

unreal relationship. The language used determines this relationship. Men are referred to as 'gentlemen' and women as 'ladies'. The terminology suggests that dancers are noble. These people are also affected by this terminology, and start trying to adjust to their titles, thereby trying to perceive themselves differently. They start to relate to one another differently too – they lead a life based on titles ie based on some vague middle-class title.

Festivals

These activities are organised so that youth clubs may display their day to day activities. In most cases festivals and concerts are just a series of performances by youth club members. They display several activities – drama, dancing (several kinds) and music. Youth clubs operating under the auspices of the Association – Thusong in Alex being one of them – are discouraged from performing drama other than tribal dramas – that is, the children are discouraged from performing their experiences. Dramas based on tribal themes, as opposed to the living experiences of the youth, are useful to capital in that they are neutral about the issues of the present. "They do not provoke young children to become tsotsis or anything disgusting like that". On the other hand these tribal dramas fail to approach any historical events seriously. They merely conform to the stereotype of tribal/traditional plays – they present no useful or new way to approach history. They make tribal history feeble and reduce it to a series of events involving drunk chiefs and their indunas engaging in wars and dances for no good reason.

Working-class culture

Members of a Youth Centre do not themselves usually invent their activities. These are already structured. Ballroom dancing is performed in a fashion created long ago, somewhere else, overseas perhaps. You don't make up the waltz, you learn to obey its rule. Even the kind of dramas put on by youth clubs have a prescribed formula: so that at drama festivals you will see the same thing time and time again – tribal nonsense. Scenes of life on a township street are actually forbidden.

It is quite different with activities that are invented by working class youths themselves, uninterfered with by authorities or middle-class misleaders. In this case it is youth themselves who produce their own culture, which, if they are working-class youths, is also working-class culture. In this section of the article we intend to discuss certain youth groups that are well known in black townships.

A re yeng mapantsuleng

What sense can be made of Pantsula activity and style? It is not very useful to take the view that these youths are merely gangsters and loafers. Even if it were true that many Pantsulas really are tough and aggressive, this is only one characteristic, and it is not shared by all youths who might call themselves Pantsulas.

Clash van die jewish

Let's examine their style of clothing. They go for trousers that seem deliberately shapeless – I refer to those called voops – which don't fit under the crotch, they are loose around the waist, so that the belt hangs down as if the buckle were too heavy; then the trouser legs are rolled up, or they have turn-ups (ash-trays) that flop over the shoes, and seem to scrape in the dust and get

caught under the heel. A majita wearing these pants looks like he has stolen them from some big fellow on the golf course. In actual fact, he did not steal them, but paid a lot of money for them, and he keeps them dry-cleaned and perfectly pressed. He may look untidy, but he definitely is not. It's the same with his shirt: even if it is a Christian Dior costing sixty, he will wear it with the sleeves too long, or an end hanging out of his trousers. He's trying to prove something. Shoes the same. If he wears takkies, they will be untied and the tongues are lolling out like two tired dogs – really untidy. But on the other hand those takkies are clean, clean, clean. He takes a lot of care.

Contrasts

In these contrasts (contradictions) we can read messages about the conditions of life in an urban ghetto. The Pantsula does not disguise his origins. His style borrows openly from the style of the tsotsi, whose second hand trousers and shirt have, generation after generation, covered a hungry frame and an Okapi.

Now this very Bra Boy-Boy whose clothes seem shapeless, and he himself seems lazy, in fact holds himself highly alert. He is manotcha, wakker. "Hy kyk en blaai, dinner en dinner, jare en jare, tot die laaste dag." He sees to it that he remains wide awake, and not a moegoe. Under his clothes that don't fit, the Pantsula is tense and ready. Hy's fluks.

But these symbols of the tsotsi are only half the style: the other half shows extravagance and ambition. Pantsula's clothes are not cast-off, but new, expensive, clean and fashionable; and they are worn as such. They shine. In this way these clothes are not just things to wear; they are messages revealing the complex lives of youths who accept that they belong "by die lokasie", but don't conform to it. They admit that they are oppressed, but they declare their freedom. Their style of dress combines oppression and ambition, shapelessness and style, the ghetto and their mockery of the ghetto. Pantsula style is a statement of working class life in South Africa. In fusing contradictions it tries to be in some way a solution to working class problems.

Sqamtho

There is the same formula of contrasts in tsotsi-taal, which combines seSetho/isiZulu with Afrikaans, especially Afrikaans constructions. It might seem strange that the talk of township youths should be 50% Afrikaans, which even blacks who speak it well recognise as the language of oppression. But what we must realise is that the situation of oppression is precisely that blacks must use the dominant language; and therefore they use it ambiguously. *Sqamtho* is a way of accepting Afrikaans, by transforming it.

Those who use tsotsi-taal, do so with a kind of mocking enjoyment. They do not show respect for Afrikaans, they flood it with vernac, subvert it with English, load it with words only the speakers understand.

Wat sê, mthaka

Ek se boeta yini ungazwakalanga edladleni jy ken ukuthi bekunenkware. En u loosile bezirara horaah. Die hele ouens en mshozas (ousies) was daar by my cabin (hideout). Besine braai i jeje galore. Ah! jy uyilahlile ngokungazwakali.

Ek verstaan ou Bra Boy-Boy beka-khona naye but zithe nge late bells nashifta saam.

Ja is waar hy was daar. Jy ken, bhazimen, daaie ou, hys 'n tiger. Hy vertel my dat hy was one man share toe hy 'n HB gemaak. Hy het pam-pam miring gekry. Intaba ek se. Ons het saam 'n zwaap getshaya daar by Mampedi se plek en so 'n case en 'n straight sputla geblaas . . . en so twee ousies getwist.

The contradictions in tsotsi-taal match those of the Pantsula's clothes and those of his dancing. He does not merely make use of language, he dazzles with it. Playing with the mother-tongue and with the language of baas-skap, he masters the cruel environment of their



Die ouens blom nou by die corners van township

relationship. Township language is a display of wit and brilliance in the hard task of handling life 'by die lokasie'.

Sdlhodlho

Some say that tsotsi-taal grew up on a location street, but was born in jail. This is surely true, for sqamtho is a way of dealing with law, with the commands and insults of racial oppression, in that it withholds clear information by making even Afrikaans obscure.

Tsotsi-taal is a warped language. It exists on the frontier between two groups where language cannot be pure. The further away from this frontier you go, the purer the language, as in rural areas where they speak 'deep' isiZulu, 'se-Tswana se phepha'.

Jail, to an even greater extent than the location, is a frontier between the work-

ing class and the state, since here in an undisguised form reigns the conflict between dominant whites and dominated blacks. In jail tsotsi-taal has its maximum intensity.

Sqamtho according die jive

Mapantsula dancing repeats what we notice in clothes and *sqamtho*, in this way again, that it is not silent about the real history and condition of the dancer. A Pantsula does not only move, he wieties with his body, he produces visible praises. His dance describes the suede patches on the jersey he likes, his success with mshozas; describes women looking in the mirror or hanging clothes on the line. Even if it is capitalists' music, imported from America, heartland of profit and exploitation, the Pantsula converts it to his own life's experience. He makes it ferment in his own bin.



Dlala Mshoza

Ho fereha

We should not forget that style in clothing or speech or dancing have immediate uses. It is not their intention to reveal these things we have been describing, about working class conditions. Fashion is clearly an important strategy in love making. He who can wietie fast and amusingly, or whose clothes combine poverty and arrogance; or a dancer from whose movements you cannot take away your eyes — such a boy will win girls and get prestige in his Pantsula circles. But this is not the **origin** of these fashions or styles. We have been trying to uncover what **generates** a certain style and keeps it going, so that although the items change from time to time, the pattern remains the same. It may well be, in this case, that **sometimes** a mshoza may wear a doek, **sometimes** a sportie, or beret, but she will **always** combine smartness with untidiness somehow, even if only by leaving a safety pin undone.

Magical solution

It is not the items, but the **contrasts** that are significant. The endless variation and inventiveness of these contrasts and combinations are born of working class experience, the contradictions of township life, their desperate need of remedies, driving youths to solutions of style, speech and movement; which do not solve anything really (to political problems there must be political solutions) — but which give expression to the reality of their lives.

Having it cool in a flaming ghetto

The other significant youth culture group is Mahippie, which really includes (though there are some small differences) Cats, Ivy and Rastas. These youths come from the same class as Mapantsula. They walk the same location streets, face the same unemployment and poverty and have the same background. But they have set up a different style of behaviour and dress. They tend to try to solve their class problem by **looking like middle class people**. They wear glasses, symbolising education and clerical work; they speak English in the manner of American blacks; they are non-aggressive ("Ain't no fightin' type") and they don't treat girls roughly. The life-style of Mahippie suggests a denial of the dangerous and illegal elements of life in an urban ghetto. They try to resolve the problem by escape. This, no less than the style of Mapantsula, is impractical: it is a solution by magic.

Ultimately youths from both these groups become workers, and learn the lessons of real political struggle.

The Ma-Hippie group have developed the image of being 'cool' and educated, elements which go with a middle-class life-style. Their immediate problem is that, as black South Africans, they cannot afford to seem to be adopting white peoples customs: and their solution to this difficulty is therefore to identify themselves with the most successful culture of a black middle-class in the world, namely American culture.

The Ma-Hippie have for a long time been importing American life-styles. They used to have Afros, wear bell-bottomed trousers and high-heeled shoes. But fashions in America have changed, and now they perm their hair, and go for tight trousers and T-shirts.

Ma-Hippie language is English (spoken with an American accent) and American usage, as for instance in referring to women as 'chicks', 'birds' and so on. They try hard to be sophisticated. Their greeting is 'Hi, brother' as opposed to the township 'Heit'. They have adopted a

kind of feeble comradeship, calling one another 'brother' and 'sister' — forms not bad to use when in the correct context.

They like wine and discos, hence the township song, 'Kaofela Ma-Hippie kaofela — kaofela ba tsamaya didisco.' Their general outlook on life is that they should get as much enjoyment as possible. They spend their time either organising fun or having it, at picnics, festivals and parties. Life to them means leisure time. They like American musicians; recent favourites being Barry White, George Benson, The Commodores. Their version of American culture is, of course, heavily reliant on media. It is not the real life of Americans that they imitate, but the picture of this as presented in magazines like Ebony, and in Hollywood films.

Rastas

The Rastas are different again. We find their position very hard to account for. What is it about that obscure, vague, imported cult that attracts township youths? No doubt to some extent it is a question of fashion, this being supported quite strongly by Reggae music, which has a wide currency in South Africa.

Ahoy Patriot

But we have still to grasp the coherence among all the odd elements of this style. Why would anyone believe in Haille Sellassie, and greet 'in the name of Shaka's spear, Haille Sellassie ever living, ever faithful Jah Ras-Tafarian'? Why is there a translation of ordinary political terms into terms such as Zion and Babylon? Why do Rastas greet people by saying 'Ahoy', and call their friends 'patriot'? If it is necessary to escape from the realities of a situation, why should this be done in the manner of people in the West Indies, of all places? Why is dagga not enough, but it must be called ganja, and be part of a foreign philosophy? Why must everything be translated out of South African ghetto life, into the ghetto life of Jamaica or Brixton?