foot making an inward C movement by extending it outwards to the right and bringing it back in, in a semi-circular movement. It is usually followed by *isiparapara*. It makes reference to the quick footed side-stepping that the pantsulas needed to do when they were targeting people for pick-pocketing. By following *isiparapara* with *kwraips* it makes reference to the muggings that would occur on trains, a major part of life in Johannesburg in the 1970s. "Trains, train stations, taxi ranks, and bus stations were the key target areas for muggings", observes Glaser (2000, 138). The C is also a reminder of the fast paced life that is characteristic of the young people of the time as well as the constant movement between the township and the city. The *mapantsula* would go to the city and

[16] The train carrying migrant workers back and forth – captured in the song 'shosholoza' – is an important component to Johannesburg life.

steal bags from the white women walking in the street and jump back on the train to return to Soweto.

Gambling dice is a less common move to use in pantsula dance but forms a part of the basic steps because of its obvious association with the *mapantsula* lifestyle. The move is made with a small kick forward with the right foot (RF). The right foot is then placed on the ground and the dancer steps back with the left foot (LF) with their weight remaining on the right foot. The dancer then kicks the left foot forward, places it on the ground and puts his or her right heel on the ground, with the toe facing up, to complete the step. The move can be recited as: "Kick (RF)-step (RF)-back (LF)-kick (LF)-step (LF)-heel (RF)", where each step has one count. The hands and head are involved in the movement as well. In front of the body the right hand makes a shaking movement as if they are holding dice, when the dancer steps back with the LF the head and the hands are thrown back and come forward again when the heel is placed forward with the RF, as if to indicate the throwing of the dice. Gambling, especially in the form of dice throwing, was an activity that many *mapantsula* took part in on the street corners of Soweto and Sophiatown.

Even these core moves of pantsula dance can be different across areas and crews. When I interviewed the crew known as 'Alexandra Rockstars', I found that they did not know what *isiparapara* was. There could be a number of reasons for this: They may not have understood what I was asking due to my lack of knowing how to speak any language other than English; names of dance moves can differ in township areas due to different languages being spoken[17]; they learnt from watching other pantsula dancers which means they could perform the move without knowing the name. These few core steps encompass the basic canon of most pantsula dancers, however, the nature of the performance of pantsula dance means it is constantly evolving. There are different styles that can be performed in pantsula dance which evolve as other dance forms influence the styles. Myburgh describes three styles that were performed in the 1990s; the 'Western style', 'Slow Poison' and *Futhuza*.

Below is a description of 'Western style' from Myburgh's paper:

[17] The popular township meal most commonly known as *kota* is an example of this. *Kota* is a quarter of a loaf of white bread, filled with chips, and a selection of egg, cheese, and a variety of other meats, such as polony, a 'russian' (sausage), vienna and/or a burger patty. The customer can then add a variety of sauces if they please. In Orange Farm *kota* is known as *skhambane.* In Pretoria, it is known as *sphatlo.*

> 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 help 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) [helps] balance. Some of the movements are small (shuffling movements) and others are big (jumping movements). The Western Style is very energetic and very exhausting. (Myburgh 1993, 2-3)

Myburgh describes 'Slow Poison' as the "total opposite" of 'Western style' as, although the way the body is held the same, the movements are slow and calm with few jumps. *Futhuza* is described as a mixture of American breakdance and pantsula. Dancers use 'popping' and 'locking' with the pantsula dance style. While conducting my research for my Honours degree in Grahamstown in 2013 with the pantsula dance crew, 'Via Kasi Movers', I learnt about a style called *Sbizha.* The following is an extract from my Honours paper which illustrates what I learnt from the dancers:

> *Rocky's particular style of pantsula dance is called sbizha. Sbizha comes from Johannesburg and is performed by other well-known groups such as Via Volcano, which Rocky was a part of when he was younger. The characteristic of this style is that one always goes back to kwraips-isiparapara before going into the next 'section' of moves. This is why the execution of the basic steps is very important to Rocky. In a discussion about the style Banana says, "Maybe I'm running, maybe 3-step, then kwraips-isiparara"* (Kilani and Njadayi 2013). *Recently Rocky has been teaching a new style that does not use isiparapara in a routine. If it is not a basic move then Banana refers to it as 'style' which is a shortening of 'freestyle'. So this new way of dancing is "just style" as opposed to the usual sbizha dances where there is kwraips-isiparara followed by 'style'.* (van Niekerk 2013)

In September 2015, I went to Katlehong for the first time to meet with the crew, 'Via Katlehong'. While chatting with some of the crew members they taught me important terms related to pantsula dance. Some examples include: *old crocs* (old *mapantsula*), *scotcho* (chequered material usually resembling tartan) and 'full *scotcho*' (wearing *scotcho* pants and shirt); *piblaskoon* described to me as *tsotsis van tuka af* – gangsters from Sophiatown (who were apparently always dressed in 'full *scotcho*'); *kick and boboza* which are fancy boat like shoes (like 'Florsheims'), named because it really hurts when one is kicked by someone wearing them; and *Scoliati* – "the big guys inside" (the artistic directors of *Via Katlehong*). I also learnt the terms *sbhiza* and *amabizha.* I was told that *sbizha* is an abbreviation of

isipantsula (the dance form) but *amabizha* is short for the people (pantsulas). When I asked if *sbizha* was also considered a style of pantsula dance the crew members were adamant that it was not. At the time I expressed my confusion to the dancers. Their reasoning was that there are different ways of explaining things in pantsula and that each group will probably tell me something different (Via Katlehong crew members 2015). This sentiment makes it difficult to attempt to define pantsula dance. However, one might find that it is through the overwhelming differences in the expression of *isipantsula* culture across townships that one may come to an understanding of its complexity.

2.2.3 A hybridised dance form

The post-apartheid era is continually accompanied by a cultural evolution among youths, as epitomized in labels such as *Loxion Kulcha*, which developed at the end of the 1990s. This era seeks to celebrate and affirm the history of the South African townships, unlike the Sophiatown youth who were consciously rejecting it, as well as to embrace global, popular culture. This era is represented in a new generation labelled, Generation Y:

> Sometimes known as the Y Generation, contemporary black youth finds itself straddling cultural spaces. On the one hand, this generation is linked to its collective political and cultural past. On the other, it seeks, through conscious innovation, to establish an identity apart from (though not free of) Generation X, its parent culture, the politically active youth of the 1960s and 70s. (Bogatsu 2002, 2)

Youth in post-apartheid South Africa are growing up in a time of great transition. This transition in the country is experienced as a double one; from apartheid to democracy and from a closed society to one suddenly exposed to the full force of globalization, observes Bogatsu (2002, 1). This is especially true for the youth who are now continually exposed to music, style and fashion on a global level due to television, radio, the internet and advertising. "While township culture and identity have existed as long as the townships themselves, it is the *performance* of township culture that has emerged with a new vigour in the contemporary context", says Nuttall (2004, 437). It is from the constant awareness of new modes of performing found in new media that the performance of a township culture such as *isipantsula* becomes possible:

> The notion of acting locally but thinking globally frames the Y cultural ideology. While advancing with modern and global developments is regarded as a primary

> aspect of the new generation, being rooted in traditional ideologies and demonstrating a loyalty to local culture is equally indispensable to this new, innovative culture. (Bogatsu 2002, 3)

Sophiatown forms a part of these traditional ideologies. While young people of post-apartheid South Africa may be more exposed to global ideologies, it is also within the tradition of urban 'culture' to re-appropriate global styles and ideas and create new ones. While young people of the 1950s rejected local styles due to the oppressive nature of their environment, the youth of today embrace the past as characterised by resistance politics.

Pantsula dance, as it is known today, is a result of the innovation of Generation Y. Youth of the 1980s, amidst the violence in the township, created the form that was an amalgamation of a variety of influences. The Soweto uprising and the introduction of television in 1976 heralded a new era; television opened young people up to new manners and modes in which they could present themselves. Television allowed young people to see what was happening around the world and the appeal of popular dance cultures made a huge impact on the dance scenes at the time. Gregory Maqoma, a renowned South African choreographer who grew up in Soweto, says:

> When television was introduced in 1976, my life was flooded with pop icons like Michael Jackson, George Michael, and Prince. I wanted to be like them; I wanted to be a star; I wanted to dress and dance like them. I started reproducing their dance routines and mixing them with South African popular rhythms and styles. (Maqoma 2011, 66)

By the 1980s, in the midst of the violence in the townships, the pantsula dance performers preferred to distance pantsula from the criminal image originally associated with the dance form. The change in clothing of pantsula dancers is evidence of this shift. Initially, in the styles of the *mapantsula,* expensive shoes from shops such as Spitz and Italian cuts were the only way to present oneself (Mbembe, Dlamini and Khunou 2004, 505). From the 1980s the dress code shifted to the All Stars shoe brand, Brentwood shirt and pants or Dickies shirts, pants and hats (Samuel 2001-2002, 55). Martial arts and Michael Jackson became major influences (Sichel in Sulcas 2013) while Clint Eastwood and Bruce Lee were apparently the most popular screen idols of this period (Glaser 2000, 135).The emergence of Kwaito music in the 1990s led pantsula dance to a new stage as a mainstream urban dance form in South

African townships (Samuel 2001-2002, 55). Today, house music is starting to take over as the music of choice for more contemporary dances[18].

The constant fluidity of forms of self-expression is embedded in urban histories and memories. In *Anthropology of Dance,* Anya Peterson Royce (1977, 155) looks at the use of dance as an 'identity marker'. She reflects on how globalisation reinforces the need to maintain or revive unique characteristics of particular societies instead of becoming a part of a global, 'homogenous mass'. Pantsula dance could be considered a marker of the unique characteristics that township communities in South Africa hold onto in the face of globalisation. Pantsula dance has a long history that is syncretic by nature. Pantsula dance today is complex. It is embedded in memory and a history of *mapantsula* from the youth-gang era of the 1970s and is constantly undergoing transformations as, along with globalisation, South Africa emerges out of apartheid and into an era of a robust democracy. The local experience of place among pantsula dancers who have grown up in townships is reflected in the evolving dance style. In this respect, it is easy to understand Royce's approach to dance as "one aspect of human behaviour inextricably bound up with all those aspects that make up the unity we call culture" (Royce 1977, 17-18). Today, the global and the local and the past and the present, are intricately interconnected to create the social, cultural and political dance phenomenon that is pantsula.

2.3 Conclusion

The mine dumps that are littered across Johannesburg might just be hills that are leftover waste from a bygone era but, to me, their presence is telling of the conception of Johannesburg; a city that grew out of an industry that sifted through the sandy wastelands and silt, looking for gold. This burgeoning money-making industry led to a system of migrant

[18] I have made a choice in my thesis to not include more rigorous discussion of the relationship between music and pantsula dance. The lack of research on pantsula dance meant that I have wanted to engage with and represent the aspects to the dance form I felt to be the most important from my ethnographic research. Music is an important component to pantsula dance, and the relationship between pantsula dance and 'kwaito' and South African 'house' music is one that warrants investigation, however, to pantsula dancers, the choice of music, although it is a constant factor in the performance of pantsula dance, is not as important as other factors I have chosen to represent, like the township space, the clothing and dance moves. Music serves more as a backdrop to pantsula dance and pantsula dancers will use music that suits the changing trends of the time. The music needs to be fast and so the most common choices of musical accompaniment are usually from the 'house' or 'rave' musical genres. The inherent rhythms within the steps of pantsula dance are what mostly drive a routine over the choice of song that accompanies a routine; any song can be chosen to accompany a routine and pantsula dancers will adjust the tempo of the steps to fit the song (routines can also be performed without music although this is uncommon).

labour that led the government to create segregated areas in order to establish and maintain control of black people and their movements. The townships may have been conceptualised to impose control over the people forced to reside within them but people found ways to transform the oppressor's intention and to resist the subjugation under which they were constantly placed. This resistance was epitomised in subcultural, stylistic expressions (dress, walk, talk, music and dance) that evolved throughout the years and continue to evolve today.

The difference in these forms of expressions across townships shows how *isipantsula* is a direct reflection of people's lived experiences in vastly different locations. Different townships have different histories. However, there are similarities that define a place as 'a township' that unifies the experiences of those who reside within them. It is within the variations that exist across townships that one may come to a definition of pantsula dance as it is the continual evolution of the form that partly defines it. Innovation and expression of past and current trends is what defines the urban, syncretic, hybrid, dance form.

To arrive at some understanding of pantsula dance's importance in contemporary South African culture one has to look at the place and space from where pantsula dance evolves. The segregationist practices and legacy of apartheid can no longer be allowed to continue to affect those living in townships as well as those living outside townships. Pantsula dance is a way to celebrate township spaces and allow those who live within and outside the township to come to an understanding of past and present day township cultures, for want of a better word.

The moving body of a pantsula dancer in a township street tells a story of a history of resistance and tells a story of current life experiences. The stories are told through the movement/gesture itself; in the core steps of *isiparapara* and *kwraips*, in the fast-paced, almost frenetic energy, or the fluid motions of breakdance, in the hybridised steps that evolved from a variety of influences – traditional African dance forms, African-American dance styles from the 1920s jazz era, gumboot dance[19], popping and locking. The stories are

[19] Gumboot dance, also referred to as *Idadla* or *isicathulo,* is a dance form that developed in South Africa in the mines. It is considered to be the first urban dance form of South Africa by practitioners such as Vuyani Feni, a member of *Via Katlehong*. It is characterised by the wearing of work boots called 'gumboots' where rhythms are created by stamping, slapping the boots and clapping.

also told in the style of dress that a pantsula dancer might employ; the 'full *scotcho*' clothes reminiscent of the 'old crocs' from Sophiatown, the Converse All-Stars and Dickies pants. The dancing body inflects these memories and impressions on the township, from where these memories are inspired. Thus a continual and evolving stream of reinforcement, of a creative and resilient history that once took place in the township, is allowed to be transformed into a new and exciting celebration of the space and the people that reside within it.

Chapter 3

'Via Sophiatown': Memory and Representations of the History of Pantsula Dance

In a radio interview on PowerFM with Masechaba Ndlovu, Xaba spoke as a representative of *Impilo Mapantsula* about the history of *isipantsula*:

> *Masechaba Ndlovu: So how old would you say isipantsula history is in South Africa, more or less?*
>
> *Sicelo Xaba: I would say 50 years. Different people will have different stories, but mostly we point to around the '80s. But I go back to the '50s, when you look at the dress code and the language, the lifestyle, that was there by then. In the '50s, it was a very vibrant era but at the same time it was rough after the first removals [in Sophiatown]. And then, in the '60s, it was about the dress code and the music like 'tsabatsaba'[20]. In the '70s, it was very political and that's when isipantsula started to emerge. Because in the '60s, it was only the mapantsula attire, but then the '70s started to emerge, and most of the individual pantsulas started to dance and formulate their own choreographic group. In the '80s, that's when it became a household name.* (Radio interview, Xaba 2016)

Xaba's answer signifies important moments in the narrative of the history of pantsula dance. His narrative, which he divides into decades, serves to pinpoint various aspects of particular eras that have influenced the *isipantsula* lifestyle today. Some of these aspects, the *mapantsula* clothing and the emergence of the dance form in the 1980s, for example, I have spoken about in Chapter 2. This chapter is mostly concerned with the "vibrant era" of the 1950s from where, Xaba says, the dress code, language and lifestyle emerged. In Chapter 2 I discussed the importance of the Sophiatown gangsters and the subcultural style of the 'clevers' of the 1950s to the *isipantsula* style of dress. In the 1950s the 'vibrant era' of which Xaba speaks, was embodied in Sophiatown; a freehold suburb that flew under the radar of apartheid segregationist policies. 'The first removals' refer to the forced removal and relocation of people from their homes into areas designated for their racial category, following the Group Areas Act of 1950. Most famously, the removals and subsequent destruction of Sophiatown was painfully documented by journalists and literary figures who

[20] A dance culture created in shebeen society alongside the performance of *marabi*.

had called it their home. The forced removal of Sophiatown residents has become emblematic of the traumatic effects, much like District Six in Cape Town, of the deeply oppressive and racist policies of the apartheid government. Sophiatown has been characterised in people's memories as a 'vibrant' place where people of all backgrounds lived together, and is an important part of the narrative of the history of pantsula dance.

This chapter is concerned with the spatial concept of Sophiatown and how, by placing it as an important part of the history of pantsula dance, pantsula dancers situate the dance form into a particular understanding of township life. Sophiatown has become metonymic of the 'vibrant' and 'lively' creation of cultural forms that defied apartheid conceptions of black people as 'backward' and 'tribal'. The image of the 'Sophiatown gangster', from which the style of dress and way of walking and talking in the *isipantsula* 'way of life', is said to have come, was an important character in resistance politics. Representations of Sophiatown by pantsula dancers in artistic performances help to reinforce the narrative of Sophiatown in the history of pantsula dance.

My experience of the rehearsal period of Via Katlehong's production, *Via Sophiatown,* during December 2015, led me to explore Sophiatown as an important concept in township history. I had previously engaged with the idea of Sophiatown in hearing about Via Kasi Mover's production, *Pantsula van Tuka Af* ('Pantsula from Sophiatown' or 'Pantsula's heyday'). Both of these productions place Sophiatown as the predecessor to pantsula dance.

In the previous chapter I mentioned how people of 'Generation-Y' reinvented "traditional ideologies" as a part of their culture and how the memory of Sophiatown has also been reinvented. The memory of Sophiatown is used by pantsula dancers to place the dance form in a particular history of creative resistance. The repressive nature of the townships led people to find creative means of resistance. Many art forms that are celebrated as uniquely South African have their history found in the creative resistance of township residents. *Marabi*, 'township jazz', *kwela*, gumboot dance, *kofifi* and *tsabatsaba* dance are a few examples[21]. Sophiatown, a multicultural, freehold suburb in Johannesburg that was

[21] Christopher Ballantine and David Coplan are two scholars who have provided key texts, *Marabi Nights* and *In Township Tonight!* respectively, for the study of the development of these various art forms. Space does not permit an in depth discussion of these art forms. Consult these texts for a more in depth analysis of the history of performing arts in Johannesburg.

destroyed by the apartheid government in the 1950s, has become an iconic embodiment of this history of resistance through creativity.

This chapter begins with a historical examination of the creation of the 'vibrant era' in Johannesburg from the beginning of the 1900s to the 1960s. This era is characterised by artistic forms created due to, and in resistance to, the increasingly oppressive legislation towards the growing black population in Johannesburg. Pantsula dancers situate pantsula dance as a descendant of this historically 'vibrant era' in the experience of township life. Following the examination of the 'vibrant era' is a discussion of Sophiatown, a place in people's memories that has come to embody the 'vibrant era' of creative, artistic resistance. A conception of Sophiatown, the 'Sophiatown Imaginary' as proposed by Allen (2004), has been created as a result of this embodiment. A descriptive analysis of Via Katlehong's representation of the 'Sophiatown Imaginary' in the production, '*Via Sophiatown',* is then provided in order to examine the dual reinforcement that takes place; the conception of Sophiatown as the metonym for 'shebeen society' and 'marabi culture' and pantsula dance as descendent of this historical narrative of township life.

3.1 The 'vibrant era' – Marabi and 'shebeen society'

Ballantine (2012, 2) marks the 1900s to the 1960s as the beginnings of a 'jazzing' tradition endemic to the South African township experience. It was in this time that, what he calls the "black jazzing subculture," was creating and perfecting styles of musical performance and dance. These styles have been an influence on many of the South African music styles that are popular today. The development of these artistic movements relate directly to the legislation and oppression forced upon people during the apartheid years. They have a "history shaped by, but also shaping itself in resistance to, the fundamental social and political stakes of a deeply repressive and exploitative social order" (Ballantine 2012, 1).

Maylam (1990) identifies four phases in the twentieth century in urban policy and practise in South Africa. He identifies the first phase as "pre-1923", the second phase as 1923-1950/52, the third as 1950/52-1979 and the fourth, "post-1979". By relating these phases to Johannesburg, one can come to an understanding of how these creative, artistic movements formed.

3.1.1 The History

Johannesburg was named in 1886, a mining town far from navigable water, which grew exponentially over the course of a few years to become the largest city in southern Africa (SAHO). Coplan (2007, 74) describes how black people from all over southern Africa came to Johannesburg to work in the goldfields after the end of the South African War in 1902. According to Maylam (1990), at this point in history, African urbanization remained at a relatively low level. The percentage of urbanized Africans remained at about 12-13 percent of the total population of black South Africans. In urban centres there were also a much higher proportion of males than females. Although the rural economies were experiencing a strain since the late nineteenth century, they were still able to provide a relatively stable base for subsistence. Urban economies relied on mining and commerce and although there was tight control exercised over mineworkers, the majority of the urban, black population remained largely unrestrained (*ibid.*).

At this first 'phase' of the apartheid city there was no strict control over racial segregation outside of the mining compounds. People found themselves living in close proximity with others of different racial, ethno-linguistic and socio-economic backgrounds to themselves. Coplan (2007, 74) describes how,

> under such conditions, cultural practices that are unreflectively taken for granted in rural districts become part of the self-conscious domain of 'custom' and 'tradition' that so vitally redefines self and other, 'us' and 'them', in the urban mélange.

Music and dance thus became integral in asserting and celebrating one's cultural identity. Dance competitions were organised in the mining compounds to try and control miners' recreational activities. These competitions helped to assert 'traditional' dance styles according to ethno-linguistic groups, however, in order to impress judges and perform better than other competitors, competitors would 'borrow' moves from other traditional styles. Coplan's (2007, 81-84) description of the competitions gives insight into the mixing of styles that occurred during these competitions and serves as a precursor to understanding the emergence and developments of pantsula dance.

Coplan (*ibid.*, 78) claims, however, that before 1924 the slumyards were areas for the most creative developments among urban black populations. Besides the mining compounds, these were among the alternative areas of accommodation for black people. Within

Maylam's first phase, there were about 60 000 black workers living in Johannesburg outside of the compounds. About 5500 were living in municipal townships (where some form of control over residents was exercised) known as Western Native Township and Kliptown. Approximately 6000 black people were living in private freehold/leasehold townships called Sophiatown, Newclare, Martindale and Alexandra. Then there were the slumyards which were white-owned properties, such as, disused warehouses and workshops, shanties and out-rooms, where residents were exploited by "rackrenters" and slum landlords (Maylam 1990, 59-60).

In these slumyards, the role of women was integral for the creation of leisure and entertainment industries among black workers. Most work opportunities in Johannesburg were in the mining industry which meant that women had few options for work besides domestic service. Women thus entered into illegal activities such as prostitution and the beer trade that could provide them with an income to make a living. They thus started establishing *shebeens* which were backroom bars where they could sell the illegal liquor called *skokiaan*[22]. The '*shebeen* queens' (women who owned and managed the *shebeens*) had regular parties that continued throughout the weekend, where vast amounts of alcohol were consumed and continuous music and dancing took place. Through their music, musicians who were employed to perform at these parties found a way to avoid being employed by white people. These musicians became known as *abaqhafi.* They did not care much for the traditions and social values of Zulu or European culture (Coplan 2007, 110-113). The *abaqhafi* made way for a new kind of music and may be the cultural precursor to the *tsotsi* subculture.

Glaser (2000, 48) writes that the *abaqhafi*, were like the *tsotsis,* in that Hollywood movie images, particularly movies depicting 'the Wild West', were a major influence on their style. The importance of the *abaqhafi* is that they helped to reinforce the link between life on society's fringes, *shebeen* society, and paid musicianship (Coplan 2007, 114). These elements might be an explanation for how entertainment became a career option for many people growing up in the townships. Those that had an interest in music and/or dance found a way to escape the oppressive and limiting options that were provided by

[22] See Coplan's (2007) fourth Chapter for a more detailed description of the origins of the shebeen and 'shebeen society'.

employment in the city. The prevalence of gangs in townships also became a major attraction to young people looking for a way to live in opposition to the extreme, individualised oppression characteristic of the apartheid regime.

Gangs were able to flourish in slumyards due to the lack of control of people's movements. Central and municipal government as well as private interests were usually in conflict at this time over how to deal with the black population of Johannesburg. Their main concern was public health. Parties were less concerned with providing adequate housing, amenities and sanitation for the non-white population, rather, their interest was in keeping the physical and social 'infection' away from the white population (Coplan 2007, 77). Coplan (*ibid*, 64) explains that although slumyards were to be destroyed, the fate that any 'unauthorised' and 'unsupervised' settlement near 'white' residential areas suffered, long-term patterns of "urban working-class social organisation, the liquor trade, prostitution, and organised criminal groups" were established.

An interesting case to examine which may provide some insight to certain traditions in *isipantsula* is the Amalaita gang, who were an offshoot of the Ninevites[23]. Coplan (*ibid.*, 80) describes the Amalaita members as young Pedi children predominantly of Christian families who "joined together to resist the pass laws." The members "drilled to commands in English and marched to the music of harmonicas and penny whistles (cheap metal recorders) on Sunday afternoons", imitating Scottish military bands who regularly played in parks in the cities. I imagine the straight-backed military-influenced marching could somehow be an influence on the straight back and formation style in pantsula dance. It is impossible to know for sure but the influence of the Scottish clothing has a more directly visible influence, namely the 'Scotcho' (chequered material that resembles tartan) still worn by pantsula dancers today. Coplan (*ibid.*) describes them as follows,

> The Scottish military bands continued to inspire the penny whistle and drum music that accompanied their parades, the boys' uniforms, and the short accordion-pleated tartan skirts called 'Scots *rokkies*' worn by female members.

[23] The Ninevites, starting as a secret society to protect mistreated black workers in Johannesburg, became known as a paramilitary gang that terrorised people of all races. They paraded the streets, wearing distinctive, colourful, wide-bottomed trousers and playing complicated rhythms and harmonies, of mixed traditions, on the mouth organ. (Coplan 2007, 66)

It is interesting to note that these gangs, along with committing violent crimes occasionally, distinguished themselves through particular modes of performance. The pennywhistles that the Amalaita used became the backbone of the music style of *kwela.* It would seem that in the early phase of Johannesburg, a tradition of organised youth groups performing music and dance was established. Coplan (*ibid.*, 81) argues that crime became an effective "medium of protest and self-assertion" in light of establishing a "system that denied social identity as well as power to Africans." He argues that after the official end of apartheid, in 1994, crime became simply crime and not "as well a socially condoned form of resistance". He adds that membership in a gang gave young black people a sense of "purpose and dignity" and the ability to resist oppression collectively (*ibid.)*.

Between 1921 and 1936 there was a large increase of black people moving from rural areas into the cities. This coincides with the start of Maylam's second phase of urban policy and practise. This phase is marked by four crucial developments and trends: the manufacturing sector grows in Johannesburg; African reserves start to deteriorate at a rapid pace (not coinciding with the Native Land Act of 1913 which reserves land ownership of black South Africans to small patches of land that were to become the 'homelands'); as a consequence of the first two factors there is a dramatic growth of the black, urban population; and central government begins to increasingly intervene in urban policy and practice. (Maylam 1990, 63-64)

The consequences of the increase of people moving to the cities meant that the percentage of women in Johannesburg had a considerable increase. The relative stability of family life, which was lacking before this phase, meant that there was an increasing community of second-generation urban black people who knew only the city as their home.

By 1936 the urban population of black South Africans had doubled. The 'Slum Act of 1934' had allowed government to clear out the slumyards and as a consequence many people moved to the freehold areas like Sophiatown, encouraging the long-established forms of entertainment and gang culture that had developed in the slumyards. Many youths had grown up in Johannesburg and knew nowhere else but the city. This group of second-generation youths of the 1930s seem to be the foundation for much of the urban culture of the 1960s and 1970s (Glaser 1994, 42). The urban youths who frequented *shebeens* were

increasingly interested in hearing music that "expressed the quality and permanence of their city way of life". As a result of this demand, a new group of semi-professional musicians arose who had come from a variety of areas, black ethno-linguistic groups and communities around South Africa. However, most of these musicians spent most of their lives in towns, where they had assimilated elements from every available performance tradition into a single urban African musical style called *marabi* (Coplan 2007, 114). In the dance documentary, *African Cypher,* Sicelo Xaba says:

> From the research we have done, we think that the history of *isiPantsula* is in the 1950's. As we trace the historical background back to the Sophiatown days, there was a culture called Marabi which was our grandparents' culture in the olden days (Xaba, in Little 2012).

Ballantine explains that *marabi* was known as "the music of the ghetto". *Marabi* was usually found in *shebeens* which were the hub for all kinds of secular social activities that involved dancing and the consumption of alcohol. The style was created in and by the 'ghetto' and was seen as evil by "everyone not condemned to life in the ghetto". *Marabi* was seen as a "corrupting menace" and was allied with police raids, unlawfulness, sex and a "desperately impoverished working class" (Ballantine 2012, 7, 33). It was in this 'depravity' that the creative, artistic expressions of the freehold area of Sophiatown flourished. Molamu says of Sophiatown:

> Within the geographical boundaries of these residential areas which were characterised by appalling conditions of life, emerged a dynamic and distinctive subculture of dance parties, music and the consumption of alcohol which provided an escape for Africans from the harsh realities of their existence (2003, xx).

Maylam describes the third phase as the most repressive phase in the creation of the apartheid city and it is no coincidence that Ballantine (2012, 2) observes that 1960 "marked the onset of the long night of apartheid's darkest period". In Ballantine's (2012, xiv) foreword, Sibongile Khumalo notes:

> A lot of the practioners were intuitive creators, as most were not schooled in the rigours of music theory or practice. And thus their work was from the gut/heart, reflecting a lived experience under a brutal political and social order. Most of the music was in defiance of that order; most of it was a covert statement against the ruling order. And thus it was that even when the apartheid regime really took root at

> the beginning of the 1960s, it could not quell the groundswell of a cultural and musical movement that was decidedly asserting the identity of the black person.

As Maylam's (1990) article shows, urban policy and practise in South Africa worked to control the influx of urban, black populations, however, no form of control could stop people from creatively expressing their humanity. It is these creative styles of performance that have laid the groundwork for pantsula dance and many other performance practices. These practices are known through the lore surrounding the iconic freehold area of Sophiatown. Through influential, memory-inducing literary texts, theatrical representations and *Drum* magazine, Sophiatown has become the embodied memory of these creative artistic forms characterised by a 'vibrant' era of creative resistance.

3.2 Sophiatown

In 1899, Herman Tobiansky, a developer, bought a piece of land a few kilometres west of central Johannesburg (Allen 2004, 19). He obtained freehold rights in 1905 and named the area after his wife, Sophia. Unfortunately for Tobiansky, the municipality built a sewage dump next to the area. Many white people who had settled there moved, and as a result, Tobiansky allowed black and other 'non-white' groups of people to move in to the area. The Slum Act of 1934 led more people to move from the inner city into Sophiatown and the surrounding Western Areas (Martindale and Newclare) after the government cleared the slums in the inner city. The Western Areas were an attractive place to live for many black people because they were able to buy and own land (Rörich 1989, 86). The suburb became a cosmopolitan hub filled with people from varying backgrounds.

By 1950 Sophiatown had a population of 40,000 people and had been in existence for nearly fifty years. Conditions in the suburb were unappealing as overcrowding led to poor sanitation and general decay. The pressure of impending removals since 1939 led to a deterioration and uncertainty of housing. However, many residents grew up in Sophiatown and felt a sense of place and home. Thus a sense of mutuality and a generosity of spirit coexisted with conditions that made it a 'deplorable, sickening slum' (Gready 1990). Until the 1950s, Sophiatown had been tolerated by the government despite its multicultural quality. Although the area operated as the antithesis of racial segregation, the government subsidised housing and transport costs for the working class, as the area made their proximity convenient for serving the interests of the industrialists (Gready 1990, 140-142).

The year 1948 brought a significant change in the tolerance of the state towards Sophiatown. The newly appointed National Party government needed to reallocate labour between the mining, agricultural and manufacturing sectors. A tighter control of the flow of workers and their families from the rural areas into the cities became a necessity (Lodge 1981, 116). Sophiatown was seen as a hotbed of resistance to the increasingly oppressive and racist regime of apartheid.

In mid-January the first 152 families were informed that they must abandon their premises by I2 February 1955 (*ibid.*, 123). On the 9th February two thousand armed police came into Sophiatown along with eighty removal trucks. By the end of 1959, the last remaining residents of Sophiatown had been evicted (Gready 1990, 158). The suburb became an area designated for white people only and was renamed 'Triomf' (Triumph).

This 'removal phase' (between 1954 and 1960) is indicative of Maylam's third, most oppressive phase in apartheid history. The Group Areas Act of 1950 gave more control to central government which gave them more power to control the lives of the urban black population in Johannesburg. The government could no longer tolerate the multicultural freehold areas that had challenged its segregationist ideology. The Group Areas Act allowed the government to implement the policies of the 1923 Urban Areas Act by creating vast townships designated for the urban black population. These townships were placed reasonably close to industrial areas but as far as possible from white residential areas. The spatial separation from residential areas was reinforced by 'buffer zones' of natural or other barriers. They were also created to be cordoned off easily in the case of riots or rebellion.

In 1963 these townships acquired the name 'Southwestern Townships', or Soweto for short. Most of the areas were built in the 1950s and early 1960s around the already established township of Orlando (Mears 2007, 12). The forced removals in the freehold areas made many resettle in these townships, named Meadowlands and Diepkloof. The 'cultural forms' that were distinct in Sophiatown in some ways shifted to Soweto, however, the vibrancy and somewhat revolutionary air that was characteristic of Sophiatown were cleared along with it, only to emerge later towards the end of apartheid.

The availability of impartial primary sources makes writing the history, of what happened to Sophiatown and why, an easier task than the more personal experience of Sophiatown life;

one can look at government policies and their political affects thereafter through council meeting minutes, newspaper articles, institutionally conducted surveys, trial records, memorandums and government mandated reports, for example. Tom Lodge's (1981)[24] historical article, *The Destruction of Sophiatown*, is a good example of the use of these kinds of sources of information. Writing about the effects of Sophiatown's destruction on its residents is more complex.

The kind of information found on the lived experience of Sophiatown, and the effects of its destruction thereafter, is based on residents' memories. Memory, being a subjective phenomenon, complicates any historically accurate depiction of the suburb. However, an evaluation of the many subjective accounts of one's experiences and memories can help us understand the collective sentiment towards Sophiatown. Some of these memories of experience in the famous suburb can be found in interviews, short stories, autobiographies, biographies and novels. Some of the famous descriptions are by Don Mattera, Father Trevor Huddleston, Nadine Gordimer and Bloke Modisane[25], to name a few. Their stories are revealed through the unfolding of their real and imaginary memories. *Drum* magazine has become synonymous with Sophiatown and has shaped the way people think of the suburb. Gready (1990, 144) writes, "*Drum* became a symbol of a new urban South Africa, centred on and epitomised by, Sophiatown."

3.3 The memory-based conception of Sophiatown

Returning to the discussion of Cresswell's definitions of 'space' and 'place' in Chapter 2, I outlined that 'place' is a combination of location, locale and 'sense of place'. Sophiatown complicates this conception of space and place, as the locale, as it was known, no longer exists. The buildings were demolished (the only building remaining from this period of Sophiatown's history is the church where Father Trevor Huddleston worked) and so the 'sense of place' of Sophiatown is essentially 'frozen' in a particular time, where the 'lived experience' that transforms 'space' to a 'place' is found only in memory and stories (Cresswell 2009, 1-2).

[24] For more details and a more comprehensive understanding of Sophiatown's destruction, consult Lodge's (1981) article.
[25] Don Mattera (1987) *Memory is the Weapon*, Father Trevor Huddleston (1956) *Sophiatown*; Nadine Gordimer (1958), *A World of Strangers,* Bloke Modisane (1963) *Blame Me on History*.

Scholars have described this phenomenon of Sophiatown as a space constituting literary texts, films and images in a variety of ways: as an 'urban palimpsest' (Samuelson 2008); as a 'legendary' suburb and a 'mythical community' (Hannerz 1994); a 'synecdoche' for the experiences of the forced removals and a 'frozen metaphor' (Fink 2015); the 'mythology of Sophiatown' (Baines 2003); comprising the 'Sophiatown Imaginary' (Allen 2004); a "historical and symbolic site of resistance to apartheid" and a "signifier for whatever was daring, exciting, experimental, culturally innovative and defiant" (Gaylard 2008, 59-60). The concepts of myth and legend, metaphor and signifier, are common to descriptions of Sophiatown. I make use of Allen's phrase, the 'Sophiatown Imaginary' (2004), to signify the conception of Sophiatown discussed below.

Fink (2015, 11) speaks of Sophiatown as a "frozen metaphor" which from the present outlook is "based mostly on fabricated nostalgia". She argues there is an 'official discourse' making up a brand of Sophiatown for heritage purposes and tourism. This discourse is made up of fragments of the larger, varied history of Sophiatown that is mixed and matched to create narratives that form our understanding of what she argues is a mythologised 'Sophiatown TM'. These narratives are performed and thus proliferated in "stories, images, and song lines. In wallpapers, dress designs, play scripts, and other forms" (*ibid.*). Fink further argues that there are two aspects to the contemporary, global life of Sophiatown; One aspect is that Sophiatown exists as a suburb in Johannesburg (in 2006 the suburb was renamed Sophiatown) and Sophiatown exists as "an archive of fragments" which continue to be "activated in different contexts by South Africans and others alike". According to Fink, there are stories within Sophiatown that are largely ignored, that the selective history that is chosen to be represented and remembered is devoid of many stories that show a transnational approach to the life that Sophiatown encouraged.

Baines (2005, 615), in a review of David Goodhew's historical book of Sophiatown, argues, that Sophiatown comprises a 'cultural imaginary' that "has been constructed and celebrated by biographers, journalists, novelists, filmmakers, and playwrights". He sees this conception of Sophiatown as a 'myth', an 'imaginative version' of reality (616). This 'myth' or imagined version of reality that Sophiatown inspired is significant, according to Baines, because of what it came to represent in the 'public memory' (*ibid.)*. The physical landscape of Sophiatown was destroyed and reconstituted in 'Triomf'. The occurrence of this destruction

allowed a significant, abstract 'sense of place' in people's memories to be created instead. Baines (2005, 616) observes, "Sophiatown survived in the memories of dispossessed former residents and (for the wider public) in the images mediated by literary and visual representations." He adds that "memory privileges the tragic story of Sophiatown", in a similar way to District Six in Cape Town and South End in Port Elizabeth, over the histories of other areas that were not destroyed by the apartheid government. The continued representation of Sophiatown in literary texts, films and theatrical representations continues to validate and reinforce this process. In a sense, this process is what Fink refers to as the 'Sophiatown TM', as these representations are largely reproduced for international audiences to sell a 'vibrant' and 'exciting' narrative of creative resistance of black residents of Sophiatown, through bright and jazzy music and dance numbers.

Hannerz's (1994) first encounter with the narrative of Sophiatown was in a performance of 'King Kong' in London's West End in the early 1960s. Fink's (2015) article 'Close-up Sophiatown' is a critical response to Hannerz's article, 'Sophiatown: The View From Afar'. Hannerz (1994, 181) describes how by the time he had first encountered the idea of Sophiatown, it "was already gone, its people removed, its buildings erased, to make place for an entirely different kind of neighbourhood." Hannerz goes on to describe how he continued to encounter Sophiatown through "a generation of South African writers" who were "all at one time or other journalists at Drum magazine". His next encounters were in Nadine Gordimer's novels, Miriam Makeba's autobiography and in Father Trevor Huddleston's 'Naught for your Comfort'. He adds, "There is indeed a polyphony of voices here to keep at least the mythical community alive, even if naturally the great majority of ordinary Sophiatowners left no comparable documents." (*ibid.)*

Hannerz's use of the word 'ordinary' to describe former Sophiatown residents is the distinguishing factor in Fink's frustration. On the one hand the limited nature of our understanding of Sophiatown ignores certain communities who lived within Sophiatown. In particular, women of Sophiatown are limited to being foils against men's various exploits (see Fink 2015; Rorich 1989; Samuelson 2008). Other ethnic or population groups other than black Africans that inhabited the area are mostly left out of the common story of Sophiatown. On the other hand, whether accurate or not, the narratives of Sophiatown help former residents feel connected to their place of origin (Fink 2015, 11). Gready (2015, 139)

observes that the "composite picture of a world, in which both Sophiatown and the writers symbolised the vitality, novelty, and precariousness of the new black urban generation" was created by these narratives. The distinction of the 'realistic' and the 'ordinary' versus the 'mythological' and 'legendary' conceptions of Sophiatown, presented in the variety of articles discussed above, are further complicated by the distinction of these ideas that were created during Sophiatown's physical existence. It is this 'mythological' conception of Sophiatown that I refer to as the 'Sophiatown Imaginary'.

Gaylard (2008, 59) observes, "By now the actual, historical Sophiatown has almost disappeared under the weight of myth, legend, fantasy and fiction that has accumulated around it." However, while Sophiatown existed in physical terms, the "actual, historical" Sophiatown was being constructed through fantasy and fiction, and through the creation of myths and legends by "a small, fringe social group" (Allen 2004, 20), of which the journalists at *Drum* magazine were a part.

3.4 The creation of the 'Sophiatown Imaginary'

Allen (2004, 20) observes that despite the reality of "overcrowding, exorbitant rents, and violence exacerbated by ineffectual policing", there was a strong community spirit; "Sophiatown was a space in which non-elite cultural producers could enact an alternative reality: a reality created and lived by the members of a small, fringe social group, and vicariously consumed through the mass media by ordinary township dwellers". Some of these key, cultural innovators who were a part of this social group, and who reinterpreted and reinvented their social reality, were the journalists who wrote for *Drum* magazine. What they wrote was then consumed and disseminated through *Drum's* readership, mostly consisting of young, black, urban residents.

3.4.1 The role of Drum magazine in the Sophiatown imaginary

Drum magazine's images and fiction and non-fiction stories portrayed particular representations of Sophiatown that were deliberately utilised in perpetuating the writers' urban ideals. The *Drum* journalists operated from a particular worldview. This worldview rejected the earlier generation who seemingly complied with racist government policies. Allen observes that many of the Drum writers were critical of the political, moral, and cultural values of the older black elite. Drum writers rejected the romanticization of a

'traditional' rural life which was seen as a lost Utopia, and the adoption of a conservative Christian morality, which imposed values critical of life in the city with its apparently "morally degrading" way of life (Allen 2004, 21). At the start of *Drum* magazine's publication, however, these values were being promoted.

According to Gaylard (2008), *Drum* magazine began in March 1951, as '*African Drum'*. Under this conception the magazine was failing due to its lack of association with its urbanised readership. Anthony Sampson was brought in as editor by Jim Bailey, the financial backer, to transform the magazine so that it appealed to a young, urban readership. Sampson discovered why the magazine was failing. What became clear was the fact that readers were not interested in the 'tribal' or 'traditional' ideals that the magazine had been perpetuating. Potential readers were more interested in what was happening in the city and in American popular culture[26]. Some of the journalists who helped Sampson to transform the magazine to be more urbanised and current, and whose literary contributions to South African literature are note-worthy (see Masilela 1990, Gaylard 2008, Gready 1990), were Can Themba, Henry Nxumalo, Bloke Modisane, Todd Matshikiza, Casey Motsis, Nat Nakasa and Lewis Nkosi.

These writers/journalists were representatives of the urban 'city-slicker' generation, a generation "rooted in and shaped by the city";

> They were articulators of a new identity, spokespersons for a new, street-wise generation who wholeheartedly embraced the culture and lifestyle of the townships – a culture and lifestyle that found its fullest expression in the Sophiatown of the 1940s and 1950s (Gaylard 2008, 59)

They prided themselves in being able to move between the varying 'worlds' that was characteristic of the closeness of living in Sophiatown[27]. One of these worlds was the world of 'the gangster', the *tsotsis* of Sophiatown, which fascinated the journalists.

The gangsters of the 1940s and 1950s in Sophiatown were the promulgators of the 'clever' or *tsotsi* subcultural styles discussed in Chapter 2. One of the leading gangs in Sophiatown

[26] The influence of American popular culture, such as Jazz music, and 'gangster' and 'western' films, on township residents has been largely documented. See Coplan (2007), Ballantine (2012), Glaser (2000) and Gaylard (2008) for some examples.

[27] People who lived in Sophiatown lived in close proximity due to the lack of space where up to eighty people could be living on a stand.

was called "the Americans". Don Mattera, leader of "the Vultures" wrote an autobiography, *Memory is the Weapon,* about his experiences of living in Sophiatown. Gangsters were an important part of city life; Glaser's (2000) book covers the significance of gangs in township life. The stories and depictions of gangsters in *Drum,* or as Fenwick (1996) refers, the 'gangster-figure', are an interesting indication of how the journalists of *Drum* reinterpreted and reinvented their social reality within the creation and perpetuation of 'The Sophiatown Imaginary'.

Fenwick (1996) writes about the importance of the gangster-figure in the 'Sophiatown imaginary' that *Drum* magazine helped to create. He describes three distinct phases in which the gangster and gangsterism were represented in *Drum* magazine from the 1950s to early 1960s. The first phase is described as the briefest phase when crime was condemned as an urban phenomenon that threatened "the rural identity of tribal blacks". The second phase is in opposition to the first, where gangsters were seen as "urban survivors" who managed to accumulate a high standard of living, in both a material and social sense, that black people, at the time, were often denied. The third stage is the nostalgic remembrance of the '*shebeen* culture' that Sophiatown revelled in, and which was subsequently lost, for a time, as a result of its destruction (Fenwick 1996, 618).

Fenwick argues that "as concrete individuals" the gangsters were not a politically effective group and it was the subversive gangster-figure that was created by *Drum* magazine writers that "was elaborated upon as an effective subject-position from which to resist the white state" (*ibid.*, 624). This can be seen in the choice of gangsters that *Drum* magazine chose to depict. *Drum* magazine focused on writing about gangs like the 'Americans', the 'Vultures' and the 'Berliners', from Sophiatown. Gangs like 'the Russians', who allied themselves along ethnic groupings, were rarely written about. Fenwick (*ibid.*, 632) continues:

> The appropriation of the Hollywood gangster-figure by all levels of cultural production in Sophiatown was a remarkable act of resistance to white oppression. The *tsotsis* and gang members took the image of the gangster and mobilised that figure against the white state's attempt to re-tribalise them by making urban, black South African culture necessarily outlaw. The writers at *Drum*, picking up on this, incorporated the gangster-figure – the black, Sophiatown gangster figure – into their stories and articles, thus ensuring both a wider audience for this figure and a re-

enforcement of that figure's resistance to the images of blacks that government was interested in projecting.

One may see the *Drum* journalists' representations of gangsters and Sophiatown life (which contribute to the 'Sophiatown Imaginary') as inaccurate and escapist. It has already been noted that conditions in Sophiatown were often uncertain due to the threat of removal since 1936, in addition to poor sanitation and overcrowding. In the journalists' depictions of living in Sophiatown and in their depictions after its destruction, the almost 'joyous' representations of Sophiatown life in creative expressions following its demise may seem inaccurate.

Gaylard (2008) discusses the significance of the *Drum* journalists' tendencies to 'joyous' descriptions of Sophiatown life. He asserts that "the *Drum* writers were in fact clearly aware that this 'compulsion to joyousness' was directly related to the pain, insecurity and frustration of life in the ghetto – hence the need to seek consolation or affirmation or escape by living for the moment" (*ibid.*, 64). This desire for escape is illustrated by the number of *Drum* writers that fell prey to alcoholism and ruined their lives as a result.

Similarly, Fenwick (1996, 622) argues that the use of the gangster-image in *Drum* magazine was not 'escapist' or diverting people's attention from the 'real' political situation. He argues that the "high point" of depictions of gangsterism in *Drum* magazine coincides with the destruction of Sophiatown and "the attempts by urban blacks to protect their unique culture." The gangster narrative and the gangster-figure, however, ceased with the end of this resistance and the "solidification of white domination in the early 1960s." Fenwick's argument is that black urban resistance actively used the gangster-figure as a form of resistance. The gangster figure is important not only as a form of resistance but also as a representation which speaks to the 'Sophiatown imaginary'.

In Chapter 2 I discussed the *tsotsis* and the *mapantsula*, who, through their subcultural style, were expressing themselves in opposition to the government's ideals. Images from American movies played a role in giving young people idols to emulate. *Drum* magazine was a reflection of the young people at the time but through the mostly selective depictions of Sophiatown's residents, an 'imaginary' was created that was politically motivated. Journalists working for *Drum* magazine, gangsters and musicians became the key players in

creating this 'Sophiatown imaginary' which glamourized inebriation, violence and crime perpetuated by gangsters operating in Sophiatown. By placing images and articles in *Drum* magazine that celebrated these qualities, people would come to associate Sophiatown with these characteristics and thus perpetuate these ideas within and outside of Sophiatown. Samuelson (2008, 65-66) observes how this conception of Sophiatown allowed black people to assert a sense of belonging in the city, in resistance to the dominating tradition:

> The black city-self of the 1950s is procured and performed in the Sophiatown of *Drum*. The magazine, then, is not only a site and source of city writing but is equally the textual space in and through which black South Africans wrote themselves *into* the city, asserting a restless belonging in defiance of apartheid's efforts to write them out of urban existence and fix them instead in ossified traditions (from which they could be plucked at will for terms of migrant labour)

'Sophiatown' is thus necessarily complex in the variety of ways in which it may be conceptualised. The 'Sophiatown Imaginary' constitutes narratives created before and after Sophiatown's destruction. A part of the 'Sophiatown Imaginary' characterised by gangsters, musicians and fast-speaking journalists, who lived in their own constructed reality of Sophiatown, is continually perpetuated after Sophiatown's destruction through their depictions of a particular lived experience in novels, autobiographies and theatrical productions. These depictions of particular memories are often situated in the 'shebeen society' and *marabi* parties that developed as a part of township life. Sophiatown has become the metonymic memory of the 'vibrancy' of 'shebeen society', characterised by a 'spirit' of resistance through creative means.

3.5 Representations of Sophiatown

In Via Katlehong's production, *Via Sophiatown*, a depiction of the removals is performed and a character says, even though the residents were divided by race for different locations, "the spirit of the people was never broken" (Via Katlehong, Via Sophiatown 2013). Through representations of Sophiatown in productions like *Via Sophiatown,* pantsula dancers, represent and reinforce the 'Sophiatown Imaginary' of creative, township art forms. The

'spirit' of the vibrant Sophiatown is reconstructed and represented to assert itself as a public, collective memory of township life[28].

The choices that have been made in representations of Sophiatown, like *Via Sophiatown*, contribute to, and are influenced by, the 'Sophiatown Imaginary'. The creators of the respective productions conducted research into the history of Sophiatown and found inspiration from the stories, images and films. One example of this research is Nomathamsanqa's 'Dolly Rathebe' character singing 'Back of the Moon', a song from the 1959 musical called King Kong. Most of the music and lyrics in King Kong were written by Todd Matshikiza, the *Drum* music editor, famous for inspiring the style of writing exemplary of *Drum* articles and stories (see Gaylard 2008, 77).

3.5.1 Via Sophiatown

> *The sounds of the performance/music are overwhelming. Bra Jones is lamenting, the women are singing and Vusi, Vuyani and Tshepo are gumboot (Idadla/isicathulo) dancing. The offbeats, thigh slaps and foot stomps coinciding rhythmically with the saxophone and keyboard. This section of the play is full of power even when every performer is tired from rehearsing all morning. They start singing –"goodbye my hometown – goodbye the land of our forefathers". The performers pick up their suitcases and leave the stage in different directions.* (Via Katlehong, Via Sophiatown Rehearsals 2015)

The description above indicates the importance of Sophiatown as "the hometown" to the characters of the performers in the show. At the start of the show the characters build Sophiatown and at its destruction it is considered the "land of [their] forefathers". This indicates the magnitude of the concept of Sophiatown through the 'Sophiatown Imaginary', as the forefather of urban culture. The description of the show through my experience of observing the rehearsals exemplifies this trajectory.

Via Sophiatown is a historical narrative of the suburb of Sophiatown performed in song and dance. The show was created for an international (mostly French-speaking) audience. The performers begin in a sparse representation of the famous shebeen, 'Back of the Moon', and through singing and dancing they depict the joys and struggles of the people living there, the destruction of Sophiatown and the subsequent removals of the people to an area

[28] Glassberg's (1996) article 'Public History and the Study of Memory', is a useful source for understanding how memory in history can be constructed in a variety of ways.

such as Meadowlands. The performers created the characters and the storyline after having conducted research into the old suburb.

My experience in November 2015 with Via Katlehong's rehearsals for their show, *Via Sophiatown*, introduced me to a professional company rehearsing for an oft-performed show. The show has been performed in France several times. *Via Sophiatown* consists of ten performers and two musicians. Since its inception many of the performers have consistently remained in the show. In December 2015 there were a few new additions. Nomathamsanqa Baba and Thembinkosi Hlophe were the singers and narrators in the show. The dancers were Tshepo Nchabeleng, a talented dancer and former Isikhotane[29]; Vuyani Feni, an expert in gumboot dancing; Vusi Mdoyi, one of the directors of Via Katlehong and the main choreographer of the show; Mbali Nkosi, a professional contemporary dancer; and Boitumelo Tshupa, a dancer from Katlehong who is also in a *kofifi* (a dance form that developed alongside *marabi* in Sophiatown) dance group. New to the group was Nthabeleng Rahlabaki, Bongani Mthombeni and Angelo Mokenenyane. Nthabeleng is a part of Real Actions Pantsula crew, Bongani is from Intellectuals crew and Angelo is a 'freestyle' dancer (a dance form that falls within the 'hip-hop', urban dance matrix). Muzi Radebe and Jackson Vilikazi are both musicians. In the show, Muzi plays the piano and Jackson, the saxophone and pennywhistle.

While I sat in on rehearsals for the show in November 2015, I was unable to watch the show on stage. The company performed in France in December 2015. The following description of the show consists of an amalgamation of the rehearsals I witnessed as well as some online videos[30] of various performances of *Via Sophiatown* in France. The performers have changed over the years but in this description the performers who were rehearsing for the run of the show in France in December 2015 are present:

> *The show starts with Muzi and Jackson playing a slow jazz tune. The performers enter the stage singing, "we are building Sophiatown", in varying harmonies. They have suitcases as props to indicate their arrival in Sophiatown. They place their*

[29] Isikhotane is an infamous competitive subcultural style where one shows off one's wealth through clothing and destruction of clothing and other objects of wealth.
[30] See http://www.numeridanse.tv/en/video/3674_via-sophiatown; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KVEOmFfMa58; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pr1-CW5q5lg

suitcases at the back of the stage, below the platform where the musicians sit. The stage is mostly bare, with a raised platform at the back and sides. There is a large screen that has projections throughout the show of images of Sophiatown and text in French either providing some context to the action or translations. Thembinkosi Hlophe, known as 'Bra Jones', addresses the audience by saying "Ladies and gentlemen! Welcome to Sophiatown! A place of joy and happiness. A place of every nation living together as one! Welcome to Sophiatown" (Hlophe in Via Sophiatown 2015). The performers all dance in unison in an energetic routine.

Bra Jones, speaking to the performers, says "Ek se gentas (men – yeah!) and dollies (women – yeah!). Back of the moon is rocking tonight! Dolly and her hot band are playing there tonight. See you there!" (Hlophe in Via Sophiatown 2015) The men and women sit on opposite ends of the stage as if they are at the shebeen, 'Back of the Moon'. They act as if they are enjoying the music and goading each other. Nomathamasanqa, known as Thami, sings 'Back of the Moon' (a rendition of the song sung by Miriam Makeba in the King Kong musical), as the Dolly Rathebe character, while the female dancers perform a routine and then harmonise with Thami. On the screen is an image of men and women dancing together in what could be a dance hall in Sophiatown. Mbali performs a solo dance while enticing each of the male performers to dance with her. If she does not like what they are doing then she pushes them away and invites another male to join her. After another jazzy song is introduced, the dancers perform a tsaba-tsaba routine with a male-female pairing.

Thami and Bra Jones sing a love song with the words, "I am yours, you are mine, forever!", while Nthabileng and Angelo perform a freestyle duet. This is the first time in the show where a 'modern' style of dance is performed. The next few scenes shift the play to varying representations/depictions of oppression and resistance by the people of Sophiatown. Muzi and Jackson play music that is evocative of jazz while the image on the screen is of two boys performing gumboot dancing. Vuyani walks on stage wearing white gumboots. He has a harmonica that he plays along with the saxophone. He performs a gumboot (idadla/isicathulo) solo. There are moments in the song where he plays without music. The next scene projects an image of people standing together protesting in the streets in what could be Sophiatown. The

performers enter and perform a routine that evokes the 'toyi-toyi' dance. The women are wearing black vests, no head scarves and their skirts with white takkies. The men are wearing vests of different colours, suspenders hung on their hips, and gumboots. After a gumboot dance routine, the men walk to the side of the stage as if their hands are cuffed together while an image of policemen is projected on the screen. Bra Jones, still in his suit of Sophiatown, stands in the middle of the stage with a spotlight on him as he sings the song. The female performers harmonise alongside him. The men come and dance around him. This is the culmination/climax of the show, leading towards the destruction of Sophiatown. All performers are present in the last scene.

Sounds of knocking, screaming and helicopters can be heard while on the projector "1955: Expulsions" is written. Another image of a young boy crying amidst rubble is projected onto the screen. The performers sing "Goodbye my hometown, goodbye land of our forefathers". While singing, the performers sit down with their backs turned towards the audience. On the screen in French, the words, "Black people were taken to Meadowlands, Coloureds to Westbury, Indians to Lenasia, Chinese to central Johannesburg." The dancers start to leave one by one. Here Thami says: "That was how Sophiatown was divided but the spirit of the people was never broken. The opening to the famous Miriam Makeba song, 'Meadowlands', begins with Jackson playing the pennywhistle and Thami singing. The dancers perform as a group, in pairs.

Towards the end of the show Thami sings a song written by Thandi Klassen. Before she begins she addresses the audience with this monologue: I remember Sophiatown as a place of different races, colours and cultures. These people lived together in harmony. They used to talk about their daily worries and ideas. I remember the time when there was a struggle against apartheid where passes, Immorality Act and Bantu education were introduced. I remember the heroes that stood up for freedom, people like uSteve Biko, uRobert Sobukwe, uSolomon Mahlangu, uNelson Mandela, the list goes on! Besides violence, poverty and misery, Sophiatown was the slum of dreams, where famous writers, politicians, musicans were discovered. Like the jazz musicians. Hai! I'm talking about umama uDorothy Masuka, uDolly Rathebe, uAbigail

Kubheka, udada uHugh Masekela, uMiriam Makeba. Not forgetting the woman who wrote this song, Thandi Klassen. These men and women were very strong, I remember they used to sing this song. Sophiatown was full of life, and it ended.

The 'street dance' finale consists of the dancers performing in solos or duets, in various street dance styles. This is the point at which Angelo and Bongani show the dance styles that they excel in. Most of the dancers perform isipantsula dance, while Angelo performs his 'freestyle' style of dance. The final song and dance is to 'Pata Pata'.

Much of the 'Sophiatown Imaginary' can be seen in *Via Sophiatown*'s simple storyline. The depiction of Sophiatown before the removals is a vibrant one, while the portrayal of the removals promotes a sense of resilience and resistance. An advertisement for the show, shown below, translated from French, can be found on the website for the 'Centre Europeén Théâtral et Chorégraphique', where it was performed in December 2015:

> For many writers and South African artists, Sophiatown, a Johannesburg neighbourhood destroyed in the late 1950s, is a symbol, a legendary reference, which embodies the beginning of the struggle against apartheid. Via Katlehong Dance Company revives this multiracial and multicultural area. With renowned South African music, tunes by Dorothy Masuka and Miriam Makeba, this play depicts dancing couples and groups dancing the *tsabatsaba* or *Kofifi*, the ancestor of the pantsula culture. Like hip-hop in the United States and Europe, the pantsula culture is a lifestyle, covering fashion, music, dance, gestural codes and talk. It also finds its field of expression in the street. That's what this uplifting and artistic heritage that the dancers, singers and musicians celebrate in this show, which recreates the atmosphere of clandestine clubs. (http://www.t-n-b.fr/fr/saison/via_sophiatown-957.php)

The idea of 'uplifting and artistic heritage' being celebrated is one akin to my previous discussion in this chapter of the 'joyous descriptions' of Sophiatown which the *Drum* journalists wrote about. Amidst depictions of the oppressive nature of this time in apartheid history, what the viewer leaves with after watching the show, is an 'uplifting' sense of a celebration of this time in South African history. Thami's line of the 'spirit of the people' never breaking after Sophiatown was destroyed, and the consequent singing of Miriam Makeba's *Meadowlands,* speaks to the desire of 'Generation-Y' members to remember the creativity of the resistance politics of their parents' generation (Generation-X).

Pantsula dance forms a part of the renewed forms of creative resistance, following from the *shebeen* and *marabi* culture, that the 'spirit' of the people of Sophiatown has embodied. Vusi Mdoyi also places the history of *isipantsula* as inspired by Sophiatown's music, language and fashion:

> Isipantsula dance is a dance form that was inspired by the life from the late 1940s, to 50s, to 60s; the township life which was inspired by the music, the language and the fashion. Everything that was happening within the daily life and the daily experiences, especially the survival was an inspiration. And then it became a dance before it was a lifestyle and then later in the 70s it became a dance. (Vusi Mdoyi in Via Katlehong 2013)

Via Kasi Mover's production in Grahamstown, *Pantsula Van Tuka Af,* was created by Ayanda Nondlwana and Thozamile 'Rocky' Mngcongo; two pantsula dancers who grew up in Johannesburg before moving to Grahamstown. The show was created as a way to demonstrate the development of pantsula dance and place it in an important part of South Africa's history. I never saw the show but Ayanda Nondlwana who created the show explained it to me one afternoon in April 2015. The show is set in a shebeen in a township somewhere where 'Twoboy' and 'Shakes', 'old-timers' from Sophiatown, are sitting. A journalist (who I found out was inspired by me and my constant questioning) sees the two men and asks them about life in Sophiatown. What follows are numerous dance scenes depicting a history of Sophiatown and life in Johannesburg. The character, Shakes, worked in the mines, which is depicted and alluded to in a gumboot dance routine. They then discuss being gangsters in Sophiatown which is shown by using a tapsula routine (a form of pantsula dance with tap shoes or crushed cans on the bottom of shoes). There are other scenes that use *kofifi* dance and hustling and pickpocketing. They then show how things have changed and how these dance forms have come to influence the creation of a new dance form called pantsula dance. Three or four routines would showcase pantsula dance before the end of the show.

The similarities in the two productions in their representations of Sophiatown are significant of the 'Sophiatown Imaginary'; The use of gumboot dancing, *kofifi* or *tsabatsaba* dance, and ending in a depiction of their influence on street dance styles such as pantsula are some of the examples of similarities in the shows. Both shows are examples of the narrative of

Sophiatown that perpetuates many of the stereotypical associations with the famous suburb that are mostly a part of the 'Sophiatown Imaginary'.

Via Sophiatown was created for an international audience and as such, condenses the history into vignettes that depict a simplistic trajectory of Sophiatown's demise. When I asked the artists whether they would like to perform the show for a South African audience they mentioned they would have to change the show significantly. This show is useful in a discussion of representations of Sophiatown as the key moments that the artists have chosen to depict are at the essence of a narrative about a 'Sophiatown Imaginary'. Bra Jones' opening lines as well as some of the artists' reasons for creating the show (see Mdoyi and Baba 2013 and Via Katlehong 2013) highlight the multicultural, multinational aspect of Sophiatown as the most important characteristic of remembering Sophiatown.

It might be absurd to suggest that Sophiatown stands as a model for racial harmony in post-apartheid South Africa. There is evidence (see Fink 2015) to show that there was not always harmony among groups within Sophiatown. Despite the reductiveness of the history of Sophiatown, what the choice of depictions suggests is the desires of young South Africans today. Thami (in Via Katlehong 2013) speaks about how racially "scattered" South Africans are, despite the freedom that post-apartheid South Africa was meant to offer. She adds that Sophiatown was an example of a "united nation" but in a very concentrated area. The artists believe that by going "via Sophiatown" some of the "energy" of the famed suburb can be revived to help South Africans create the best community possible in the present moment (Mdoyi and Baba 2013).

Except for Angelo, all of the dancers have a background in pantsula dance. The background of the cast is significant in that almost all of them, with the exception of Thami who grew up in Grahamstown and Angelo who grew up in Bloemfontein, have grown up in a township on the borders of Johannesburg. Along with the research they conducted on the internet, the artists in the show have been told by older generations what Sophiatown was like. Vusi explains what it is like to hear about a place that no longer exists:

> After Sophiatown, after people were moved, it was called 'Triumph'. Which meant victory for the apartheid government by then but now they have started to restore

> the name. The name has been restored but even though it has, you cannot smell or feel Sophiatown as we were told Sophiatown used to be. (Via Katlehong 2013)

Vusi's sentiments returns to the problem of imagining Sophiatown. The freehold suburb no longer exists as it once was. The only way to know of Sophiatown is by the memories of the people that lived there and by observing how these memories translate into or are enacted in performance styles such as pantsula. Baines (2005) argues that what makes Sophiatown significant in South African history is its place in public memory. It was physically destroyed but it survived in former residents' memories and (for those that were never residents) in images "mediated by literary and visual representations" (Baines 2005). These representations help pantsula dancers to recreate a sense of celebration of the township space, from which the 'spirit' of the 'Sophiatown Imaginary' was inspired.

3.6 Conclusion

The Sophiatown retained in people's memories was destroyed by the apartheid government in the 1950s. It could be argued that it is because of this destruction that it holds such an important place in the memory of Johannesburg. Sophiatown has become an icon that stands for resistance. As a metonym for similar experiences elsewhere it is a place that stands in for something; the legend of Sophiatown has become an amalgamation of all the freehold areas that were destroyed during apartheid South Africa. District Six in Cape Town has a similar hold in people's memories. Sophiatown stands out, however, because of the images and narratives that exists, largely because of *Drum* magazine and the journalists that worked for the magazine.

Sophiatown lives as an important place in the minds and memories of people from Johannesburg and many other South Africans. Many famous writers such as Bloke Modisane, Can Themba and Nadine Gordimer and musicians such as Dolly Rathebe, Hugh Masikela and Miriam Makeba began their careers in Sophiatown. The place allowed for multicultural interaction. Its destruction in the late 1950s stamped out these possibilities but helped the myth of Sophiatown to continue to inspire people, and to strive for freedom of creative expression. Pantsula dancers place Sophiatown at the centre of pantsula's development. Pantsula dance continues in the creative, innovative 'spirit' for which the imagined reality of Sophiatown is famous. Pantsula dance emerges as a representation of a selective memory, a 'Sophiatown Imaginary', a longing for a less than ideal past, and as a

means of addressing something that is lacking in the present. The next few chapters will describe in further detail how the township, or Sophiatown, is mediated as an important metaphor in the many guises of pantsula in the townships of Johannesburg.

Understanding the origins of the dance in the context of Sophiatown is largely complicated because the place no longer exists as it once was. This place that is so iconic can only exist in our imaginations and in the steps and choreographies of dancers. Thus representations of Sophiatown through performance are not only depictions of an imagined history, they are also contributing towards this imagined past. They are helping to shape the way people remember and imagine Sophiatown through performances of its past. The representations of Sophiatown are more than what the place itself once was. They are a way for people and contemporary dancers to look back and remember a particular past (whether fictional or not) where people were free to construct the ideal self through these representations. This idea is still important today because not much has changed economically in the townships and thus people are still marginalised. Bearing in mind the idea of the 'Sophiatown Imaginary' as a political/creative redefinition of the past and how it is represented today in performance of this redefined history, this next section describes how Sophiatown, as a metonym for most townships and 'shebeen society', produces and imagines the creative resistant forms of 'the township' through the performance of pantsula for worldwide consumption.

The history of the creative forms developed in the townships of Johannesburg discussed in this chapter is 'intrinsically linked' with pantsula dance. This link is created through pantsula dancers' placing of this history as the precedent of *isipantsula* culture and the dance form itself. Dancers look to the positivity and celebratory aspects of the 'Sophiatown Imaginary' to recreate and redefine 'the township' as a positive space/place in South African history and in present South Africa. The next chapter focuses on how pantsula dance adapts while continuing its existence while keeping the 'intrinsic link' of place and history in mind.

Chapter 4
Adaptation: Redefining Pantsula Dance and 'the Township'

Pantsula dance has been extending beyond 'the townships' and has infiltrated the mainstream media in South Africa and abroad. Pantsula dancers are increasingly being featured in music videos of international artists: In 2013, the U.K. based electronic duo, Basement Jaxx, used South African pantsula dancers in their music video for 'What a Difference your Love Makes' (see BasementJaxxonVEVO 2013); Beyoncé Knowles used Mozambican pantsula dancers in her music video for 'Run The World (Girls)' in 2011 (see beyonceVEVO 2011); most recently, Jain, a French singer-songwriter, featured the Johannesburg based crew, 'The Perfect Storm', in a music video for her song, 'Makeba' (see JAINVEVO 2016). Pantsula dance is included in South African competitive dance television shows, 'Step Up or Step Out', 'Red Bull Beat Battle' and 'Stumbo Stomp amaPantsula'. In these shows, crews compete to win cash prizes. Pantsula was featured in the street dance documentary, 'African Cypher'. Since 2010, the appeal of pantsula dance seems to be escalating as many online articles and videos explore this dance phenomenon (see Bischoff 2013; Klein 2013; Richardson 2016; SPIN 2013 and Webster 2010, for a few examples).

These examples show the various ways in which pantsula dance has become a part of the 'mainstream' through an extension and celebration of its marginalised heritage. Shifts in the dance form and the 'way of life' or culture of *isipantsula* have taken place out of necessity as the dance form has provided professional opportunities for dancers. Sicelo Xaba describes the development of pantsula dance from an expressive form of an alternative culture to a mainstream, performing art:

> *When the forced removals came in the mid-1950's, and people were being removed from Sophiatown and Madubulaville and taken to Mohlakeng and Soweto, people were looking for an alternative culture to express themselves. IsiPantsula became the alternative culture that people used to express themselves and remember where they came from, bringing it into the new townships. It has developed to a performing art, from a street dance to a performing art. So it came from the indigenous dances, to*

> *urban dances, street dances then it became a performing art like now.* (Sicelo Xaba in Little 2012)

Xaba asserts that *isipantsula* culture helped people to remember the creative resistant forms that developed in freehold areas like Sophiatown. The 'alternative culture' was the opposition to the oppressive experiences of life under apartheid for black people who were forced to reside in township areas after the forced removals in the 1950s. In Chapter 3 I quoted Xaba in a radio interview where he avers that pantsula dance became "a household name" in the 1980s. In the 1980s the dance form was performed in the streets, where young people would learn from each other and use the dance form to express themselves as a way to escape the severe repression of the time. Myburgh (1993) observed in the 1990s how pantsula dance had, in many ways, "become a township language for expressing the frustrations, ideals and dreams of many black South Africans." However, in the development of pantsula dance, as indicated by Xaba, the dance form became a performing art. This change is largely tied to the end of apartheid in the 1990s and the resulting, expanding opportunities for performances afforded to pantsula dancers. Following Xaba's proposed trajectory of the development of pantsula dance, I discuss the possibility of these changes in the following section.

4.1 Indigenous dances, to urban dance, to street dance, to performing art

The possible development of pantsula dance suggested by Xaba could be explained by the process and consequences of urbanisation in Johannesburg. Xaba argues that pantsula dance is a distinctly South African urban form that is a consequence of many different artistic forms from many different dance traditions. Although Xaba has said the performance of pantsula dance, as it is recognised today, started in the 1980s, the influences of pantsula dance began much earlier, in the 'indigenous' dances of people from different areas coming to Johannesburg to work.

Rani's (2012) article, 'An Overview of Social Traditional African Dance in South African Townships', helps to provide a discussion of the development of social dance forms in Johannesburg. Where Xaba refers to these dances as 'indigenous' dance, Rani uses the term 'social traditional dance' to refer to dance forms expressing a particular ethnicity or ethnolinguistic group in South Africa. Rani (2012) discusses the changes in South African

traditional dances because of the process of urbanisation in Johannesburg. Through the rural-urban migration to Johannesburg that was inspired by the possibility of work on the gold mines, people of varying backgrounds met in this new environment:

> People from all different South African language groups were moving to the cities to find work, including people from Xhosa, Sotho, Zulu, Venda, and Tswana ethnic backgrounds. These are very distinct cultural groups with varying dance traditions.

These 'dance traditions' were understood as a part of everyday life, a 'way of life', and were passed down through generations for "religious, social or other ceremonial purposes." For these people of varying backgrounds, dance functioned in a multitude of ways as a cultural and artistic expression of a community. Dance was "associated with everyday activities, such as birth, death, puberty, war, recreation, initiation and ritual." The move to the townships from rural areas, along with influences of European cultures in the cities, altered "the physical, socio-cultural and ideological spaces" in which dance took place. "Cultures mixed and new forms were created", observes Rani. (2012, 73-74)

The people coming to live in the townships were from various ethnic backgrounds and were made to live together in close proximity. Rani explains that dance forms from rural areas had clearly outlined roles for men, women and children as well as different members of society. In the townships these roles changed significantly. People from different rural areas and practises lived close together. This meant that adjustments had to be made to rural, traditional practices to accommodate the new living environment. These adjustments often led to "extensive and vibrant social interaction" among township communities. (*ibid.*, 75, 77)

Rani (*ibid.* 75) observes, "Through such a cocktail of cultures and traditions in one space, domestication of movements, language, dress codes, and dances began to occur." Rani describes the 'domestication' of dance as people borrowing dances and claiming them as their own due to "geography, space and socio-political issues". One might look at it through Guzman-Sanchez's (2012, 15) description of artistic expression:

> As an artist you see something and then reinterpret and elaborate on it to make it an individual statement of expression. In a sense, you are making it your own while staying true to the essence of the original concept.

Adjustments, however, had to be made to traditional social dance forms because of a "completely new physical and geographical environment" (Rani 2012, 76). Over time, dance forms such as gumboot (isicathulo) dance, marabi and pantsula dance were created within township spaces. "Like social traditional dances [from rural areas], these new forms of dance have developed historically and have social and cultural significance", observes Rani (*ibid.*, 83). Marabi is considered by some pantsula dancers as the precursor to pantsula dance. The context in which marabi developed (discussed in Chapter 3) illuminates many aspects that are characteristic of the contextual development of pantsula dance. These dance styles created from a mix of traditional dance styles or 'indigenous' dances became distinctly urban dance styles.

The 'urbanness' and 'modern' aspects of these dance forms were of particular importance to the practitioners. The move away from the traditional or rural was of political significance; the distinction between a 'city slicker' and a '*moegoe*'[31] was evidence of this fact. However, the 'traditional' dance styles were not without their influence. The hybridising of the traditional dance and music, along with the influence of jazz and dance styles seen in American films, aided in the creation of these modern, urban styles. People were 'borrowing' and mixing to create something that spoke to a new lifestyle. When young people in South African townships were born into the cities it was the only 'tradition' they knew.

The changes and mixing that necessarily took place in 'indigenous' dance styles that were characteristic of rural lifestyles, to become reflections of the urban melange, relate to Xaba's statement of pantsula dance's development from indigenous dance to urban dance. He also used the notion of 'street dance' in relation to pantsula dance. There is no evidence, as far as I have been able to find, to suggest the difference between the distinctions of 'urban' and 'street' dance forms. The use of either definition relates to the development of a form in a space characterised by city life. However, Xaba's use of the word 'street' seems to suggest the further development of the form, from an expression of a distinctly 'urban' form (performed in the *shebeen, marabi* parties) to the expression of youth in the streets of

[31] Glaser (2000, 107) describes this distinction in his book: "*Clevers* were street-wise city slickers. They asserted an urbanness that defined insiders and outsiders according to dress, language, and style codes. The antithesis to 'clever' was *moegoe,* a country bumpkin."

the townships. Xaba describes in a radio interview how he found a passion for pantsula dance through learning about it in the streets of the township:

> *As kids we explore many things on the street, we can do various dance forms that you come across off the streets of ekasi, we get to explore different things. We explore as kids who fell in love with something so you go 'this is me, this is where I belong'. So later on I think around in the early 90's, around '91, that's when I felt like, no, this is where I belong.* (Xaba 2016)

In the radio interview, the interviewer asks Xaba how this passion he discovered for pantsula dance influenced his life. He responded by relating how the decision to build a career from pantsula dance created a number of unforeseen challenges. While he was in school, "it was all about the passion", but after school he had to make the decision, despite his parents' wishes to "go and work", to build a career from pantsula dance. Xaba puts it as such: "I knew that now there is something bigger than just going for a 9 to 5 but this is building a career or a profession out of working from ekasi" (Xaba 2016). It was the possibility and decision of pantsula dancers to create careers from the form they were passionate about, which had the dance style become a 'performing art', where dancers could earn money from its performance.

The idea of 'working from ekasi' is an interesting one and is an important notion for this chapter. The end of apartheid legislation opened up opportunities for people living in townships to legally make changes and redefine township spaces and the creative art forms that developed within them. This notion is a part of pantsula dance's development from a street dance into a performing art and a profession.

4.1.1 A Performing Art – Pantsula on Stage

Samuel's (2001-2002) article suggests that the end of apartheid brought performance opportunities to pantsula dance groups where theatres and performance venues were attempting to widen the choices of dance forms represented on stage. Samuel's article is an interesting source of information of the status of pantsula dance in South African performance contexts in the 1990s and early 2000s. The article observes that the 'shift' of pantsula dance "from townships to mainstream theatre spaces" created shifts in features of the dance form such as "space, form and gender." Samuel (*ibid.*, 55) suggests that many

features of pantsula dance, like the 'uniform' of All-Stars shoes, Dickies pants and shirts or Brentwood pants and shirts and a *spotie*, as well as the modes of performance – narrative style and strict formations for example – were solidified through the new performance opportunities. Samuel (*ibid.*) observes, "Choreographers of pantsula found new avenues in which to parade their work and thus assert their preferred form."

Rani (2012, 83) says of pantsula dance, "As a social urban form it is a dance that, while it can be enjoyed at social gatherings, has been formalised and theatricalised to create professional performing dance groups." The 'shift' to the theatre and the consequent possibilities of earning money created many changes in the various ways pantsula dance could be performed. Not only were certain features of the dance form solidified and theatricalised but the way in which *isipantsula* was performed, as a 'way of life' necessarily needed to change. The shift to the theatre, from being performed in the streets, could be considered a controversial one, where dance performed in theatres is thought of as having higher value in society than dance performed in the streets. Dodds' (2010) article, about legitimising popular dance forms as a valid object of study within dance studies, refers to the absolutist model of value judgements in dance forms, usually created by dominant political powers. She argues that some art forms are privileged over others and usually, "the dance that takes place in formal theatrical spaces, before a paying audience, is awarded higher levels of worth than that which occurs in dance halls, clubs , leisure centres and street sites" (2010, 346). Samuels (2001-2002, 53) refers to the positioning of pantsula dance as a "low status art form" as opposed to the "high art position reserved for classical ballet in middle class performance venues." In many ways the move of pantsula dance from the street to the stage can be controversial in that, while performing pantsula dance on stage affords it a higher status or 'dignity' as Faleni puts it below, it also plays into the privileging of the 'stage' as a space of higher value than the streets.

Leballo 'Lee' Lenela speaks about how 'Intellectuals' attempts to perform pantsula dance in theatre by saying, "We are trying to take this dance of ours out from the streets and show people that you can actually put it in theatre" (Lenela 2015). Rani, however, argues that "social traditional African dance", of which pantsula dance was a part, loses the intimacy and interactive nature of the dance forms when performed on a theatre stage. The physical boundaries created by the proscenium arch between the dancer and the audience as well as

the length of time are constrained. He argues that this is moving away from the traditional role of dance. He adds that by putting traditional dance in a theatre, it becomes an 'elitist commodity' due to the fact that some people would not be able to afford tickets. According to Rani, "this is against the participatory and inclusive nature of social traditional dance and the Afrocentric approach to theatre" (Rani 2012, 77-78). Faleni, of Via Katlehong, has a different approach to dance being performed on stage. He believes that,

> *When we take isipantsula out of the streets and put it on the stage in the theatre, I think we are giving it more respect and we are giving it dignity. When people see pantsula in the streets they say 'ah, that dance is for amateurs, it is suitable for the streets only'. But now when they start to see the creativity on stage, that is where the dancers need to come with the best elements of the craft on stage. Then people they will say, 'wow that dance, those people they are creative, they can put street dance on the stage.' Before we did it, people used to be afraid to put their craft on stage, especially when it comes to pantsula. I'm proud to say we were one of the few organisations that put pantsula in the theatre, on stage. And when people see pantsula on stage, we take them through the journey of all the moves and then when they get out of the theatre or out of the event, they will start talking about pantsula 'ah wow you see that move', 'ah that move is like catching a taxi', 'ah you see that one, that guy he was imitating a mother'. We have a story to tell with our dance form. All the things that we do on the streets, we put them on stage but now we are doing it in a way that can educate people.* (Faleni 2015)

Faleni and Rani both have good points on the value of theatre in society; theatre has the potential to educate but it also has the potential to distil and commodify what it represents on stage. For Faleni, what is important is the ability of theatre to portray something that does not usually have the opportunity to be seen in such a way. Theatre, for Faleni, helps to remove the criminal connotations related to pantsula dance and allows it to be seen as a performing art. It also allows for the stories of 'the township' (as discussed in Chapter 2) to be told to a variety of audiences. Faleni's notions of 'dignity' speak to how pantsula dance is still a marginalised form. Lenela's assertion I quoted earlier, of wanting to show people that pantsula dance can be performed in the theatre and not only in the streets, shows that, despite pantsula dance being performed on stage since at least the early 1990s, people still

consider the dance form to be an inferior one. The more important distinction, however, is that for some people, 'the stage' is seen as a place of dignity and professionalism, whereas 'the streets' are a place for amateurs. Rani's frustration with the performance of dance forms born in South Africa being performed on stage might be a reflection of the sentiment of this bias between 'streets' and the 'stage'. Despite these notions, the importance of pantsula dance being performed on stage has led to the possibility of professionalization for pantsula dancers and thus a change in the expression of the *isipantsula* 'way of life'.

For many pantsula dancers I have spoken to, the performance of pantsula dance on stage is significantly different to the performance of pantsula in the streets. Steven Faleni of Via Katlehong gives an example of how misconceptions of pantsula dancers as gangsters by the public led dancers to change how they present themselves. Faleni explained that when sharing a changing room at the theatres with other groups of other performing arts, people will remove their valuables out of sight from the pantsula dancers. However, he adds that once these people see pantsula dancers on stage they forget that they thought the pantsula dancers "look like thugs":

> *That is why most of our artists, before they used to dress, even when they walk in the streets, they used to dress like pantsulas, but now when you start to see other people and meet different people then you start to say, 'you know what, I'm going to treat my pantsula as a profession. You know, I'm not going to put my trousers here, under my belt because people when they see that, think 'ah that guys a thug'. But now once you start to jump on stage then you are going to wear it like a pantsula.* (Faleni 2015)

Having come from the subcultural style of the Sophiatown gangsters and the *mapantsula,* people associate the 'uniform' of the pantsula dancer with the clothing of *tsotsis.* Ayanda Nondlwana explains this perception in a short documentary about his crew, 'Via Kasi Movers':

> *The pantsulas of apartheid, they were gangsters, they were thugs. They were guys who used to wear expensive clothes. They had the style, the walk, the look, the dress code and the talk. So we took from 50s, 60s and then we form it into a dance and positive thing. That's the change that we are trying to show people. That we are no longer the apartheid mapantsula but we are the modern ones. And there are those*

> *who are now bringing the dance and the joys, the unity in people, cause pantsula dancers, they bring all people together. Today we pantsula dancers, we are not tsotsis or thugs. But we are doctors and our medicine is entertainment.* (Nondlwana, in Perros and Brazic 2013)

Both Nondlwana and Faleni illustrate how the association with *tsotsis* or 'thugs' is a negative one. Although the *tsotsis* have been a source of inspiration for the style of *isipantsula,* it is no longer economically or socially viable for pantsula dancers who are attempting to create a profession out of the dance form. Coplan (2007, 81) suggests crime became a tool for self-assertion and protest, in the time of apartheid, where people's social identity and power were denied. He adds that after 1994, "crime became simply crime and not as well a socially condoned form of resistance." The image of creative resistance, in the townships of Johannesburg, that the *tsotsis* were known for, the expensive clothes, the walk and the talk, inspired dancers and are, in part, something to be venerated. It was, and still is, a part of the 'street culture' of township life and although pantsula dancers do not wish to have the negative associations of being criminals, crime and gangsters are a part of the reality of life in the townships, which pantsula dance often attempts to narrate.

Some of the core steps of pantsula dance (described in Chapter 2) reflect the influence of the criminal acts of gangsters. *Kwraips* refers to the quick, grabbing action of stealing handbags from white women in the city while 'Gambling Dice' makes reference to the *tsotsis* who gambled on street corners in the townships. In a visit to Lee Leballo's house in Soweto, I witnessed the gambling antics of men, young and old, in the street outside an already vibrant *shebeen* one sunny afternoon in 2015. These moves, however, act more as a reflection of life in the townships, rather than a glorification of acts of crime.

The use of props in routines as well as the choice of costuming in performances indicates an ongoing attempt by dancers to reflect their experiences and the kinds of characters they encounter in the township. At a pantsula dance competition in Mohlakeng that was organised by Red For Danger, one crew depicted working-class characters with the use of a ladder, pitchfork, spade, rake and cans of paint. This crew consisted of five young males and despite the competition being solely for pantsula dance, they performed *sbhujwa*. *Sbhujwa* is an off-shoot of pantsula dance that differs from pantsula in the bent knees and slightly

slower execution. Some of the other crews who were performing pantsula dance with rigid bodies and precise footwork, used crates (commonly used as seating in shebeens) as props in their routines.

The development of pantsula dance, from a 'street' dance to a performing art, has largely occurred because of the new opportunities for performance offered in the post-apartheid era. The theatre stage became a new place to share stories and create routines. The shift from street to stage meant that certain aspects of the dance form became more formalised and a shift in everyday representation of professional dancers, in how they dress, talk and walk, occurred out of necessity.

4.2 Shifts in the *isipantsula* 'way of life'

In an informal interview with Steven Faleni and Vuyani Feni of Via Katlehong, we discussed the different ways people can express their perceptions of culture (see entire interview in Appendix C):

> *Steven: There are people who, when they walk in the streets they walk like pantsula, but they are not dressed like pantsula. There are people who dress like pantsula but they do not walk like pantsula. Then there are people who dance like pantsula but they are not pantsulas.*

And

> *Vuyani: It's like someone who is in art but is not an artist. You can be in art but you are not an artist.*

And

> *Heather: Okay so it's like if I go to a gallery and I look at art, and I love art and I follow art,*
>
> *Vuyani: You appreciate it.*

Steven elaborated on the analogy by explaining how some people who do not create artworks but studied art have the ability to see what is good art and what is not. He compared it to some people who do not dance pantsula but they have the ability to see what moves work well in a choreographic routine and what moves do not. These

distinctions make it difficult to write about pantsula dance and *isipantsula* culture. As with most cultures, *isipantsula* is constantly shifting and evolving and is expressed differently across different areas.

Sello Modiga illustrates his ideas of the personal expression of *isipantsula* through his understanding of traditional dress:

> *For me now it is very important to understand your culture; where you come from and what you eat is usually from your culture. I'm a Tswana guy but I can't wear the Tswana costume when I wake up in the morning because there is only one costume* (Modiga 2016).

Modiga explains, in a somewhat hyperbolic way, that it is not necessary and almost impractical for someone to wear the traditional clothing of the 'culture' with which they identify. There are many clothing choices that a pantsula dancer would wear but not every person who identifies as a pantsula is obligated to wear this clothing. These dancers wear the clothing only when they are performing pantsula dance. This might be because many pantsulas have chosen careers as professional dancers. An example of my first meeting with a few *Via Katlehong* crew members illustrates this point:

> *I finally arrived at Phooko section, Katlehong, (after a brief dalliance in Alberton after taking the wrong turn). Feeling very nervous after missing the turn into the Arts Centre, I had to ask a woman with an apron where I could find Via Katlehong pantsula. She told me they would be at the Arts Centre. I turned back. Three young men were walking into the Arts Centre. They had a security guard open the gate for me and my car. Other men sitting on a bench helped me find a parking spot in the already crowded square. I had no idea who I was looking for, already having forgotten the faces of Steven Faleni and Buru Mohlabane (whom I had spoken to on the phone) who I had seen on the Via Katlehong website. I was hoping the pantsula dancers would be easier to recognise but there were no All-Stars or Sporties in sight. I asked the men sitting on the bench where I could find the Via Katlehong Pantsula dancers. They directed me to the inside of a building where they were having a meeting.*

I poked my head through the door. There were about five men sitting at a large desk obviously in the midst of discussing something important. I timidly introduced myself and said I was looking for Steven and Buru. Steven got up and briefly chatted with me. They were preparing for the 'Just Stand Up and Dance Battle' on the 19th September. Steven had warned me that they were very busy when I spoke to him on the phone but it was Buru who said I could come through since they would all be there and the dancers would be rehearsing. Unfortunately no rehearsals were taking place but Steven took me to the men at the bench and introduced them as the dancers of Via Katlehong. He said I could chat to them while the other men finished up with their meeting.

I introduced myself to the dancers and attempted to explain what I am doing. Their jovial camaraderie among them, now stifled by my awkward presence (especially since English is now the medium in which they have to communicate – a common occurrence among South Africans as soon as a white English speaker enters the circle. A reminder to myself that I need to learn more languages). However, as I tried my best to prove I know a few things about pantsula and asked them questions, the air of playfulness I had interrupted returned as we made jokes about the 'old crocs' (mapantsula) that wear head to toe 'Scotcho' (chequered material usually resembling tartan).

The men at the bench turned out to be accomplished dancers of Via Katlehong. They have toured extensively and perform all the dance forms that Via Katlehong is known for – pantsula, gumboots, tapsula[32] and steps. They are Mpho Malotana, Lemi Fudumele, Thabo Letho, introduced to me as 'Big Eyes', Thato Qofela and Mduduzu 'Snake' Zwane. These men are not only dancers; they refer to themselves as performing artists.

I asked them why they are not dressed as pantsulas. They laughed and asked me what my impression is of the way a pantsula dresses. I tell them the All-Stars, chequered shirts, Sporties and straight pants. They told me that it is true but they are professional artists and so they do not dress like pantsulas other than when they are

[32] Tapsula is performed as a combination of tap-dancing and pantsula dance. Some dancers perform pantsula dance with taps or coke cans on the bottom of their shoes and call it tapsula.

performing. This is something that working with Via Katlehong has instilled in them. They have a sense of professionalism. But Thabo says that 'it's inside'. They are pantsulas on the inside, they don't have to dress like pantsulas to be one.

Faleni further explains this distinction of the professionalism of pantsula dance and being a pantsula 'on the inside':

> *I'm not saying that other people are not treating it as a profession but I treat it as a profession. I'm doing pantsula on stage. Pantsula is my craft. I have the history of pantsula and I 'talk'*[33] *pantsula but when people see me, they think that I'm just an ordinary guy, a normal person. When we go to a meeting, when we meet people, when we go to parties, I cannot dress like a pantsula. I need to respect my craft now because to me, it's a profession. I cannot just dance in the street. If I go to a nightclub and I expose my craft, I need to think instead that I make a living out of this thing. Vuyani is relying on this and Vusi is relying on this then I need to respect my craft.* (Faleni 2015)

This respect of the craft and of other crew members in pantsula dance, is linked to the ability of pantsula dance to create a lifestyle for practitioners that is centred around its performance. There is a kind of dedication and discipline required in performing the form that takes precedence in one's life. In a short documentary about *Via Sophiatown,* Vusi Mdoyi (2013) talks about how young black people grow up knowing how to sing and dance. He adds that *Via Katlehong* was created as a community youth club to teach young people "the discipline of art" and take them "away from the streets" (Via Katlehong 2013). Both Ayanda and Rocky of Via Kasi Movers expressed their interest in helping young people in the townships avoid the negative aspects of 'the streets', such as drugs, alcohol and petty theft, by teaching them pantsula dance.

> *Rocky: My childhood like I was naughty, smoking, drink alcohol, drugs, I was all over you know. When I started dancing then my life changed. Young kids are busy now with alcohol and drugs and all that stuff. Ya so I'm trying to change that. I can teach*

[33] The lingo of pantsula is known as *tsotsitaal. Tsotsitaal* is a mixture of languages that were spoken in township areas. Much research has been done on *tsotsitaal:* see Hurst (2009) for a comprehensive study.

> *them how to do this kind of dance. Our motto, in Via Kasi: together we prosper and divided we fall. That's our motto.* (Mngcongo, in Perros and Brazic 2013)

Nceba Njadayi, a high school student and pantsula dancer in Via Kasi Movers, reiterated the notion of the influence Rocky and Ayanda had as teachers and role models:

> *Nceba: In Via Kasi we don't only learn and practice dance moves. We learn respect and we learn how to conduct ourselves and we have role models that we look up to and aspire to be like them one day. We want to grow up and not smoke or drink alcohol or do those things which are wrong.* (Njadayi, in Perros and Brazic 2013)

Ayanda Nondlwana has also spoken about the rehabilitative and life-changing quality of pantsula dance in his life:

> *I started pantsula, I was young, and then when I was growing up, I started to be a gangster, living pantsula, starting to do wrong things. I started to do break-ins, doing drugs, all of that. But then God whispered in my ear and he said 'I gave you a talent, use that talent' and then I remembered when I came here in Grahamstown that no I've got a talent, so let me use that talent to rehabilitate myself. Pantsula changed me and saved my life, that's why I'm here.* (Nondlwana 2011)

Prince Mofokeng of 'Shakers and Movers', who became the principal character in Bryan Little's documentary about South African street dance styles, 'African Cypher', also illustrated how pantsula dance changed his life. He explained how he used to mug people at gunpoint. He was caught one day and put in jail where he served a three year sentence. In jail, he became a choreographer of pantsula dance and on his release he continued to practise pantsula dance. He said of pantsula dance:

> *I want to show the world that pantsula is talent. Pantsula could be someone's daily bread or someone's success story. And that's why I'm still a pantsula today. IsiPantsula saved my life.* (Mofokeng, in Little 2012)

The notions of 'talent', 'discipline', 'respect', and 'togetherness' are common notions in the views of many pantsula dancers. Sello Modiga believes that pantsula dance is preceded by talent and a 'drive' to succeed. He once told me how,

> *There are a few young people who try to make pantsula dance a profession but they are not driven or 'gifted' enough to make it work; It is because they don't set their goals straight, they don't understand exactly what it is that they need or want to achieve at the end of the day. It is not a calling for them but it's just doing it for fun.* (Modiga 2016)

The pantsula dancers for which pantsula dance is 'a calling' require high levels of dedication to the practice of the form. Richardson (2016) mentions how, "With ample skill and dedication — many of the troupes practice several hours a day — they have become recognized leaders and entertainers in their townships." This kind of dedication is illustrated in a generalised description of the daily life of Nceba and Thanduxolo 'Banana' Kilani, who I worked with during my field research for my Honours degree in 2013 in Grahamstown:

> *Every day Banana and Nceba wake up at five o' clock. They are both in grade ten at T.M. Mretyana, a high school on the top of the hill in Joza. For an hour they go for a run from the start to the end of Joza which is about 2.5km in length. They do various exercises and then run back home to prepare for school. Around three o' clock they have rehearsals with their current pantsula dance group, Dlala Majimboz. Before rehearsals begin everyone does the same run that Banana and Nceba did in the morning. Fitness is extremely important if one wants to be a proper pantsula dancer. Banana and Nceba took it upon themselves to ensure their fitness. Their general attitude befits this quote by Mnembe, Dlamini and Khunou (2004, 501): "Young people are less political and more excited about life and about the world in general. People are keen to make it for themselves".* (van Niekerk 2013)

Another example of dedication to the dance form was found in the Alexandra Rockstars or 'Alex Rockstars', whom I met in 2015. At the time, all five members of this crew were younger than twenty-one and in school. They told me they rehearse every day after school for two to three hours. On the weekends Alexandra Rockstars were either at the major intersections of Johannesburg streets collecting money from passing drivers or performing in a dance competition somewhere else. When I met them, they were dancing at a large intersection in Johannesburg in the affluent Bryanston area (see figure 5 below).

Figure 5: Alexandra Rockstars performing at the intersection.

In between their short routines where they perform to ask money from passing motorists, I asked them a few questions:

> *Me: And you learnt just from watching other pantsula dancers?*
>
> *Thabang Masipa: Yes. It's what we do. This is our culture. We live by it.*
>
> *Me: How do you live by it?*
>
> *Thabang Masipa: For the love of it. We do love this traditional thing. We love pantsula with all our hearts. (Alexandra Rockstars 2015)*

Passion for the dance form is a distinguishing feature of many accounts of pantsula dancers. However, there is a discrepancy between younger and older generations of dancers in how the passion and dedication manifests. Xaba's discussion in the radio interview of the ease of his school-going years in practicing pantsula, where it was all about the passion, and the difficulty in choosing pantsula dance as a viable career illustrates this distinction.

Another example of the distinction between school-going younger dancers and older dancers who are making a career for themselves, is shown in the description below, of a rehearsal I attended in May 2015, of the Grahamstown-based crew, Dlala Majimboz. At around 5 o' clock in the evening, I went to Archie Mbolekwa School in Joza, Grahamstown, where Dlala Majimboz was rehearsing. Likhaya 'Petite' Jack had asked me to come to the school because he wanted to tell me what had happened since the last time we met:

> *The sun is starting to set. Archie Mbolekwa is on the edge of the hill and the view of Grahamstown is mesmerising. Makana's Kop sits to the left of us, overlooking the*

city with its quiet eeriness. Petite opens the gate for me and I walk with him to the classroom where the crew has been rehearsing. It feels good to see him after such a long time; we walk with our arms around each other. As we enter the classroom I am struck by the smell of sweat and hard work. The atmosphere is jovial. It must have been a successful rehearsal. Sitting at the back of the classroom are the nine dancers in Dlala Majimboz crew. Banana is standing in the middle in a grey onesie with purple lining; an interesting choice of outfit that speaks to his uniqueness and strength of character. Petite introduces me to the crew and I am surprised at how many faces I recognise. These are all performers who have worked with Rocky except for the one young man who I did not recognise. He was new to the crew and to pantsula dance.

Petite starts off addressing the issues that they want me to help them with. They are concerned about working with Ayanda. He is picking the best dancers from the crew (the ones who are teaching the others) and not including the rest of the crew. They feel like this is unfair to the dancers who are still learning. Everyone should be involved. I am told new information about the day Rocky died. Ayanda had been away in Johannesburg over the holidays. Dlala Majimboz (including Rocky) had been working hard on new routines for 'Pantsula van Tuka Af'. The day Ayanda returned, he and Rocky were walking together to a Dlala Majimboz rehearsal. Rocky had wanted to surprise Ayanda with the new routines for the play. He had not told him of the plan to include all the dancers in Dlala Majimboz who had been working over the holidays. It was on the way to this rehearsal that Rocky was stabbed to death.

Now that they are planning a tour of the production around the Eastern Cape, the Dlala Majimboz crew wants to perform the routines they were practising for the show with Rocky. They say that Ayanda only cares about himself and making money. Having spoken to Ayanda I know that this show is a way for him to earn money for the crew; to have some disposable income to help with costumes and paying dancers. The younger crew wants to dance for the exposure and the recognition. They are not concerned with money and say as much. They say that as long as they can get costumes (and even that is not too important) they do not have to get paid for the show. All they want is that Dlala Majimboz be recognised on the poster as creators of the routines. They said that the poster can say Via Kasi Movers featuring Dlala

Majimboz or they can come up with a new name that includes everyone (like Grahamstown Pantsula, for example)

At the heart of the conflict between the two crews is the issue of money and recognition. Nondlwana wanted to take the show on tour in order to earn money for himself and the dancers. Having much experience in performance and touring shows through his work with the theatre company 'UBOM!', he wanted the show to provide a form of income for Via Kasi Movers so he could continue creating shows. The younger dancers, most of whom are still at school, are more concerned with gaining recognition within the industry in the hope that they will have more gigs resulting from the exposure. They do not have the kinds of responsibilities that older dancers like Ayanda have, since they are still at school and thus mostly supported by their parents.

Grahamstown provides its own challenges, and opportunities for performing are not as available as in Johannesburg. However, the sheer number of pantsula dance crews in Gauteng means that competition for performance opportunities is rife and many individuals have to find alternative forms of income to sustain themselves and their passion for the dance form. In *African Cypher*, Sithembiso 'Mada' Moloi, who is a part of the crew, 'Shakers and Movers', talks about how he started selling chickens in Soweto. He uses the business to generate an income so that he can dedicate the rest of his time and effort to dancing (Little 2012). Steven Faleni owns a marquee business to generate income when *Via Katlehong* is not performing. He saw a demand for well-priced marquee rentals when he hired marquees for his own wedding (Faleni 2015).

Via Katlehong is known for their theatre shows. The move away from dancing in the street[34], to dancing on stage necessitated a shift in how Steven and the other performers in 'Via Katlehong' represent themselves. However, other performers of pantsula dance have constructed their careers out of different ways of representing *isipantsula* culture. Faleni jokingly explained, once, that Sicelo Xaba is a dancer who represents *isipantsula* culture in everything that he does:

[34] Faleni has explained to me before how some of the older members of Via Katlehong, the current directors, used to dance on street corners after school, before they were picked up by the then leader of Via Katlehong, David Mahlaba.

> *When you see Sicelo, Sicelo eats pantsula, he drinks pantsula, he sleeps pantsula. I'm telling you, I swear, maybe Sicelo in his house has got a blanket of pantsula.* (Faleni 2015)

Sicelo Xaba has been a pantsula dancer for over thirty years. He joined the crew 'Red For Danger' and became the leader of the crew some years later. His image and marketability comes from his dedication to the history of pantsula dance. Xaba, along with Chris Saunders and Daniela Goeller, is writing a book about the history of pantsula dance. Xaba's belief in the importance of the history and the culture is what differentiates him from the other directors who try to push the boundaries of pantsula dance into the mainstream. Xaba is an advocate for *isipantsula* culture and dance and speaks about pantsula dance at functions like FADA's 'encounters' held in October 2015, for instance[35]. While the other directors are fixated on innovation in the form, Xaba deems himself the champion for the history and culture of the form. Both are important when so little is known of the dance form outside pantsula dance circles.

The difference in expression and professionalism in pantsula dance as articulated by Faleni and Xaba shows the variety in the ways pantsula dancers create professional opportunities for themselves. Sello 'Zilo' Modiga is the director of 'Real Actions Pantsula' and the entertainment company 'Zilo's Entertainment' and has managed to construct his businesses around pantsula dance and other forms of entertainment. He is another example of how someone can construct a career in the performance of pantsula dance through a particular representation of 'the township'. Modiga situates himself and his crew deliberately in 'the streets' of the township of Orange Farm as a way of taking advantage of the newly economised aesthetic of 'the township' life experience.

4.3 The Businessman: Sello Modiga

I first met Sello Modiga in January of 2015 at Eyethu Mall in Orange Farm. He was the first contact I made in Johannesburg. If one searches 'pantsula dance' on the internet where he and his crew feature prominently his number is quite easily found. When browsing on Google for leads on 'pantsula dance' Modiga's name appeared on the first page. The

[35] In October 2015, I worked at, and participated in, this experimental 'conference' at the University of Johannesburg (UJ) Faculty of Art, Design and Architecture's (FADA), based on an exhibition called 'Hypersampling Identities: Jozi Styles'.

characteristic orange and yellow costumes of the Real Actions Pantsula crew are the dominating images on media portrayals of pantsula dancers. This is a strategic success on Modiga's part. He told me in one of our meetings that he asks any person that he works with to upload videos and pictures. He wants Real Actions to be the first association people make with pantsula dance. Sello Modiga is a businessman. He is also a choreographer and an emcee as well as being a dancer. He owns and manages two companies, 'Zilo's Entertainment' and Real Actions Pantsula. He is also one of the directors of Impilo Mapantsula.

Modiga has been doing pantsula for a long time. He is thirty-six years old and has had to learn to market himself in a particular way in order to earn money from what he loves. Without being overt his clothing choices are often indicative of his choice of career. His overalls made of rolled plastic bags combined with orange All-Stars and an orange *spotie* comes to mind (see figure 6 on page 92). He told me that passion can only go so far, as one has to have an image and a set of standards if one wants to go far in the business of dance. Like Via Katlehong, he believes that in order to market oneself as a dancer one must know how to dance many different styles (Modiga 2016). However, Modiga (*ibid.*) no longer considers himself a dancer:

> *I'm not a dancer anymore; I'm a dance teacher, I'm a choreographer, via pantsula. But then if you say Sello can you dance? I can dance but I will never dance as much as these young ones now.*

Modiga has worked extremely hard to achieve the level of success he enjoys today. In an informal interview with him in January 2016, where we sat together and shared some *pap* (stiffly cooked maize porridge) and livers in a restaurant in Orange Farm, he explained to me how he made the conscious decision not to go to university and decided instead to pursue a career in dancing. Everything he has learnt about owning and managing a business has been through the 'trial and error' of experience.

Modiga started his career as a dancer, and although he says his background is in pantsula dance, he made it clear to classify himself as a dancer in order to "break the categories" of dance and to perform whatever was required of him. He told me that going overseas and

participating in workshops helped him to learn other dance styles. This is an idea he adopted and maintains for the dancers in 'Real Actions':

> *When I go overseas, I've learnt about hip-hop, I've learnt about house dance, I've learnt about this. That's why Real Actions, most of the time, it's on top of everything. Why? It's because of what they do: They travel a lot and while they are travelling, they take classes, they take workshops, somewhere else with something different, not pantsula. So when they come to South Africa they mix those things into one thing. And then they make it in their own way but it must look like the same footwork, same speed, same thing, but mixing it all in one. Then it becomes a different thing when you see it. So it looks like "aw this pantsula it's something else" but then, it's still pantsula.* (Modiga 2016)

The experience gained overseas motivated Modiga to construct a new business venture that enables dancers from overseas to learn pantsula dance. For R5000, Modiga offers two-week long intensive courses in pantsula dance to 'street' dancers from Sweden. This venture became possible after a series of workshops in Sweden. Along with this initiative, dancers from overseas experience township life. He takes them out to clubs on the weekends so they can see the difference between South African clubs in Orange Farm and clubs overseas. He introduces them to local food, and they often stay at his house to fully immerse themselves in township life (Modiga 2016).

Other business ventures that Modiga has created include his entertainment company, 'Zilo's Entertainment', which offers entertainment for corporate events and he is often called upon to emcee events with Thomas Motsapi in their emceeing collective, 2Man2. One event, described below, in which I witnessed the emceeing prowess of 2Man2 was the Just Stand Up And Dance battle held in the DH Williams hall in Katlehong, on 19th September 2015 (see figure 6 below).

Figure 6: Sello Modiga (right) and Thomas Motsapi (left) emceeing as the 2Man2 duo at the Just Stand Up and Dance Battle in Katlehong

The competitive nature of the dance form, expressed through battles, may have its roots in the showdown of dance performed in 'the streets' of the townships. 'Battles' are a commonplace occurrence in many street dance styles. Guzman-Sanchez (2012) describes many battles that took place throughout the evolution of the American urban dance styles now falling under the name of 'hip-hop' dance. Competitions in traditional dance styles were also commonplace on the mining compounds in South Africa.

'Battles' provide a way for dancers and crews to earn money and become recognised by the public. Real Actions has garnered a reputation similar to the other major crews in Gauteng; Via Katlehong, Ezomdabu, Via Volcano, Red For Danger and Real Actions, are among the top crews that operate as businesses. The directors of these crews have managed to market themselves in a particular way that is appealing to an international crowd, in particular. They are the crews that have found success and then in that success, they want to give back to the community and help young dancers achieve similar success. One no longer finds these crews battling in a competition, unless it is between each other and for fun. Real Actions will never be in a 'real' battle unless it is an international battle. Sello has to keep up the reputation of his crew so that he can continue with his business. He will be called to a battle to emcee, or oversee the battle to ensure it is conducted properly. When he was younger he participated in battles but the crew has reached a level where they can no

longer compete if they want to continue to be respected by the pantsula community. 'Via Katlehong' organised the 'Just Stand Up and Dance' Battle as a way to give back to the community.

4.4 The Battle: Just Stand Up And Dance

The competition was organised by Via Katlehong to give young dancers and crews an opportunity to perform, gain a reputation and win money. The prizes for the group section of the competition included R20 000 for first prize, R10 000 second prize and R5000 for third prize. The winner of the solo section won a tour with Via Katlehong to France in December 2015 with their production *Via Sophiatown* in addition to a voucher for an outfit. Second prize for the solo competition was R2000. I had met Via Katlehong the week before the event while they were in the midst of preparations.

> *The event started three hours later than stated on the poster but this is not unusual and did nothing to dampen the jovial energy of the crowd. We jostled inside after the doors were opened, walked past the seating to reveal a large stand set up in front of the stage. The stand was reminiscent of a boxing ring without ropes. At the top of the cube was a ring of colourful lights. The actual stage in the hall was a VIP area. The Red Bull DJ booth was set up on the left and the stage was made to look like a lounge area, with comfortable seating and coffee tables where guests could recline with their Red Bull drinks. The green seats opposite the stage were gradually filling up. I sat in the middle in the second row, close to the action. There were also seats to the side of the stand (which will henceforth be referred to as the stage since it is where the action took place) which were occupied by members of the audience on the left and performers on the right. The set up gave one the feeling of a rectangular arena (see figure 7 below).*

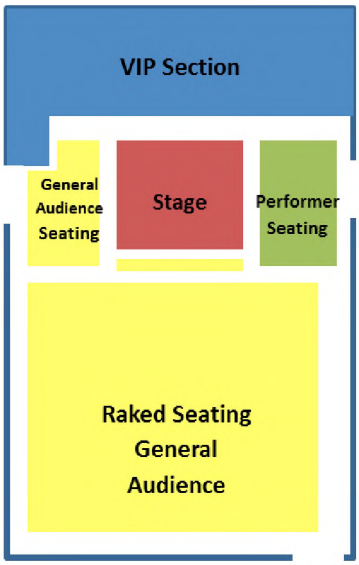

Figure 7: Illustration of DH Williams Hall set up for the Just Stand Up and Dance battle in Katlehong, 2015.

Turning my head to look at the fully occupied seats many excited children's faces were visible. The audience seemed to comprise mostly children and their mothers. The smell of KFC and Nik-Naks flavoured with fruit chutney was wafting through the air as crinkling packets and the fizz of cold drink bottles added to the cacophony of excited chatter and pumping beats from the DJ's booth. Sello Modiga and Thomas Motsapi walked on stage. Sello was wearing short overalls that seemed to be made of plastic packets accompanied by an orange Dickies spotie and orange All-Stars. Thomas is wearing red pants, a 'Just Stand Up and Dance' t-shirt and a yellow spotie. They were the emcees for the day and they call themselves 2Man2. They are both accomplished pantsula dancers and entertainers and their energy is matched by the audience's excitement.

We were taught the 'Just Stand Up and Dance' move. It consisted of hands shaking alternatively to the right and then to the left in a rhythm explained as "rabadabada" on either side. Then there was a jump in and out three times by criss-crossing the feet. The rhythm was described as "kwa-kwa-kwa". If one can imagine the rhythm through these sounds it sounds like: rabadabada (hands shaking to the right)– rabadabada (hands shaking to the left)– kwa-kwa-kwa (jumping while criss-crossing feet) repeated several times.

While more delays took place the DJ played popular songs (one I recognised as Beatenberg's 'Rafael'). The children responded with screams of delight and sang along as the more popular songs were played. The screams reminded me of being in a school assembly where there was a lot of fun. Despite the noise, many young children managed to sleep through it. One young boy sat on his mother's lap fast asleep with his head on her bosom. One young boy obviously enjoyed the music as he danced along frantically. His feet wide apart as he gyrated his hips and shook his arms.

After 2Man2 entertained the crowd, Buru from Via Katlehong appeared on stage and shouted "hola". The audience responded with a "heita". He repeated this several times and then launched into the history of Via Katlehong and gave thanks to the sponsors of the event. This being much less entertaining the attention of the audience started slipping as Sello and Thomas had to ask the audience to be quiet. Buru continued to talk about how Via Katlehong had been given many great opportunities and so it is now their responsibility to promote the arts and culture. This is why they had created this event. They hope to give other talented dancers and crews the opportunities they had when they were getting started. This sentiment was a reminder for me of the previous week where they were discussing the meaning of this event at the meeting. They wanted all the dancers to be given opportunities. Not only the winners, but all the participants.

Before the introductions of the various crews began, 2Man2 asked the audience, 'who can dance', and brought two eager young children on to the stage. They made a battle between a young girl and a young boy. The girl started and danced confidently, attempting to intimidate the young boy. When it was his turn, he broke out into pantsula much to the delight of the entire audience[36]*. A round was repeated. Then came the chance for the audience to use the IN/OUT cards we were given. On the purple side is a large 'IN' in white writing and a happy emoji pulling a 'thumbs up'. On the other red side is a large 'OUT' and a sad/bored emoji (see Figure 8 below). 2Man2 now point to either young dancer and we were made to vote whether they were IN or OUT. The boy was IN by quite a large margin with the majority of the*

[36] Here is a link to a video of this taking place: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fybGh64EETs

audience giving him the thumbs up. 2Man2 told the audience that young children can come to the Katlehong Arts Centre and improve their skills.

Figure 8: Both sides of the 'In' and 'Out' card at the Just Stand Up and Dance battle in Katlehong, 2015

Then the battle began! They started with the group section. The crews had a short introduction of a one minute routine. The crews that stood out from the beginning were a crew called 'Take Care Nation' made up of five young boys. The response of the audience to them reminded me of screaming hordes of fans following boy bands. They are obviously a well-known and popular crew. At that point, I could only guess that they were from Katlehong. They were very well put together and had great formations. There were eleven crews over all. The outfits they wore were quite interesting as a lot of it was full Scotch or overalls.

The next category was the Solos. There were five entries. Despite this being a competition where all dance styles were welcome only one man out of the soloists and crews was not a pantsula dancer. His style fell under a hip-hop dance style called freestyle. Judging by his clothing it was obvious that he was not a pantsula dancer. He wore a large T-Shirt with the American flag on it and baggy black pants. He won the solo competition while 'Take Care Nation' won the group entry.

The winner of the solo competition was Angelo Mokenenyane whom I later met during the *Via Sophiatown* rehearsals, where he had won the opportunity to perform with 'Via Katlehong' in France.

It seems to me now, in hindsight, that my description of the event includes only a short description of the actual 'battle'. In what is probably not desired while conducting fieldwork, I left for home before the actual battle began and the winners were announced. The

ceremonial events before the battle took up much of the initial time of the event. What I had felt to be of much importance was the enacting of the event and less the battle itself. I can only infer what that means for the role of dance in communities where much of the ceremony is handed to the sponsors of the events and to the entertainment of the community who were the majority in the crowd.

Many of the dancers spend a lot of money to reach these competitions, as they come from different township areas and public transport to and from these areas costs money. It seems to me that these battles are important for young pantsula dancers as an opportunity to gain exposure and potentially win money. For the organisers of the event, it is an opportunity to gain support for street dance styles by having local government officials of the Arts and Culture department as 'VIP' guests, and to have the community in which they are based support the dance. An example of this is when Mohlabane and Modiga encouraged parents to bring their children to the Katlehong Performing Arts Centre, where they can learn to dance.

Another competition I attended was organised by the 'Red For Danger' crew in November 2015 in Mohlakeng Ramosa Hall. This pantsula dance competition was a part of celebrating Red For Danger's thirtieth anniversary. For an hour before the competition began, a lot of ceremony was enacted to thank the local government for their support and more particularly, in celebrating Red For Danger's legacy. A touching moment was also created where families of pantsula dancers who have died were acknowledged. This competition was specifically focused on pantsula dance and the crowd was decidedly older than at the battle in Katlehong. Most of the children present were from families of pantsula dancers, a few children were the family of Prince Mofokeng and were wearing commemorative t-shirts to remember his contribution to pantsula dance after he died of cancer in 2015.

In the competition there were a variety of crews performing. 2man2 were once again the emcees of the event. The competition had started much later than expected due to the late arrival of the crews who were not from Mohlakeng. Mohlakeng, located in Randfontein, is far from the city of Johannesburg. It took me an hour to reach there. It would have undoubtedly cost a lot of money for crews from far to reach Mohlakeng, if they were relying on public transport. My notes from watching approximately eight crews perform, was on

how their performances "show how different pantsula can be in so many different crews". There was also a moment where soloists competed but this was not a part of the main competition. The prizes for the competition were as follows: third prize R3000, second prize R5000 and first prize R10000.

Similar to the Just Stand Up and Dance Battle, for the dancers the competition provided a way for them to show what they can do and earn money, whereas as a community event, the competition had much larger significance. This event was a way to celebrate the positive impact of pantsula dance on the community. For the individual dancers and crews, battles and competitions are an important component to honing their craft and meeting other dancers, as well as potentially earning money. The televised competition, 'Stumbo Stomp amaPantsula', offers money to crews if they win a battle against another crew. 'Stumbo Stomp' is described as "South Africa's richest pantsula talent dance show and it is about watching incredible pantsula dancers perform amazing routines. Celebrating the talent of real pantsulas and promoting the art of pantsula dancing" (SABC 1 n.d.) Bongani Mthombeni won the opportunity to perform in Via Katlehong's *Via Sophiatown* through competing in Stumbo Stomp. Via Katlehong is involved in the competition as Vusi Mdoyi is the choreographer in the show and Buru Mohlabane is a judge. Bongani did not win when he competed but after many people on social media objected to his loss, Via Katlehong decided to give him the opportunity to tour with them in the show.

4.5 'Car'versations with Bongani

I had a few opportunities to acquaint myself with Bongani through the rehearsal process of Via Sophiatown. Bongani lives in Soweto. In order to return home from Katlehong he could take a taxi from the city centre. Since I would drive past the city centre to my home, I would drop him off after rehearsals.

Figure 9: Intellectuals Crew performing at the opening for an exhibition in their characteristic 'uniform'. Teboho Diphehlo (left), Bongani Mthombeni (middle) and Leballo 'Lee' Lenela (right).

Bongani is from 'Intellectuals', a pantsula dance crew from Soweto. The crew consists of only three members, Teboho Diphehlo, Leballo 'Lee' Lenela and Bongani (See Figure 9 above). This is unusually small for a pantsula dance crew which would usually have at least four or five members. Each of the dancers is an accomplished soloist and their routines usually have some elements of soloing rather than the usual group formations. They have added a lot of acrobatics and flips to their routines for competitions so that they can 'be different'.

I was fortunate to witness one of their acrobatic routines at the JSUAD battle. The audience responded well to their antics and it had been particularly entertaining and stood out among the many competing crews. Teboho had also competed in the solo battle at the competition. Their characteristic red and green spotty, white golf shirt with a red breast pocket, red pants and red All-Stars further characterised their individuality.

Intellectuals mostly perform in competitions to earn money. Bongani told me this was because it is difficult to get jobs performing in corporate gigs but that a lot of dancers are intimidated by the competitions. He added that the people who are trained in contemporary dance in South Africa necessarily learn all the styles, including pantsula. Often these kinds of dancers will be chosen for a pantsula 'gig' (usually a corporate performance) despite the fact that they are not trained in 'real' pantsula.

In a discussion about competitions and battles, Bongani shared with me the difficulty of pantsula dance competing against other dance styles. Competitions like the Red Bull Beat Battle and Step Up or Step Out are examples of these kinds of competitions. When pantsula dancers compete it is well known that they hardly ever win. This is because if one sees a lot of pantsula routines they can be repetitive and thus become less interesting. 'Intellectuals' necessarily add the flips and acrobatics in competitions because they want to be different and entertaining. There are some gigs that require 'straight pantsula' and then, Bongani told me, that is about strict footwork (adhering to the basic steps) and 'running' (the high energy transitions between steps) but for most competitions it needs to be different. He says that in battles a pantsula dancer should learn a bit of b-boying so that when he/she battles against a b-boy then he/she can do the competitor's dance style as well as pantsula. The assumption is that most b-boys would not be able to perform pantsula dance.

I asked Bongani how one can make pantsula dance more exciting. He believes that a crew should always come up with new ideas that break the mould of what one expects from pantsula dance. He talks about 'Fire' as the best pantsula crew when it comes to innovation. He says that they are great at coming up with concepts of which no one else would think. Fire competed in 'Red Bull Beat Battle' in 2014 and 2015 where they performed routines as zombies and as chefs. To Bongani, these are innovative concepts for routines. The concept of a routine is very important and can influence how the routine takes shape as well as how the performers dance. The concept is the story of the routine which is a very important feature of the routines of pantsula dance groups. As zombies, Fire added a different dimension to the more 'traditional' straight-backed, smiling pantsula dancer. Their grimaces and powdered faces made the moves look more menacing[37].

Bongani believes that the clothes of pantsula can be predictable and this relates to why people tend to find it boring. There are usually the same kinds of costumes; the *scotcho* shirts, Dickies pants, *spoties* hats and All-Stars. In a session at a series of discussions by the University of Johannesburg (UJ) Faculty of Art, Design and Architecture's (FADA) exhibition called 'Hypersampling Identities: Jozi Styles' in October 2015, Sicelo Xaba spoke about how pantsula dancers should develop their own shoes, music and clothing brands. In our

[37] For a video of this routine in a battle against Psyko Souljahs in the 2014 Red Bull Beat Battle, see link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TqmKZmHfuIg

meeting, Modiga told me that brands such as Dickies and All-Stars sponsor big crews like Via Katlehong and Via Volcano. He added that while he is wearing a Dickies shirt, it makes people think that the brand "belongs to the pantsulas" even though it is "American wear" (Modiga 2016).

The concept of branding and a shift in performance indicates that pantsula is currently in a stage of renewal where the crux of the change is how to adapt the performance of pantsula while keeping the roots that have influenced 'straight pantsula'. The choice of clothing, and in particular 'American wear', has been explained as a politicised rejection of the traditional ideologies imposed on black people during apartheid. The clothing was always about creating a sense of ownership of oneself and how one is perceived, a particularly important notion when considering the individualised distortion of the self that apartheid created. Xaba's assertion of pantsula dancers developing their own brands highlights a shift in the need to establish oneself and have a sense of ownership over the craft they have created and established. This issue is in light of the increase of visibility of pantsula dance in the mainstream media. A major component of the importance of an organisation like Impilo Mapantsula, is how pantsula dancers maintain ownership of the form in all its complexities and forms of expression. Guzman-Sanchez's (2012, 146) engagement of the issue of the naming of hip-hop as a marketing tool in the 1980s, is a harbinger for the negative potential in the commodification of pantsula dance. 'Hip-hop' became a catch-all term to describe the variety of artistic expressive forms that had developed in the South Bronx including "B-Boying, Double Dutch [Jump Rope], Graffiti Writing, Deejaying, and MCing [rapping]" (Guzman-Sanchez 2012, 141). This term and consequent media interest in the artistic forms led to a worldwide interest in the form, denying its innovators and its 'roots' in the process. The need for Guzman-Sanchez to write his book is the consequence of this very process of commodification and transition from the outside, as in the township, to the centre, as in the media and other cultural manifestations of the city.

Indigenous Dance Academy (IDA), a sbujwa crew, relates the problem of disinterest in South African dance forms in South Africa; "We find it disappointing that we're respected more by people overseas than in our own country. Sbujwa and pantsula are only big in the townships. In urban areas all you get is hip hop, ballet and contemporary. If we can stick to

our roots, whilst elevating sbujwa to a wider audience, we'll have done our jobs" (IDA, in Scher 2013).

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter has dealt with issues in pantsula dance and *isipantsula* culture based mostly on the conversations and observations of some of my research experiences. The complexity of pantsula dance, and the various ways it can be expressed, is made more complex by the dance form's adaptability to suit the needs of practitioners and pressure from external forces. As was indicated at the beginning of this chapter, dance, especially dance based on expressions of urban life, develops from change and innovation. Pantsula dance is an expressive form based on the experiences of township residents. The variety in individual lived experiences as well as the variety in township spaces means that a unified understanding of this complex form is a daunting if not impossible task. Pantsula dance is a varied and complex dance form that aims to 'stick to its roots' while adapting to 'elevate' the form in mainstream society.

Steven Faleni's words are particularly poignant in understanding the delicate role in which pantsula dance is placed in light of its increasing popularity in mainstream media:

> *We don't know who owns pantsula. Our belief is that each and every township has got its own pantsula and each and every township has their own way to tell their culture and the history of pantsula. Pantsula is not owned by Via Katlehong or Red For Danger but pantsula is owned by each and every child who lives in the township, who makes a living out of the survival of the pantsula culture. That is my belief on pantsula. (Faleni and Feni 2015)*

In the time of change and increasing popularity of the form, what must continue to remain important is the consideration of the people who do pantsula because they love it with all their hearts; who spend every day dedicating their bodies and their time to pantsula dance. For as Faleni so rightly points out, they are the people who ensure its survival.

Chapter 5
A Complex and Varied Celebration

His right arm undulates and extends into the large space. His All-Stars glide across the wood as he keeps his eyes closed, remembering his friend. He starts jerking his knees and then his shoulders, his dreadlocks bouncing along, and manipulating his feet, first onto his toes and then placing his heels down fast. He flows between flexing and extending, undulating and rotating his long limbs while he dances out his pain.

—

He sits with the air of a king in his domain. His conversation with me is often interrupted with a 'Heita!' to a friend; it seems as if everyone who walks by the restaurant knows him. His energy is unparalleled; when he walks, it's as if he is bouncing, or dancing.

—

It's her turn to solo, she jumps into the performance space and her fiery red pants flash with the flexion of her legs and bend of the knees.

—

They wait for the break in the music, he claps rapidly '1-2, 3-4' and they begin! Feet flying and stamping in quick succession. Every beat of the music produces a new movement of the head, hands, arms, legs and feet. The group seamlessly move between each other, first in a line and then in a triangle, their formations are precise and use the concrete rehearsal area to full effect.

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In my introductory chapter I began with a description of how I imagined a prototypical pantsula dancer, dancing in a township street. I stated that the goal of my thesis was to understand how pantsula dancers imagine 'the township' and how their conception of 'the township' is embodied through the performance of pantsula dance. The four descriptions above are imagined moments of memory based on some of my experiences during my research: Brief moments of witnessing Ayanda dancing at Rocky's memorial, Sello Modiga walking around Orange Farm, Lee Lenela performing alongside Intellectuals and Dlala Majimboz practising their routines. These descriptions along with my initial description at the beginning of this thesis are some examples of how pantsula dancers perform in a variety of contexts. The above descriptions attempt to show that there are multiple ways in which pantsula dance and the *isipantsula* 'way of life' can be performed. 'The township', being an abstract notion of place important to pantsula dance, is expressed differently by every

individual dancer. Every dancer will imagine 'the township' differently and perform their 'township imaginary' in their own way. It is in the variation of performance of 'the township', a complex notion in itself, where one can come to understand pantsula dance as a diverse and multifaceted dance form.

My thesis has focused on pantsula dance as a performance of 'the township'. The defining questions following from this focus were in establishing what is 'the township', pantsula dance and 'performance'? My aim was to understand how pantsula dancers conceive 'the township' space, how this conception of 'the township' space is performed and how this performance reinforces or shifts other conceptions of 'the township'.

In this concluding chapter I shall examine how I have answered to these inquiries in the previous chapters. It is my hope that what I have brought forth through this presentation of my research can provide an interesting way of understanding the important concepts of my focus. The beauty of the complexity of these notions is that there is a multitude of ways in which they can be comprehended. Further research into pantsula dance as well as the abstract notion of 'the township' and the performance of this notion in other artistic forms is a necessity. There are multiple aspects to pantsula dance and *isipantsula* 'culture' I have not addressed in my research; the relationship of pantsula dance and music, gender relations in pantsula dance and *isipantsula,* and notions of masculinity, as well as the performance of pantsula dance throughout South Africa and other urban centres worldwide, are some examples of areas where further research can take place.

5.1 'The Township', Pantsula Dance and Performance

While my thesis has attempted to examine pantsula dance as a performance of the township, these notions are important to comprehend the complexity of their definitions. I will discuss how the research presented in my thesis has attempted to define these notions.

5.1.1 The Township

The construction of townships in South Africa has a bleak history. Much of South Africa's recent past centres around finding ways to control and separate people according to their 'race'. 'Black' people were especially disadvantaged to remain a cheap source of labour for growing industries, usually in the hands of 'white' ownership. Housing was an effective way to maintain control of people's movements as well as affect their 'sense of self'. This was

achieved by creating small, uniform houses in areas separate from 'white' suburbs and cities, easily contained and accessible to the army and police. Where slumyards and freehold areas were created, where people had more relative freedom of movement and people of all 'races' were less segregated, the government found ways to destroy them and forcibly remove people to township areas designated for their racial category.

Resistance to the oppressive experiences of life in the townships was generated in many different ways. Where government sought to oppress black people in as many aspects of their lives as possible, people found ways to resist it; modifying the uniform houses, running *spaza* shops, creating and attending *shebeens* and catching illegal minibus taxis, were some ways people counteracted the oppressive assault on their mobility and social and economic freedom.

Shebeens were spaces where creative, artistic forms in music and dance were created and disseminated. *Marabi* was a music and dance form created in *shebeens,* where copious amounts of alcohol were consumed in weekend-long parties. *Marabi* was an artistic form created as a celebration of a distinctly urban lifestyle. Artistic forms like *marabi,* and the *shebeen* parties they were found in, became embodied in the collective memory of the freehold suburb, Sophiatown.

Through the dissemination of *Drum* magazine and other literary sources, an imagined Sophiatown became the symbol of artistic and social resistance towards apartheid legislation. Gangsters became an important symbol in this 'Sophiatown Imaginary'. Their flashy clothing, expensive cars, criminal dealings and lifestyle born of city life were symbolically written into a memory, characterised by a disregard for all that was imposed on them by the dominant, oppressive society. After the destruction of Sophiatown, the 'Imaginary' continued, packaged into the 'spirit' of Sophiatown, and transported with the people who were forced to move to assigned township areas.

After the end of the era of apartheid legislation, townships are spaces still mostly occupied by black people. In Johannesburg there are numerous township areas surrounding the city and previously 'white' suburbs, with the exception of Alexandra, which lies between some of the wealthiest suburbs in Johannesburg. My research in Johannesburg led me to Katlehong, Orange Farm, Soweto and Mohlakeng, each vastly different areas, yet still areas

known as townships. 'The township', in post-apartheid South Africa, remains a term that characterises these historically separated areas. The history of oppression and resistance lingers in people's lived experiences and 'sense of place'.

Given that every individual may have multiple conceptions of one place, there are multiple imaginings of 'the township' as an abstract notion of place, which always carries these historical connotations. Different imaginings from people who live outside of townships is usually informed by media representations or based on other people's experiences. These 'outsider' imaginings usually see 'the township' as places of poverty, underdevelopment and violence, continuing the legacy the apartheid government constructed in keeping a perception of black people as pre-modern and violent. People who live within township areas have different conceptions of 'the township' space. This conception is informed by the lived experience of a particular area as well as a 'sense of place' affected by multiple notions of the township space in which they live, influenced by individual and collective memories of experiences and media representations. This leads to the idea that 'the township' is a complex phenomenon of space and place, specific to South Africa.

5.1.2 Pantsula Dance

Pantsula dance is a dance form born from the lived experience of certain township residents. It is situated in the history of resistance art forms, born among expressive youth defining themselves in opposition to the dominant conceptions of black people as a source of cheap labour. The dance form is characterised by fast-paced, energetic movements, made with a straight back and fast footwork. It is performed either as a solo or in groups. Group routines consist of uniform movements performed mostly in formations. Pantsula dance routines are usually narrative based, where the narrative is often based on lived experiences of life in the townships. Pantsula dancers are usually organised into crews. Crews have a distinct name and often a 'uniform' which is distinctive clothing worn in performances. The 'uniform' is distinctive of clothing worn in the *isipantsula* 'culture'.

The *isipantsula* 'culture' or 'way of life' is a development from the 'clevers' or *tsotsis,* and then from the 1970s, the *mapantsula* subcultural styles in Johannesburg. The clothing is especially indicative of 'the township', distinguished by Dickies pants or chinos, all-Star shoes, a *spotie* hat and a neat long-sleeve or golf shirt. The people who identified within the

mapantsula subcultural styles, influenced by the Sopthiatown gangster, walked, talked and dressed in a particular way which has influenced the *isipantsula* 'way of life'. The 'core moves' in pantsula dance are influenced by the life experience of the *mapantsula;* 'gambling dice', *isiparapara* and *kwraips* embody the life experience of these township residents.

Although influenced by and celebrating the *mapantsula* subcultural style, the isipantsula 'way of life' is more often a dedication to the dance form which is the embodiment of these historical lifestyles. Most pantsula dance crews who perform in a professional capacity rehearse nearly every day and are dedicated to keeping their bodies fit and in shape. For professional reasons the expression of the *isipantsula* 'culture' is kept for performances of pantsula dance. Opportunities for performance of pantsula dance are often in theatre productions, music videos, battles and competitive events, in live performances or on television.

5.1.3 Performance

The concept of performance has not been as explicitly discussed in my thesis as 'the township' or pantsula dance; the notion being taken for granted as its name suggests, as an outward presentation of particular ideas, or aspects to oneself. There are many ways in which performances are taking place through pantsula dance and the *isipantsula* 'way of life'. It is the concept of a performance of 'the township' that takes place through pantsula dance, discussed at the end of Chapter 2, which has been the basis of my thesis, and my understanding of the notion of performance. Pantsula dance might be performed on television, on a stage or in a film, in a community hall, or a grand theatre in France, or in the streets. *Shebeens*, gambling, gangsters, Sophiatown, taxis and friendship are some elements of township life that are depicted in pantsula dance performance, in the core steps, in the inherent hybridity of the movements, in the clothing, in the narratives of routines. While these elements are a reality of township life, in their performance they are reinforced and celebrated by pantsula dancers. This works to define a particular imagining, within all its complexity of constitutive elements, of 'the township'.

5.2 Three Inquiries

The above discussion serves to answer how pantsula dance is a performance of the township by examining the three constitutive elements of the focus, namely, pantsula

dance, 'the township' and performance. Pantsula dancers conceive 'the township' in a multitude of ways. Of particular importance is the specific area a dancer or crew may reside. This area, with its own part in South African history, informs the dancers' depictions of life within that area. However, above this, there is the notion of 'the township', as an abstract place that constitutes all the areas created as townships during apartheid. These areas have aspects in common, due to their being spaces of similar life experiences of oppression and resistance, where similar forms created and disseminated among these areas constitutes the form as 'a township thing'. Pantsula dancers use the collective experience and notion of the township, along with their own experience of the area in which they reside, and present certain aspects of these experiences to themselves and to others. This presentation finds itself in the way they dress in a performance of pantsula dance, in the movements that are chosen for a specific routine, in a story a series of movements tries to tell a watching audience, and in many other aspects of representation. To audiences from township spaces and to audiences outside of township spaces, these representations depict an aspect of township life that either coincides with an already perceived notion of township life, or break conceptions of 'the township'. All the while, the almost always joyful and energetic movements, tells these stories, to entertain and to educate, and in some sense, heal the wounds of a broken past.

To answer to my inquiries more directly, there are a variety of ways in which pantsula dancers conceive of or imagine 'the township'. Through a collectively and individually constructed 'sense of place' of 'the township', which has been informed by historical, personal and artistic resistance, pantsula dancers construct a 'township imaginary'. This 'township imaginary' is performed in a variety of contexts; on theatrical and competitive stages, in the streets in the city and in township areas, in music videos and films and in community halls, in South Africa and abroad. The performance is an outward and an internal one for different dancers and is informed by individual beliefs, often depending on professional interests. Some dancers who perform in theatres will choose not to dress in the 'traditional' pantsula clothing, whereas some dancers have built an image on promoting the *isipantsula* 'way of life' and will wear the clothing as a personal and professional choice. The choice of clothing, the 'uniform' of professional performances, presents the 'township imaginary' in that it is built from historical subcultural styles reminiscent of the Sophiatown

gangsters, the 'clevers', *tsotsis* and the *mapantsula* of the 1970s. The dance moves of pantsula represent this history in the stories behind the core moves, as well as the history of social forms developed in Johannesburg, as a part of the consequences of urbanisation and hybridisation. There are many ways in which 'the township imaginary' is thus performed, in a wide variety of contexts, by different individuals through the performance of pantsula dance.

The third inquiry is concerned with how the varied performances of the 'township imaginary' reinforces or shifts other conceptions of 'the township'. The 'Sophiatown Imaginary' discussed in Chapter 3 is an analogical example of how I believe this third inquiry can be examined. The 'Sophiatown Imaginary' operates as a collective, imagined construction of a 'sense of place' of Sophiatown, created initially by *Drum* magazine and the journalists that worked for it. These journalists lived the lifestyle they had constructed as their 'sense of place' and perpetuated their notion of Sophiatown through the everyday performance of their lifestyle and the stories they told about it through *Drum.* The stories that followed through autobiographies and theatrical representations have served to reinforce this understanding of Sophiatown life. Pantsula dancers hold to a particular imagining of life in a township, one that is reinforced by historical, subcultural styles and creative, resistance art forms. In performing this imagining through a dedication to a dance form in which the imagining manifests, by telling stories and representing these stories in a variety of contexts and in a variety of ways, 'the township' is celebrated. 'The township' is then not just a space with a negative, oppressive beginning but a space in which it is worth celebrating the lives of those who have lived, and continue to live within them. For people from different backgrounds across South Africa and the rest of the world, this celebration may either serve to challenge preconceived notions of life in a township and the people who live within a township space, or it may affirm already existing notions of 'the township' and the unique place the variety of townships hold in South Africa.

I would like to end by reminding the reader of Ayanda Nondlwana's words about pantsula dance, which presents a fitting closure to this thesis:

> And there are those who are now bringing the dance and the joys, the unity in people, cause pantsula dancers, they bring all people together. Today we pantsula

dancers, we are not tsotsis or thugs. But we are doctors and our medicine is entertainment. (Perros and Brazic 2013)

Interviews

Alexandra Rockstars, 16 August 2015, intersection of William Nicol and Republic Road, Johannesburg.

Faleni, Steven, and Vuyani Feni, 05 November 2015, Katlehong Arts Centre.

Kilani, Thanduxolo, and Nceba Njadayi, November 2013, Grahamstown.

Lenela, Leballo 'Lee', 24 September 2015, Soweto.

Modiga, Sello, 25 January 2016, Orange Farm.

Mthombeni, Bongani, November 2016, In my car, Johannesburg

Via Katlehong crew members, 8 September 2015, Katlehong Arts Centre.

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Appendix A

Transcription of interview with Ayanda Nondlwana of Via Kasi Movers. Interview by Sebastian Tuinder. May 2011.

Sebastian: Alright well it's uh 24th of May 2011, I'm standing here with Ace, also known as Ayanda from 'Veeya' Kasi hey?

Ayanda: hmm mm VIA

S: Via kasi, can you tell us what via kasi means?

A: Via Kasi means, eh combination of townships. There are different areas in the townships but when we combine them all as together from Grahamstown, from Ghini, we call ourselves Via Kasi, so we wanted to bring that unity, not eh having that diverse thing, as you are staying in that area and you are staying in that area. So all of us we wanted to combine as in Grahamstown and stand for Grahamstown in pantsula dance.

S: That's really cool (laughs) Umm When did Via Kasi start? When did you guys actually start umm when did you come up with the name and the actual group?

A: okkk the name is for now, but the actual group started in 2000. Ya, year 2000, ya millennium time. Ya the group started there, and then at that time it was called Grahamstown Pantsula. So now as we were Grahamstown Pantsula and then we joined with some other guys, so we thought that we must call ehh one name that must represent all of us, so we chose this name Via Kasi, but the group yoh ehh the group started in the year 2000.

S: So it's been 10 years of pantsula. How do you found that you've progressed? like Um your dancing, I know that you are incorporating juggling, stilts. How is it progressed from just pantsula to bootsula and fire poi and all of that?

A: uuuhh we have progressed in a way that in, 2008 we were doing a production in Fringe, which was called Revel8, it was where we combine ehhh pantsula and break dance, b-boys so we combine with b-boys guys from coloured area here in Grahamstown, and then we come up with Revel8. So we wanted to see also that element of breakdance in pantsula, how does it work when they combine together? So ya I say we did progress, and now our pantsula is going further in a way that its getting even into circus now, cause we are involving a lot of circus things like poia and stilts, there are those that you just mentioned.

S: Do you incorporate the circus element because of your audience? Do you think that your audience wants to see that or is that something that you guys wanted to learn to do and then incorporate it or what was the reason for you bringing in the circus elements?

A: ehh the reason for us to bring the circus element is to also to search for another target that ehh don't know about, more about pantsula. Cause its bad to be a white man in South Africa, the only thing that you hearing is the word pantsula but you don't actually know what is pantsula dance or how it is, how fun it is or how energetic it is. So circus, we saw that circus, there is also an audience

that need to know about this pantsula, cause pantsula is not only for blacks people, it's for all of us, cause its dance and it's an element of art.

S: So then Ayanda to you specifically, personally, what do you think Pantsula is?

A: Pantsula, to me, its modern culture. It's my modern culture.

S: So it's your way of living? How long have you been dancing isipantsula?

A: yoh since I was 7. Ya, till now, cause now I'm 29 years old now but I'm still doing pantsula. So from since 7 you can count, I can't count cause I'v been doing pantsula. So by saying it's my modern culture, cause we know that all of us got different cultures and then street cultures. But this one, its modern in a way that, we live in a urban area so where there's cities, street lights, different people, so in those urban areas you find people adopting ehh styles and doing them in a way of a culture so also pantsula to us represent us as from township cause it' s the way we live in township.

S: So basically you live, breathe, sleep pantsula?

A: pantsula baa

both: pantsula, pantsula, pantsula (laughs)

A: yaa

S: umm and where did you learn? Who did you learn it from? Was it from your friends when you were young or was it maybe your father or...?

A: Ok basically I am from Joburg. You know when you from Joburg and then township also, you thandi, when you young, you go into primary, and in primary, even in your street, even in your school you must have something that you do, that you love, maybe sports, you good, they know that 'ohh that one can run, that one', 'oh that one he can draw', 'oh that one is in the choir - singer'. So also we, we liked street style so we came up with pantsula, we liked pantsula, so also that we can be recognised. Cause we wiping out the wrong impression about pantsula. Cos pantusla at first it was looked as a negative thing, becos of its history, people there in the 50s like in sophiatown, in the 50s, they were called mapantsula they were not doing dance, they were just normal people, if you checked them, you'll check them like gangsters or mafias, so they were doing wrong things. So now when the years go about, in 80s, 90s its where we, the generation of 70s, 80s, started to say no, this style of pantsula, this neat walking and then this style of walking and then this dressing up and then this waying of talk, let us take that energy, all of that energy and make it a dance. And call this dance of ours pantsula. So it's where it started. If you can remember mesipakela (sp) long time, in 80s, mesipakela she was a woman she was doing pantsula in 80s. So I'm surprised of eh women saying that 'no pantsula is for men', noo cos mesipakela was doing pantsula. So we started then and then it changed to be a dance. So now we are trying to make, ehh to show people that no this thing its a dance, its something that also prevent us from bad things, and from wrong things so that's why we stick with it.

S: Would you say that pantsula is also able to help kids from stopping violence or crime or anything, gives them something to look forward to, to um invest their energy into?

A: mm and Future. And future, cos also you see why I say yes, it does that, it did that to me. Cos I started pantsula, I was young, and then when I was growing up, I started to be a gangster, living pantsula, starting to do wrong things, you know. Ya starting to breaking up, doing drugs, all of that but I remembered and then God whispered in my ear say 'I gave you a talent, use that talent' and then I remembered when I came here in Grahamstown that no I've got a talent, so let me use that talent to rehabilitate myself. Cos I cant go to those buildings and those nurses, I must rehabilitate myself cos its my choice when I said no I will smoke, so it is also my choice when I say no I must stop, not someone else coming to tell me, you must stop and you must do this to stop. No that doesn't work, so pantsula changed me and saved my life, that's why I'm here, Cos many of my friends are in prison some of them are dead.

S: and now you are helping these guys as well

A: so ya im showing them that it can save you, cos even them they know me, they know how I used to be and also for them its still difficult for them to believe that iv changed. So that's why im saying that pantsula can change a person cos it's a dance and it can also heal you also

S: and it's a really nice form of expression

A: ya cos you take out all that energy that you have, if you have frustration you take it out on pantsula, yu dance you sweat and you get tired and you go sleep. you cant go out and steal. Ya you go sleep cos you tired so you cant go out and go steal some houses, ya you tired, you exhausted just need a bath and sleep and then you wake up tomorrow, oh it's a brand new day again ya let me do the same thing, so you get saved by that.

Appendix B

Transcription of interview, conducted by Heather van Niekerk, with Steven Faleni and Vuyani Feni at Katlehong Arts Centre. 05 November 2015.

I arrive while Steven and Vuyani are practising a gumboot routine that is a part of the show *Nkululeko* that they are taking to France in December (one of three performances they are taking to France at this time).

Recording begins with the sounds of Tshepo shouting and kwela being played downstairs. Apparently there is a group that is practising kofifi. Tumi, whom I have met before (and is a good pantsula dancer and is in Via Sophiatown) is a part of this organisation.

Heather: so there is something I actually wanted to chat to you guys about because it was something that Sicelo said to me on Whatsapp yesterday. He was talking about umm for pantsula dancers it's really hard in the industry. He is saying that lots of people come and approach pantsula dancers and mostly white people and storytellers don't often benefit from telling their stories, sometimes it might be a monetary thing, they might not get enough money but then also its about when you take someone's story, it's their intellectual property and it's not protected so then the story gets published and publicised and there is no benefit, and the people won't even tell the story tellers or the pantsula dancers. [quoting from Sicelo's message]. "The main problem we have as pantsulas is that those who take the story from us they don't see a need to consult us whenever they publicise our stories because they say it is exposure for the world to know our stories. It's not like we don't want people to write and publicise our history but we need to be treated as professionals and taken serious as you can with any other professional person." Ya so I wanted to know what you guys thought of that (laughs)

Steven: You know for me, I think it's true what Sicelo is saying but on the other hand is that if we are not telling our story to people then people will never discover pantsula. And we have been waiting for so long that the history of pantsula and pantsula culture can be written down in a proper manner or in a book form so that people can know. And this is not for us. Because of our great grandparents they have done pantsula and put it into a certain platform and now it's up to us. Where do we take it? So that the next generation, when they come, when they start to involve themselves in the pantsula culture. For them it's going to be easy. We will have paved the way for them. So if you don't take the responsibility of sharing the culture, it's not about money, but it's about making the culture well known so that the next generation when they come into this world then they will find the history of pantsula accessible, in the libraries, in the bookshops so for me, it's about, like I feel it's my responsibility to share with people then it's up to the next generation what they are going to take, what they are going to do, if I put this spear here, who is going to take it further. It's not about the money but off what I know is that my name, Sicelo's name, Vusi's name, Buru's name, Vuyani's name will be written down at some point. You will find people who maybe agreed not to recognise the pantsulas, they only want their own recognition to be recognised, like oh he is doing that book, that doctorate of the book of pantsula but not recognising the people who helped him to compile the book. But now at some point you find people who are open and so trustful that they can put our names down, it's all about making the use of pantsula well known and written down, like now, we don't know who owns pantsula, our belief is that each and every township has got its own pantsula and each and every township has their own way to tell their culture and the history of pantsula.

Pantsula is not owned by Via Katlehong or Red For Danger but pantsula is owned by each and every child who lives in the township who makes a living out of the survival of the pantsula culture. That is my belief on pantsula.

H: But it seems to me like there is [a difference], there is the culture of pantsula and I agree with you that it shouldn't be owned by anyone in particular and people shouldn't try to say that we started it or

S: It's like gospel music, no one owns gospel music.

H: Ya and it's this art that is out there and ya a part of the culture. But there is also this thing that Via Katlehong owns Via Sophiatown and Toyi-Toyi and its not only about the culture there is also the thing that pantsula dancers are artists who are creating work and when you choreograph you own that dance

S: Yes it's true

H: And that people are then maybe confusing the culture and the art that is being created

S: And the craft.

H: And that people are also, like cause it is about the money in some ways that as artists this is what you are doing, this is what you are doing to make a living.

S: For living, mm.

H: So when people are coming in and exploiting it and saying 'oh but its, I'm trying to get the story of pantsula out there, I am trying to get the culture and everything. It's exploiting you as artists, in a way.

S: Eh for me, I think when it comes to storytelling and the performing art itself. When you start to talk about the craft, when you talk about to do the choreography, then I think its two different things than to tell, to talk about the culture itself. For me I feel free to talk with people about the culture itself but now when it comes to the craft the practicality of dance on stage, the routines and the choreography then that's when its starts but now when it comes to share the culture, I think its more important to share with people so that people can know. For us, Via Katlehong, I think we were lucky enough to be in the right place at the right time so that we meet the right people whom they going to recognise our craft as a professional dance form. So for me yeah its uh the history its complicated of pantsula and its something that we need to share, so that when we share our history, then people will know and people will want to see the craft itself. Now when they start to see the craft, that's where maybe they can involve money. I believe if someone can hire my craft then he needs to pay for the craft, but someone who needs to find information about my craft then I should give him the information so that he can hire what he knows. Unlike someone who doesn't know about pantsula then like 'no I want to hire pantsula' then he doesn't know where it is coming from and where it is going. So I think it's important to share our history and talk to people, then they can hire our craft.

H: So what do you think about getting corporate gigs and then when you perform pantsula for a corporate thing and they don't know anything about the history

S: you know corporate its only an entertainment. Those people they hire pantsula just to entertain themselves. Sitting there with nice suits, like ah no we want to see the people there jumping with pantsula, they don't know pantsula. I think they hire pantsula because pantsula is the most

H: Entertaining, joyful

S: It's not a set dance, they hire pantsula, they want to entertain themselves they want to put smiles on their faces. But with us we have done a lot of corporates then we have decided that we should move away from corporate. The reason being that when we, normally we used to do corporates for Sappi and Microsoft, we stopped doing the corporates because of our names are not written down. When they hire you they pay you then its finished. They will see you next time they do another event whatever. When it comes to theatre, your name is going to be written down. You can perform in one theatre. After ten years when you start to google, maybe you go you see your name, okay I was performing in this theatre. But in corporate they never recognise you. You can google coke, or you can google Microsoft, you'll never find your name in the events, in that no we have hired this company and in this company there was performing this person and then this person. It's not, it doesn't help, it's a quick cash. I can say that, even though it pays better than the theatre. You know that theatre doesn't pay well but the theatre, it's about recognition. Your name stays there. You will be recognised. Even after fifteen decades your name is going to be there.

H: Is that important?

S: This is important. It's important for pantsula. It's important for the street culture. Its important forall the dance forms that are not recognised. If they perform in the theatre, for me, it's the way to go.

H: But then what do you think about, the fact that, so pantsula comes from a street culture, its comes from performing in the battles on the streets, or Vuyani you were saying like when people came together with the gatherings and then people were dancing. So now then putting it on stage, what does that do to the dance form. To the craft.

S: For me, when we take isipantsula out of the streets and putting it in the stage on the theatre, I think we are giving it more respect and that's where we are giving it a dignity. When people they see pantsula on the streets they say 'ah that dance its for amateurs, that does is only for to dance in the street its suitable for the streets only'. But now when they start to see the creativity on stage that's where you need to come with good elements when you put your craft on stage. Then people they will see you 'wow that dance, those people they are creative, they can put the street dance on the stage.' Before people they used to be afraid to put their craft on stage, more especially when it comes to pantsula. I'm proud, I'm proud to say we were one of the few organisations that put pantsula in the theatre, on stage. And people when they see pantsula then we take them through the journey of all the moves that we do on stage and then now when they get out of the theatre or out of the event then they will start talking about pantsula 'ah wow you see that moves' 'ah that move is like catching a taxi' 'ah you see that one, that guy he was imitating to be a mother' you know like we have a story to tell with our dance form. All the things that we do on the streets we put them on stage but now we are doing it in a way that can people can also be educated.

H: ah and that's something that I want to focus on in my paper, this idea of like the township space being put in the dance moves and in the dance itself its kind of celebrating it and putting it out there, especially because the township is often seen in such a negative light in many ways. And pantsula is kind of saying, so ya I really want to explore that idea more.

S: I think it's going to help because of even now in some other places or some other gigs, you know when they see pantsula they think like hey these guys they look like thugs, if we are going to share with them a changing room you must remove our valuable things like cellphones, wallets, all those things you know. But now once you start to see it on stage then you forget that you said 'ah those guys look like thugs', once you start to see their work. That is why most of our artists, before th ey used to dress, even when they walk in the streets, they used to dress like pantsulas but now when you start to see other people and meet different people then you start to say 'you know what, I'm going to treat my pantsula as a profession. You know, I'm not going to put my trousers here, under my belt because people when they see that think 'ah that guys a thug'. But now once you start to jump on stage then you going to wear it like a pantsula

H: But then what does that mean for the culture of pantsula?

S: What does that mean for the culture of pantsula?

H: Ja if you not dressing that way?

S: I think it's coming, its dividing itself because of you find someone, I'm sorry to say, when you see Sicelo, Sicelo eats pantsula, he drinks pantsula, he sleeps pant sula. I'm telling you, I swear, maybe Sicelo in his house has got a blanket of pantsula. So for me pantsula, I take it, I'm not saying that other people are not taking it as a profession but I take it as a profession. I'm doing pantsula, on stage, I'm doing pantsula like it's my craft. So but now I have the history of pantsula, I talk pantsula. When people see me they think I'm just an ordinary guy, a normal person. But now when we go to a meeting, when we meet people, when we go to parties, eh I cannot wear like pantsula to respect my craft now because to me now it's a profession. I cannot just dance in the street. Eh maybe like I go to a nightclub then I expose my craft, I need to think that oh this thing I make a living out of and Vuyani is relying on this and Vusi is relying on this then I need to respect my craft but off what we do most when we went out when we see people dancing like when they do pantsula we communicate with them, we network with them, we share the ideas. You know with your craft you can do this, you know with your craft you can go here and here and here. So for me the what does, it means a lot there are people who when they walk in the streets they walk like pantsula but they are not dressed like pantsula. There are people who dress like pantsula but they do not walk like pantsula. Then there are people who dance like pantsula but they are not pantsulas. I think it's like...

V: It's like someone who is in art but is not an artist. You can be in art but you are not an artist. Do art related things but you are not an artist

H: Okay so like I go to a gallery and I look at art, and I love art and I follow art

V: You appreciate

H: but I don't paint.

S: Like its same like programmers. Programmers they have never been artists but they go to scho ol for art but then they can see good art they can see that art can sell, that craft cannot sell. Its like pantsula. There are people who can see pantsula that these pantsula moves can make it these pantsula can't make it. Like its spread in a lot of ways, pantsula, its spread in a lot of ways. But it's a pity that it is not written down. You know its not like other dance forms like zulu dance before it spread like you can find the books that talks about zulu dance. Then after it spread you find a lot of difference of zulu dance. But now pantsula you cannot even identify where this moves come from what does it mean because now it's so big in a way that no one can identify. When we did this stumbo thing it was my first time seeing a pantsula from Durban it was amazing for me it was like watching a circus now it was pantsula now you could see it was pantsula but it was completely different. It twisted my mind. When those guys get out of the stage, I went to them, I spoke with them. That thing I knew that in Gauteng the pantsula it's been identified in different ways but now I didn't expect that out of Gauteng you would find a different pantsula. That pantsula it was amazing.

H: What was it about it though?

S: They jumping on top of each other, then the one on the bottom he danced it was amazing it was so amazing it was crazy.

H: That's crazy, when I was with the pantsula dancers in Grahamstown we went to PE, cause they were in Step Up or Step Out and they were auditioning for it. There was a pantsula crew from Ugie, which is this tiny town and they were these young guys, ya they were very young and they had just learnt from watching other people, and they... I think there is pantsula everywhere but in Cape Town.

S: Its big, you cannot stop it. And that is why I was saying earlier about that I cannot claim that I own isipantsula. We might own the choreography but not pantsula itself. Pantsula it belongs to your communities for the communities for the people. Like those guys from Durban, they were amazing, it's a pity that they didn't win because of the competition was tight for them cause of most of pantsulas they were from Gauteng it was a pity for them and the vibe of pantsula its also different and you find people enjoying maybe a 45 tempo others they are enjoying maybe a 65 tempo its different. So for us we dance to any any any type of music. We don't block. We bring the music we work with it we don't block.

H: I wanted to ask about choreography. Cause there are so many ways that you can choreograph a dance. How does it work for you guys? Cause I know cause I used to do tap dancing, and I used to make up dances and I would always hear the thing in my head, I would hear the rhythm and then I would do that and then you kind of make it work with the music. Cause I've noticed with pantsula music isn't all that important

S: With us in terms of the choreography, we don't block. We do a collective work but there will be someone who is going to be in charge artistically. Then they will say okay these moves are going to work, these moves are not going to work.

H: But how do you know if they work or if they don't work?

S: We put them together, maybe for an example, Tshepo brings two counts of eight of moves, I bring two counts of eight, Vuyani brings two counts of eight and Vusi brings two counts of eight and Buru

brings two counts of eight then we will have a one minute long piece. Then we will mix them together. Then we start to see if it goes along with the music. Then we start to see okay Vuyani's moves. We can split Vuayni's moves and put it before Tshepo's moves or after Tshepo's moves and see how it works. If it goes along with the music then we start now, we start to invite someone from the outside and we say 'okay what do you think about this choreography?' Then they say 'ah no its good'. But other people, it's good to invite someone along who doesn't know anything about dance, because of he will want to entertain himself, but now more than if you invite someone who knows about art then you will criticize then you will end up not having a choreography. So normally we put work toghether, put different moves together, then normally we meet then we do them then we give someone a task to put the direction on the choreography. We do a collective work. Maybe it's the thing that makes us special because of if you make one choreography belongs to Vuyani then that means you all going to be Vuyani's because of its his mind, all the moves its his mind so you all going to be Vuyani's. But now if you do choreography in the collective then you going to be all together in one boat. That's how we do our choreography. We even invented our own dance. We call it Umgaba dance. It's a mix of pantsula and gumboots and tap. It's a very nice dance piece. And we also invented