FROM PAUL TO PENNY: THE EMERGENCE AND DEVELOPMENT OF TSONGA DISCO 1985–1990s

by

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Introduction

Amidst the intense socio-political circumstances in South Africa during the 1980s, black urban South African music continued to thrive by blending domestic and international music trends giving rise to new styles or genres. When disco made its way to the country in the 1970s, South African musicians began incorporating it into their music, leading to the decline of the formerly notable *mbaqanga*. This new type of music took the labels township soul, township soul jive, township jive, or Soweto jive; names derived for the amalgam of influences which the music relied on including American soul, *mbaqanga* jive, disco, and township jazz (Hamm 1988).

In this article I trace the emergence of Tsonga disco, a Tsonga music subgenre which, at its emergence, could be differentiated from the other mentioned township styles such as township soul/jive only by its progenitor, Paul Ndlovu, who was Tsonga and his of predominantly Tsonga lyrics.[1] Further, I discuss the musical techniques employed by producer Peter Moticoce who produced Paul Ndlovu's music and the techniques used by singer, songwriter and producer Joe Shirimani. It is important to point out here that Shirimani not only produces his own music, but he also writes and produces music for other artists such as of singer and songwriter Eric Nkovane, who is known by his stage name Penny Penny.

Tsonga disco has received very little literary attention with the exception of Max Mojapelo's brief meantion of this subgenre in his collection of memories from his days as a DJ at the South African Broadcasting Corporation, *Beyond Memory* (2008). In his account Mojapelo highlights key players in this subgenre such as Paul Ndlovu, Peta Teanet, and Penny Penny, all of whom are central to the discussion of this article.

A cogent factor in the discussion is Fabian Holt's framework for the analysis of popular music genres in his monograph, *Genre in Popular Music* (2007), which functions as a guide in exploring how the Tsonga disco musicians who came after Paul Ndlovu have built upon Ndlovu's work and how they have managed to find their own musical voices. Theoretically, I use Bourdieu's *habitus* and the forms of capital to substantiate my argument. I argue that the music is a reflection and a result of the musicians'social and historical circumstances. This work draws from masters degree field research

[1] See Madalane 2011 for further reading on Tsonga popular music.

conducted between 2009 and 2011 in South Africa. My fieldwork methods included semi-structured interviews with the living musicians[2] and music industry practitioners as well as participant observation.

Paul Ndlovu and the emergence of Tsonga disco

Some scholars describe black South Africa popular music as "crossover" (Allingham 1999: 636), "fusion" (Ballantine 1989: 4), "cross-fertilization" (Coplan 1985: 193), and "hybrid" (Allen 2003a) due to the use of musical elements from more than one music culture. Generally, these terms are used to describe the presence of more than one style or genre in the music. In *Afro-American Music, South Africa, and Apartheid* (1988), Charles Hamm suggests that the cross-fertilisation or fusion process goes through three stages: importation, imitation and assimilation. By importation, he refers to the process through which the music is brought into the country. Imitation, for Hamm, is when South African musicians "perform … songs in the style in which they were done in the United States or Britain". Finally, the music is assimilated by merging the imported styles with "black South African performance traditions" (1988: 5). This framework for analysis pertains to much black South African popular music, including Tsonga disco.

As black South African musicians began incorporating disco into their music to create new genres, these new genres were subsequently labelled township jive/soul, and later bubblegum. The music was a blend of both domestic and international styles including *mbaqanga*, American soul, and disco. Tsonga disco, as a subgenre, emerged during this period as a descendent or subgenre of Tsonga neo-tradional music.[3] Prior to its emergence, commercial Tsonga music was primarily made up of choral music, indigenous music, and the neo-traditional music pioneered by Daniel Shirinda, known as General MD Shirinda. I elaborate and discuss the 'Tsonga' prefix in this music elsewhere (Madalane 2011). To summarize, Tsonga disco was given its title, according to my interlocutors, because of Paul Ndlovu's ethnic background. Through analysis of the music, I establish that Ndlovu's music is very similar to that of other South African township pop/bubblegum artists such as Sello 'Chicco' Twala, Yvonne Chaka Chaka, Brenda Fassie, and Splash.[4] The difference between Ndlovu and these other artists was seemingly that he came from a particular place associated with 'pure' ethnic identity (*ibid*.).

Paul Ndlovu was amongst the solo artists that emerged during this period. Ndlovu came from Phalaborwa in Limpopo Province to Johannesburg to pursue his music career. Various sources, including Max Mojapelo (2008), Lulu Masilele (Interview 23 March 2010), James Shikwambana (Interview 12 April 2009), and Peter Moticoe (Interview 4 May 2011), concur that before he became a solo artist, Ndlovu worked with the Big Cats, The Cannibals, Street Kids, the Movers, and Stimela. These are all groups that performed a mixture of musical styles including township jazz, township jive, *mbaqanga* and township soul. Masilela cited a misunderstanding with the Movers'

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2 Paul Ndlovu and Peta Teanet are both deceased.

3 See Madalane 2011 for discussion on Tsonga (neo)tradional music.

4 See Coplan 2008 for further discussion on these artists.

former manager, David Thekwana, as the reason for Ndlovu's departure from the group. Both Masilela and Mojapelo state that Ndlovu went on to a working relationship with Peter 'Hitman' Moticoe as his producer when he became a solo artist. Ndlovu thus emerged from this background of having worked with these groups with vast musical experience from which he, together with his producer, would draw inspiration for his own musical identity.

Obed Ngobeni's influence

Although Ndlovu was to become the Tsonga disco king, Moticoe credits Obed Ngobeni as the one who paved the way for Ndlovu, a musician who in this regard is also acknowledged by Ndlovu's producer, Mojapelo, but by none of the people I interviewed. According to Mojapelo and Moticoe, Obed Ngobeni rose to popularity through his hit song "*Kuhluvikile Eka Zete*" ("There is progress at Kazet")(1983). The song was produced by Moticoe and later adapted by the popular *mbaqanga* group Mahlathini and the Mahotela Queens. According to Mojapelo, "the track caught the attention of Harry Belafonte and inspired his album *"Paradise in Gazankulu*" (2008: 297). It was because of the success of this song that Ndlovu later approached Moticoe and asked him to become his producer. Moticoe recalled Ndlovu saying "I like what you did with that guy (Obed Ngobeni), I would like you to give me a try as well" (Interview 4 May 2011).

The absence of Ngobeni in the Tsonga disco discourse could be attributed to the fact that Ngobeni's music is considered Tsonga neo-traditional music,[5] a music genre described as being similar to *maskanda* (Mojapelo 2008: 296; Madalane 2011).[6] Like *maskanda*, this style is dominated by a lead guitar which is usually played by a male singer, backed by female backing singers (*ibid.*). The proliferation of this genre, together with other neo-traditional styles such as *maskanda* and *mbaqanga* from the 1960s, was entwined with the introduction of Radio Bantu. In the article, "The Constant Companion of Man", Hamm explicates how the apartheid government's cultural policy relied on radio, with music being a central method, to disseminate its political propaganda (1991).

Hamm unpacks the apartheid system's cultural policy through scrutiny of the South African Broadcasting Corporation's (SABC) annual report in which fundamental instructions on the programming and the music to be played on radio were documented. He further notes that in order to "promote the mythology of Separate Development all music programmed on Radio Bantu [was to] relate in some way to the culture of the 'tribal' group at which a given service was aimed" (1991: 161). It is from this policy that Tsonga neo-traditional music became popular and musicians like Ngobeni gained so much exposure in the late 1970s when his song, "*Kuhluvikile eka Zete*", was released.

[5] I use the term neo-tradional knowing that its use has been contested by scholars such as Phindile Nhlapho (1998) preferring the music to be called tradional music rather than neo-tradional. It's use here is solely intended for the reader not to mistake this music as indigenous music.

[6] General MD Shirinda paved the way for this genre during the late 1950s and early 60s for artists like Elias Baloyi, Samson Mthombeni and Thomas Chauke (see Madalane 2011).

The apartheid government's 'separate development' system, its censorship laws and cultural policy that gave precedence to these neo-traditional styles would therefore not have given a platform for rhetorical style shift even though Moticoe had musically diverged from the Tsonga traditional music conventions in Ngobeni's song. Thus, despite the complexities in musicians' changing or evolving from one genre to another, as expressed by Jonathan Shaw (2010) and Keith Negus (1999), "*Kuhluvukile eka Zete*" could not have, under such circumstances, afforded Ngobeni the platform to become a Tsonga disco/township pop artist. Even the album sleeve containing the song shows Ngobeni crouching, surrounded by his backing singers, the Kurhula Sisters, adorned in their traditional *swibelani* (the Tsonga female traditional skirt) and *miceka* (cloths) in accordance with the visual aesthetics of the classical Tsonga neo-traditional music of the time. Therefore the song's heavy reliance on a disco beat would not have influenced the way Ngobeni was promoted and marketed.

However, "*Kuhluvukile eka Zete*" is different from Tsonga neo-traditional music in that the lead guitar that dominates this style is taken to the background in this song. Listen to '*Kuhluvukile eka Zete*' by following this link: www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qq6qRpEZVTY. Instead Moticoe relied on heavy disco thumping bass line to drive the song. In addition, he used the keyboard sound typically found in township soul and/or jive music to support the bass line. This keyboard sound was popular at the time, mainly influenced by American soul and disco, but it was not introduced in Tsonga neo-traditional music until later.

When Paul Ndlovu, having worked with the aforementioned groups, approached Moticoe, who had previously worked with a number of such groups, he was in a better position to be located within the popular apolitical musical genres of the time, which were township soul and disco. He subsequently became the pioneer of so-called Tsonga disco due to, according to Moticoe, his Tsonga ethnic background and his first two hit songs '*Khombo Ra Mina*' and '*Mukon'wana*' which he sang solely in Tsonga.[7] Though Moticoe's view that Ndlovu's music was given a different label from that of his counterparts because of his ethnicity is well justified, it does not rule out other possible interpretations of this decision, especially considering the year in which Ndlovu released his first songs, 1985, the same year in which the South African government declared a state of emergency.

Considering this particular year and the socio-political state of the country at the time, it would also not seem illogical to surmise that marrying a specifically South African ethnic group, Tsonga, with a global music genre, disco, could have been an attempt to convey South Africa's participation in the global cultural sphere. The ethnic part of the label, one could argue, could have been a desperate attempt to show that though South Africans were broken up into different ethnic groups, this did not mean they could not engage with the rest of the world, especially because Ndlovu's music is undoubtedly very similar to that of his peers at the time. Listening to the compilation CD called *Reliable Afro-Pop Hits* (2008), released by Gallo gives credence to this

[7] See Madalane 2011 for discussion of Tsonga popular music and ethnicity.

hypothesis as well. The CD includes songs by Splash, Alec Khaoli, Patricia Majalisa, and Sipho Mabuse among others. Ndlovu's song, "Cool Me Down" is included in this CD. Technically, the music of these artists is very similar, employing the same recording techniques, similar timbres, textures and instrumentation in such a way that each song can only be linked to its owner by their unique voices. Another important fact underpinning this argument is that the music was not labelled by the musicians themselves, but by the companies with which they were signed.[8]

The aesthetics of this music, from the music parameters to the branding and marketing of the music, completely contradicted the socio-political atmosphere at the time. Musically, the songs were upbeat, sometimes slow and soulful like American soul and some were groovy, drawing influence from the disco beat. Love themes inspired by both soul and disco music permeated both singles and albums. To compliment these sounds, artists were also decorated in bright coloured costumes and had funky hair dos. The sleeve of Brenda and the Big Dudes' 1983 hit "Weekend's Special" and the video of the same title is an epitome of this trend. The group looks like Donna Summer and the Jackson 5 with Brenda in her mini dress and all the male members in their white suits with their shirts slightly unbuttoned. Sipho Mabuse could be mistaken for Marvin Gay on the cover of his *Burn Out* album. Not surprisingly therefore, Ndlovu's solo music followed these trends, even though it was dubbed Tsonga disco instead of township soul or disco or jive like that of his compatriots.

The similarity of Ndlovu's music to that of other township pop musicians could also be the reason for Ndlovu's immediate popularity amongst most South Africans. The music was familiar to them, yet different in the sense that Ndlovu also drew on his Tsonga roots to create his own musical identity, thus giving credence to Holt's assertion that popular music genres are fluid and musicians are often encouraged to "find their own voices" (2007: 5).

Music of the 'sailor man'[9]

In describing how he worked with Paul Ndlovu's songs, Moticoe said he was experimenting, fusing elements of what he referred to as "our local brand" and western popular music such as that of Marvin Gaye, Booker T and Johnny 'Hammond' Smith, all of whom are associated with both soul and disco, and especially disco, which he declared was the "in thing at the time". He went on to describe how Ndlovu's first songs came about:

> By that time I was working for a certain company, my previous company, which was Trutone Music. I then joined RPM as a public relations officer. So they just know this guy who can market black music. So I told them, guys this is not my line, my line is producing, can I try with this guy, which [was] Paul Ndlovu. They said no we like what you are doing. But eventually I booked studio time. We worked with Paul. We came up with one track and

[8] See Muff Anderson 1981 for further reading on the relationship between artists and record labels during apartheid.

[9] Ndlovu's signature outfit was his sailor hat.

> they said *ja* we like it, but can you go back and do this and that. I never went back and did anything, instead we did another song. I gave it to them, they liked it, and they pressed it and it was a demo (Interview 4 May 2011).

The song that came out of this first studio session was none other than the memorable "*Khombo Ra Mina*" ("My misfortune"). He cited a phrase from the lyrics when he mentioned the song, "*Wansati waxi dakwa*" (A drunkard of a wife). As the story unfolded, Moticoe recited lyrics from some of Ndlovu's songs, which astounded me as he is not a Tsonga speaker. Nevertheless, his ability to remember the exact lyrics of the songs points to two important factors. The first is Moticoe's producer/artist relationship with Ndlovu and the second the unforgettable nature of the song, which may have resulted from it being so popular or from Moticoe having played the song scountless times while working on them.

Moticoe's description of his professional relationship with Ndlovu seems in contrast with what is commonly found in publications where producers from this period are often described as agents of white record labels who told musicians what to do in order to not only produce music that would sell, but music that would also be in accordance with the censorship laws (Coplan 2007, Anderson 1981). Coplan described the producers as *indunas* (headmen) (2007: 243). Moticoe went on to say

> You see *abo* (guys like) Paul, you see as a producer you need to make the artist your friend, you wanna know what his problem [is], what is it that can make him perform…even your students, you work on them, you work with them, you must know when he is sad, when he is angry, when he is happy, that must be your business, and make sure that you want him to perform, you must do the right thing, you must make him happy, you see. It's not just about doing music, befriend him, talk to him, what is your problem; he will help you, and guide you (Interview 4 May 2011).

The second song they worked on was "*Mukon'wana*" ("Son-in-law"), which Mojapela says was a "hit". Referring to these two songs, Mojapelo proclaims, "it was clear that Shangaan-disco music king had arrived" (2008: 143).

Naming Ndlovu the king of Shangaan-disco is one of the reasons to consider Ndlovu one of the *centre collectives* referred to by Holt. By centre collectives, Holt refers to "clusters of specialized subjects that have given direction to a larger network…They include record producers, and above all artists whose iconic status marks them as "leading" figures" (2007: 21). Besides being the first artist to be labelled a Tsonga disco artist, Ndlovu became a "leading" figure within this genre (*ibid.*). Others later aspired to be like him and drew inspiration from his work.

Though disco was, according to Hamm, "a complex phenomenon" in America, it was perceived as "mindless, apolitical entertainment" in South Africa (1988: 35). As much as Hamm contends that this period (1970s and 80s) was not a favourable period for a "new, apolitical genre of popular music to flourish in the country, but", he goes on to say, "old patterns persisted: South African record companies released American disco records and the SABC put them on air" (1988: 34). Rob Allingham adds, referring to the local disco, recording techniques, that "in some instances the level of musicianship had

improved and more sophisticated keyboards came in" (1994: 386). It is these features that would later find their way into Ndlovu's music as well.

Ndlovu's music maintained most of the American disco elements which include the thumping bass, synthesizers, drum machines and keyboards (Clarke 1989, Hamm 1988, Starr 2006). The song "*Hita Famba Moyeni*" ("We will walk on air") starts with the synthesized keyboard riffs in Figure 1 and 2.

Figure 1: "*Hita Famba Moyeni*" as recorded by Paul Ndlovu. Transcription by author.

Figure 2. "*Hita Famba Moyeni*" as recorded by Paul Ndlovu. Transcription by author.

Then an electric bass interjects playing the following motif:

Figure 3. "Hita Famba Moyeni" as recorded by Paul Ndlovu. Transcription by author. To listen to '*Hita Famba Moyeni*' go to https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h3X4Sh76gAY.

In most of Ndlovu's songs, the music is built upon an ostinato bass line. In addition, it is mainly constructed of synthesizer and keyboard riffs that are repeated throughout the song with occasional variation. The use of synthesizer and keyboard riffs was also a defining feature of American disco. Though both American and Tsonga disco share these features, they do have very distinctive overall sounds. While the synthesized sounds in Tsonga disco attempt to replicate the sounds of acoustic western instruments, in some American disco the synthesized sounds are audibly synthetic with no reference to acoustic instruments. Donna Summer's "I Feel Love" is a good example of this. Barker and Taylor describe this piece as having an "alien, robotic, repetitive groove, [and] made completely without acoustic instruments" (2007: 253). This difference may be due to

the fact that in America, big name producers had more sophisticated studio equipment than what was available to black South African musicians during apartheid.[10]

In certain songs, Ndlovu uses live instruments such as the trumpet in 'Cool Me Down', and saxophone in "*Mina Ndzi Rhandza Wena*" ("I only love you") and "*Dyambu Ri Xile*" ("The sun has risen"). In "*Mina Ndzi Rhandza Wena*" the sax is given a short phrase which is repeated throughout the piece with minor variations, while in "*Dyambu Ri Xile*" the sax plays an improvisatory role as a solo instrument. Moticoe expressed his love for live instruments saying that to this day, though he makes use of electronic synthesizers, he always incorporates live instruments in his music. The use of brass in disco was a feature of American disco, though mainly in groups rather than as solo instruments; for example in "Stayin Alive", a single from the sound track of the film *Saturday Night Fever* (1977), there are numerous brass stabs (2:00–4:35).

Poetically, Ndlovu's songs follow the township soul/disco/jive trend of the time with love being the central theme. The didactic nature of Tsonga indigenous music is also used. As Moticoe professed, "you know we were into idioms, you check the one song he says "ixikala xa mukon'wana axiwomi, ikhamba lomkhonyana alomi, lihlala lino ncwala" (the [beer] gourd/calabash of a son-in-law is never or should never run dry. It must always be full of beer) (Interview 4 May 2011). The lyrics are as follows:[11]

Mukon'wana	**Son-in-Law**
Hi xewetile, vakon'wana	Greetings, our in-laws
Mi pfukile xana?	Are you well
Ahee	Salutation
Switsakisa ngopfu kumi vona mingena lamutini, Vasivara	It is indeed splendid to see you coming to visit us here at home, brothers-in-law
Leswi miswi lavaka mitaswikuma	Whatever you want, you will get
axi omi xamukon'wana	It [the beer gourd] does not run dry
Loko milava swibyalana, mitaswikuma	If you want some beer, you will get it
axi omi xamukon'wana	It [the beer gourd] does not run dry
Loko milava xibiyana, mitaxikuma	If you want some beer, you will get it
axi omi xamukon'wana	It [the beer gourd] does not run dry
Loko milaxiputla, mitaxikuma, vasivara	If you want hot stuff (whiskey or brandy), you will get it
axi omi xamukon'wana	It [the beer gourd] does not run dry

To listen to 'Mukon'wana' follow this link, www.youtube.com/watch?v=h3X4Sh76gAY.

The response phrase, *a xi omi xa mukon'wana* (it does not run dry), is derived from the phrase mentioned by Moticoe as *ixikala* (in Tsonga), *ikhamba* (in Zulu), which refers to the traditional gourd or calabash used to serve beer. Thus, in this song reference is made to the traditional way the Tsonga serve beer. The song describes relations between in-laws and points to how in-laws should be treated according to Tsonga tradition.

[10] See Louise Meintjes's 2005 article 'Reaching "Overseas' in *Wired for Sound: Engineering and Technologies in Sonic Culture* for a discussion about technology if the South African music industry.

[11] Lyrics not cited in full.

In "*Khomobo Ra Mina*" on the other hand, a man laments his misfortune for being given a drunkard for a wife.

Khombo ra mina	**My Misfortune**
Mhani yoo, khombo ra mina	Lamentation, my misfortune
Vani tekela wansati va ni tekela xidakwa	They took (gave me) a wife for me, they gave me a drunkard
Andzi n'wi lavi mino, wansati wa xi dakwa	I don't want her, a wife who is a drunkard
Andzi n'wi lavi mino, wansati wa dlakuta	I don't want her, a filthy wife
A min'wi voni n'wino, wa dedeleka mhanee	Can't you see, she stumbles all over [from being drunk]
A min'wi voni n'wino, wa dedeleka mhanee	Can't you see, she stumbles all over [from being drunk]
Mhani yoo, khombo ra mina	Lamentation, my misfortune
Anga etleli notlela	She does not even sleep
U tlela swidakanini	She sleeps in taverns
Anga kukuli la kaya	She does not sweep the house
Anga swikoti kusweka	She can't even cook

The lyrics indicate that the man did not have the liberty of choosing his own wife, a practice in contrast to the one described by Junod in which young Tsonga men choose their own mates (1962: 97), unless he made the girl pregnant before marriage in which case he would be forced to "buy her in marriage" (*ibid.*).[12] According to Junod also, though women brew the beer (*ibid*, 108) and are allowed to consume it (Johnston 1973; 1974), getting intoxicated is not the aim of Tsonga beer-drinking (1974: 293). Johnston described rural beer-drinking occasions as "formal and dignified" therefore, it would seem appropriate for a man to complain if his wife is a drunkard, as Ndlovu does in the song. These two songs are clearly influenced by Tsonga idioms, which Moticoe referred to, thus attesting to his point about having drawn inspiration from "our own music" and affirming the point about black South African popular music being a "fusion".

Ndlovu's other songs follow the love theme common in soul and disco lyrics. An example is the song "*Tsakane*" (a person's name, meaning rejoice). The lyrics are in English and Tsonga. "*Tsakane*" is one of several songs in which Ndlovu declares or proposes love to a woman. Others include "I Wanna Know Your Name" in which Ndlovu's narrator asks a woman for her name because he is "a lonely man" and he "just wants to know her"; "*Mina Ndzi Rhandza Wena*" ("I love only you"); "*Hita Famba Moyeni*" ("We will walk on air"); and 'Cool Me Down'.[13] Another influence also prevalent and found within these songs is what Maultsby refers to as soul music's "teenage love songs" (2006: 278), due to the predominance of romance and social relationship,.

That Ndlovu mixed languages and succeeded while Jonny Clegg and Sipho Mcunu's "*Woza* Friday" suffered a different fate is not surprising (Drewett 2006: 128). Besides the fact that Ndlovu was a solo artist, without a white man singing alongside him, Coplan

12 Junod also described that elders may start complaining if a young man is of appropriate age to marry and still does not have a wife. The researcher is also aware of cases where a wife may be chosen for a young man by elders if the first wife is considered problematic, is barren, or lazy.

13 "We will walk on air" is a literal translation but the song lyrics refer to flying in an airplane.

observed that by this time government censorship was half-hearted. "The reality was that the National Party regime, forced to defend its core political real estate of apartheid legal structure and power itself, had ceded the cultural domain of black culture to the blacks and fellow travellers, and popular musicians had been among the first and most aggressive in its appropriation," proclaims Coplan (2007: 296). Nevertheless, Moticoe admitted to having been cautious of the censorship laws in order to avoid his music from being banned. He elaborated by saying, "I had friends in the radio [industry], mostly they were ex-teachers, you could only get into radio if you were an ex-teacher, so I would check lyrics with them first, is this right if I say this, is it not vulgar or anything" (Interview 4 May 2011).

Ndlovu's popularity

In addition to writing songs that audiences would relate to and that could be approved for airplay, Moticoe also attributed Ndlovu's performance skills as one of the reasons he became a much sought after musician.

> He used to be very good, we used to tour. In our group, like the Movers, we used to have different genres, we used to play from 20h00 until 00h00. Today's acts [are] 45 minutes [long]. We used to play from 20h00 to 00h00. So performing, he was one of the best in the country, so he had this type of dance called jive, so he was famous for it. It's a pity I don't have videos (Interview 4 May 2011).

Mojapelo credits the power of radio for Ndlovu's popularity. He claims that Ndlovu was "one musician who opened [his] eyes to the overwhelming power of radio" (2008: 143). The power of media in genre formation is also acknowledged by Holt (2007: 21). Moticoe also confirmed that Ndlovu's music was played by various radio stations. Ironically, however, he also admitted that Ndlovu's music was not well received by some people working for the Tsonga radio station. He claims that this resistance was because he, the producer, was not Tsonga and therefore he was viewed as an intruder to their culture. Nonetheless, he went on to say that as soon as they heard that Ndlovu's music was getting popular with other radio stations, the Tsonga station followed suit and started playing the music. The initial resistance to Ndlovu's music by his 'own' people because he worked with an 'outsider' is evidence of the effects of the Apartheid regime's separate development system. Another point to consider, however, is that Ndlovu was the first musician to use predominantly Tsonga lyrics in a music genre that was not associated with the Tsonga people. Prior to Ndlovu, the only Tsonga music genres that existed were indigenous music, choral music and the neo-traditional style that was pioneered by Shirinda. It is therefore a combination of these factors that left Ndlovu's music in the hearts of many, including musicians who came after him. Sadly, as Mojapelo says, "Ndlovu died tragically on 16 September 1986" (2008: 143), a victim of a tragic car accident.

Figure 4. Paul Ndlovu. CD sleeve cover.

Holt says that "genre boundaries are contingent upon the social spaces in which they emerge" (2007: 14). For Tsonga disco, this statement is quite apt as, according to Moticoe, Ndlovu's music was intended to be dance or party music. He explained how he eschewed the protest song route, choosing the traditional idioms, soul and disco instead. Choosing the protest song route would have meant risking their music being banned or themselves being harassed or arrested by government officials. Moticoe reasoned, whether times are good or bad, people will always want to have a good time and it was his duty as a producer to look ahead of the time and guide his musician to write music that would outlive its period, pointing out that one hardly hears Mzwake Mbuli or Blondie Makhene's music today. Thus the choice not to sing songs with politically loaded lyrics may seem to be a politically motivated stance on the surface, but it also has residue of a long term, sustainable music career and vision when observed more closely. Though the subgenre began with Ndlovu as apolitical dance music aimed at everyone, this subgenre would later be used as a form of cultural expression by some of the Tsonga disco artists. Although Ndlovu died early, the concept he left behind would later be continued by others and would adopt a different meaning which was influenced by the context in which the music was practised.

Stayin' alive—Peta Teanet sustains Ndlovu's legacy

Ndlovu's premature death in 1986 left a vacuum in Tsonga popular music which was soon filled by Peta Teanet (1966–1996), another Tsonga disco artist whose life would be prematurely cut short. Very little is known about Teanet and efforts to find anyone

close to him have been unsuccessful.[14] The little that is known is quoted by Mojapelo from CD sleeve notes:

He was born Ntahleng Teanet Peta on 16 June 1966 in Letsitele. His mother Emma sang many traditional songs to the child and that laid the foundation from which Ntahleng's future music inspiration would benefit. His family later moved to the village of Thapane outside Tzaneen where he grew up. Teanet started singing publicly at the age of 18 in church at Relela village, where he also helped pray for the troubled souls. Later he played keyboard and sang for a group called Relela. The band caught attention of Radio Tsonga's music producer, Roy Ngobeni. He exposed them to the broader public. After the passing away of his hero [Paul Ndlovu], Teanet went down to Johannesburg with the aim of sustaining Paul's legacy. After knocking on many doors, he eventually met the leader of Mordillo [Ndlovu's band], Lefty Rhikhoto, who was prepared to produce him. Using the name Peta Teanet, his debut album Maxaka (1998, Challenger) hit the streets (2008: 144–145, cited from CD sleeve of the album *The Best of Peta Teanet*, 2004).

After his solo album *Maxaka* (We are relatives), Teanet went on to release other albums such as *Divorce Case* (1989), *Peta Teanet and The Special Servants* (1991), *Saka Naye Jive* (Jive with him jive), (1992), and *Utakutsakisa* (He will make you happy), (1993). He was murdered in 1996 while "promoting his forthcoming album" (*ibid.*).

Figure 5. Peta Teanet. CD sleeve cover.

Teanet acknowledges Ndlovu's influence in some of his songs; however, as Holt puts it, he went on to "find [his] own voice" (2007: 5). The song "*Maxaka*" ('We are relatives') from his debut album of the same name begins with two keyboard riffs and a synthesized

[14] Peter Moticoe said that he worked with Teanet only on one project, and does not know anything else about him. Gallo Records failed to provide me with Teanet's artist profile after several requests.

percussive rhythm. The first riff enters with the percussive rhythm; the second riff half way through the first one as if responding to it. Once the riffs are in play, the bass drops in just before Teanet gruffly whispers the word "*Maxaka*". The two keyboard riffs and the bass line form the instrumental foundation of this song. They are maintained throughout the piece and do not change, though the riffs are occasionally omitted while the bass and the percussion parts remain and *vice versa*. The use of synthesizer and keyboard riffs and a consistent bass motive was also a feature of Ndlovu's music.

Teanet's admiration for Ndlovu is depicted in the song "*Hisarisile*" ("We said our goodbyes", or "Goodbye") in which he replicates in imitation one of the sounds found in at least three of Ndlovu's songs, "*Hita Famba Moyeni*" ("We will walk on air"), "Cool Me Down" and "*Khombo Ra Mina*" ("My misfortune").[15] This sound clip, probably a pitch bend, resembles a synthesized sustained muffled descending 'u' sound. In the same song Teanet also reproduces a melodic motif, the fundamental sound of which is that of an African marimba, found in Ndlovu's '*Mukon'wana*' ('Son-in-law'). In Ndlovu's song the motif appears as in Figure 6 and Teanet's version is shown in Figure 7.

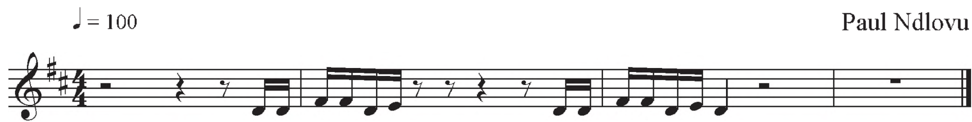

Figure 6.[16] "*Mukon'wana*" as recorded by Paul Ndlovu. Transcription by author.

Figure 7. "*Hisarisile*" as recorded by Peta Teanet. Transcription by author.

The motif is the same except that they appear in different keys, and the tempo is much faster in Teanet's, set to, in disco terms, 115 bpm; "*Mukon'wana*" is 100 bpm. In the latter, the motif appears very early in the piece at 0:07 when it enters with another keyboard riff. Initially it comes and goes, until it returns just before the chorus where after its distinctive marimba sound dominates the piece. One is drawn more to it than any of the other riffs. Both the motifs have a synthesised marimba sound.

In "*Hisarisile*" the marimba melodic motif only appears after all the instrumentation, including the voice, has been laid down. Though there are a number of other melodic motifs within this song, the marimba motif dominates. Its busyness thickens, creating a distinctive sound. The use of the pitch bend sound and referencing the marimba motif

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[15] In '*Hita Famba Moyeni*' the sound can be heard at 00:03, in 'Cool Me Down' at 00:57, and in 'Khombo Ra Mina' at 00:04. In all songs the sound keeps recurring throughout the track.

[16] This song should be spelt '*Mukon'wana*', but on the CD sleeve it was spelt '*Mokon'wana*'. I only use the incorrect spelling for the song transcription.

can be thought of as Teanet's acknowledgment of Ndlovu's influence on him and as a tribute to the Tsonga star. His admiration of Ndlovu has been spoken about by Moticoe (Interview 4 May 2011) and Mojapelo (2008: 144).

Though Ndlovu's influence is present in Teanet's music, Teanet has his own 'idiolect', the term used by Brackett for "the style trait associated with [a] particular performer" (2000: 10). A notable feature of Teanet's music that differentiates it from that of Ndlovu is the tendency to use children's voices in the backing vocals. This practice was a common feature in South African township pop during this time as artists like Chicco in "We Can Dance" and "Teacher We Love", and Brenda Fassie in "Ag, Shame Lovie") employed the same technique. In Teanet's music, use of this feature seems to occur when the subject of the song is related to children. A song such as "*Matswele*" ("Breasts") uses children's voices in this way as the chorus sings: *Tsotsi skatshwara matswele* (*Tsotsi* don't touch my breasts). The song tells of a man who comes from 'nowhere' and touches a girl's breasts. Then it goes on to say, *kgasi oakgago* (they are not yours).

Teanet's music is generally up-tempo in comparison with that of Ndlovu. Teanet surfaced in the late 1980s, at a time when American house and hip-hop had made its way into the country (Mojapelo 2008, Haupt 2008, Watkins 2004). The influence of these varieties of music on Teanet is explicit, and may account for the faster tempo of Teanet's music. "I'm a Dancer" clearly shows these influences. Structured on a 127 bpm beat and built on a synthesized thumping bass line, Teanet raps the words in "I'm A Dancer"; that is, he rhymes the lyrics rhythmically as opposed to singing them melodically.[17] "I'm a Dancer", however, more typically draws on elements of house music. According to Rick Snoman, for example, 127 bpm is a typical tempo in house music (2004: 271). The track is in 4/4, the kick is laid firmly on all the beats, a clap is added in addition to the kick and the hi-hat, and the synthesized bass is kept relatively simple and remains consistent throughout the piece while the electronic piano solos above the bass and the kick. These are all typical features of house music (2004: 271–278).

The early 1990s saw the emergence of a township music style called *kwaito*.[18] One of *kwaito*'s defining features at the time was that the lyrics "consisted of a few of the latest catch phrases repeated and played against each other, rather than lengthy poetry", and draws influences from hip-hop, American and European dance music, including house, techno, and pop (Allen 2004: 85). Though Teanet raps in the song "I'm a Dancer", the manner in which he does this is more consistent with how *kwaito* lyrics work rather than the poetic, complex and lengthy lyrics of American rap music. In addition to the repetition of short phrases, "Let's dance" and "I'm a rapper", the subject matter also suggests *kwaito*'s influence on Teanet's song because it is about having fun, a dominant theme of *kwaito* during this period (2004: 87). The subject of "*Saka Naye* Jive" ("Jive with him/her") is also typical of *kwaito*. It is about the township dance style *uku saka*,

[17] See *Popular Music Genres* (Borthwick and Moy, 2004) for description of the different types of rap.

[18] See David Coplan's 'God Rock Africa' (2005), Gavin Steingo's 'South African Music After Apartheid' (2005), Thokozani Mhlambi's 'Kwaitofabulous' (2004), and Lara Allen's 'Kwaito versus Cross-over' (2004) for further discussions on *kwaito*.

meaning to dance in a specific way, a dance which I did as a teenager in the early 1990s and which involves putting one's hand on the head and the other on the buttocks while bending all the way down.[19] This reference to *uku saka* situates specifically South African dance music in the context of other global dance music genres the lyrics of which, since disco, have often functioned self-referentially.[20]

Although Ndlovu's music was intended for the dance floor, as Moticoe noted, Ndlovu did not explicitly refer to dancing in his songs. Conversely Teanet's songs often include lyrics about dancing. "*Saka Naye* Jive", "*China Ndoda*" ("Dance, man") and "Double Phashash", all make clear reference to dancing. In "*China Ndoda*" for example he commands the men to dance; he challenges the young men to dance because they are being defeated by another group of dancers and suggests that in the old days they knew how to dance and have a good time. The recurring dance and playful themes found in Teanet's music depicts social or national cultural consciousness as *kwaito* became a national phenomenon.

However, in "*Maxaka*" Teanet complains to his grandparents for not having warned him about the girl he married as it later became known that they were related. In Tsonga tradition, it is taboo for relatives to marry. Teanet thus continues the tradition of Tsonga musicians tackling domestic matters. As such, polygamy is themetised in his songs; it is commonly known that Teanet's backing singers were his wives (Mojapelo 2008: 145). "*N'wayingwana*" ("Daughter of Yingwana") makes reference to polygamy as the song's narrator sings about his wife (from Johannesburg) making life difficult for his first wife.

In his treatment of this subject, Henri Junod addressed the consequences of wife rivalry in Tsonga polygamy (1962: 282–289). Teanet's song not only speaks of the continuous existence of polygamy among the Tsonga but also speaks to the challenges of the practice that are still very much part of today's polygamous marriages. Making reference to the traditional themes such as cultural taboos, polygamy and traditional dances like *xigubu* and *muchongolo* (referred to in the song "*China Ndoda*"), is a depiction of ethnic pride, a feature which is not explicit in Ndlovu's music.

Teanet's music is also eclectic, another important feature of his song-writing. This can be noted by the difference between "I'm a Dancer", "*Maxaka*" ("We are relatives"), "*Nwayingwana*" ("Daughter of Yingwana") and "I Love You Africa" (Remix). The songs draw on such diverse styles that, without Teanet's identifiable voice, it would be difficult to attribute them to the same artist. As discussed, 'I'm a Dancer' mainly draws influence from house music, in "*Maxaka*" Ndlovu's influence can be detected. In "*N'wayingwana*" the lead guitar gives the song a Zimbabwean aesthetic, while in 'I Love you Africa' an electro sound can be heard. While Ndlovu's music could almost be described as "predictable" in the sense that one song is similar to another, Teanet's

[19] The complete phrase of this dance is *penti yiwele, saka uyidobe,* meaning the panty has fallen, go down and get it; hence the bending in the dance movement.

[20] Arthur Mafokate is the most famous *kwaito* artist to predominantly use lyrics that refer to a dance. See for example the tracks 'Mnike', 'Kwasa', and 'Twalatsa'.

music is filled with diverse sounds and influences that, in the words of Brenda Fassie, "*Ngeke uncomfeme*" ("You cannot confirm a person").[21]

Teanet's fusion of different genres, styles and traditions in his music, his versatile voice, and his ability to be unpredictable in his songwriting, not only distinguished his music from that of his predecessor, Ndlovu, but also created a unique musical language within the Tsonga music world that has not since been heard. While Ndlovu started Tsonga disco, Teanet built on and developed the subgenre, doing so in a way that Ndlovu the founder did not. Important to note is that his career spanned from the transition period from apartheid up to the few years following the democratic elections. Thus the eclectic nature of his music, including the lyrics, could be attributed to the changes within the socio-political sphere. While political negotiations were taking place, culturally, South African saw an influx of different international genres which Teanet clearly appropriated and fused with domestic genres to create his own musical identity. He was subsequently labeled the king of Shangaan-disco by music commentators, thus also placing him amongst the *centre collectives*. Following Teanet's death in 1996, Joe Shirimani and Penny Penny took over the Tsonga disco music scene.

Joe Shirimani

Born in *KaN'wamitwa*, a village in Tzaneen, Limpopo Province, Joe Shirimani came from a musical family. His father played the guitar and it was not long before young Joe picked up the instrument. This humble and soft-spoken musician, songwriter, arranger and producer leisurely related his story as we sat in his studio in Soshanguve, a township outside Pretoria.

During our conversation, Shirimani emphasized that he had grown up in a multi-cultural and multi-ethnic society. Growing up in a multi-cultural environment was to influence Shirimani's later work. While in high school, in 1987 he started a 7-piece band called *Kimayos* (Kind Masters of Youth Sound). It was with this band that Shirimani recorded his first demo. Their debut album, after a few hindrances, was released in 1989. The music recorded by the band was, according to Shirimani, disco or bubblegum.

> I think I can call it disco but we used many languages because when I look properly, look at the way Pretoria is, it has many languages, Sesotho, Tswana, Sepedi, Ndebele, there is everything. It was not Shangaan disco, it was disco, it was like, you know Yvonne Chaka Chaka, Chicco, you know, it was that type of music. Some called it bubblegum at the time that was the kind of music we played. We were still young and so we were interested in music that would make people dance (Interview 3 April 2009).

After *Kimayos*, Shirimani worked with various groups such as Malume Pikipiki, Angola, The Crooners, and Chibuku before releasing his debut solo album *Black is Beautiful* in 1993 (Ncube 2000: 21). Since this album, Shirimani has released a number of hits including, "Gabaza" (a person's name), "*Nosi*" ('Bee') and "Limpopo". It was only when Shirimani went solo in 1993 that his music was placed within the Shangaan or Tsonga

[21] From the song "*Umuntu Uyatshitsha*" ("a person changes") from the album of the same name, released in 1996.

disco[22] subgenre. About this he commented: "the definition for this Shangaan disco is that, disco meaning dance, pop music, Shangaan is put in there because of the lyrics and the way we sing is leaning on the side of Tsonga tradition" (Interview 3 April 2009).

Figure 8. Joe Shirimani CD sleeve cover.

Though Shirimani enjoys commercial success as a songwriter and performing artist, it is also through the work he does as a producer that he has made his mark on Tsonga disco. Two of Shirimani's successful artists are Esta M of "*Nawu*" ('Law or Tradition") fame and the current holder of the 'king' of Tsonga disco crown, singer and songwriter Giyani Kulani Nkovane, known by his stage name, Penny Penny. He occasionally works with another Tsonga disco favorite, Chris Mkhonto, known by his stage name, General Muzka; and more recently, he took on a protégé, Benny Mayingane, who won the Best Xitsonga most popular song at the 2012 Xitsonga Annual Music Awards. Shirimani explicitly declared his *centre collective* status at a performance that took place at Phomolong, a village in Limpopo, on 20 March 2010. After the first song, while waiting for the second song to start, he declared to the audience: "Esta M is my child! Penny Penny is my child!" Besides writing songs and producing for these artists,

[22] The words Tsonga and Shangaan are used interchangeably here, as Shangaan is another designation often used for Tsonga people. The style is sometimes called Tsonga disco, other times Shangaan disco. For a brief overview of the controversy surrounding the use of these terms see the online article, 'How Tsonga became Shangaan: The difference between Tsonga and Shangaan' (2014), http://fanathepurp.co.za/how-tsonga-became-shangaan-the-difference-between-tsonga-and-shangaan-introduction.

Shirimani's most important contribution is a peculiar bass sound that has become the defining feature of Tsonga disco.

The bass sound created by Shirimani is identified by its richness, depth and sharpness. While keeping the consistency of the bass beat, he manipulates it so that it is the most dominant and most powerful sound in the song, making it texturally thick and acoustically deep. Shirimani said he creates this bass sound through the application of various effects; he was reluctant to speak more about this trademark sound. However, he proudly pointed out that "*kwaito* singers want that sound and they have asked me for it but they won't get it. They tried but they can't get it right" (Interview 3 April 2009). This bass sound is present in most of Shirimani's and Penny Penny's music and it has come to symbolize Tsonga disco more than any other sound or feature of the music. The prominence and popularity of this particular sound was enhanced by the fact that Penny is considered by commentators and fans to be current king of Tsonga disco. The album *The King vs The General* (2009), produced by Shirimani and the late Rhengu Mkhari, is a confirmation of this with the General referring to the previously mentioned General Muzka.

In the song "*Gabaza*" the bass line is as follows:

Figure 9. "*Gabaza*" as recorded by Joe Shirimani. Transcription by author.

In Penny Penny's "*Hai Kamina*" (Not in my house), the bass line is as follows:

Figure 10. "*Hai Kamina*" as recorded by Penny Penny. Transcription by author.

Shirimani's bass motifs differ from those of Ndlovu and Teanet in terms of the texture and tone and also in that, while the latter often alter the bass line in minor ways when it appears later in their songs, Shirimani's bass lines remain the same throughout: the above bass lines remain as they are for the entire song. However this does not mean that the bass appears non-stop as he makes use of instrumental breaks during which the bass line falls out of the mix. Elsewhere, the bass line remains while the other instruments drop out. These are all typical production techniques of global dance musics.

Penny Penny

Before further discussing Shirimani's music, it is necessary to focus on Penny Penny since Shirimani produces most of his music. Penny was born Giyani Kulani Nkovane in a village called Ximbupfe in Giyani, then the capital of Limpopo. He was given the name

Eric by the apartheid "government" (Penny's words) when he applied for his pass in 1977. His father was a traditional healer who had twenty-two wives though Mojapelo says there were sixteen (2008: 145). He never went to school but was proud to say that he can read and write. Due to his father's practice as a traditional healer, Nkovane grew up dancing Tsonga traditional dances such as *muchongolo*, *xichayichayi*, and *xigubu*.[23] After the death of his father his family lived in poverty which led him to seek work on nearby farms when only 10 years old. He later worked in the mines at West Driefontein, Carletonville. It was here that he developed a serious interest in music, beginning with dancing. He later moved to Johannesburg where he danced in night clubs while selling vegetables on the streets for a living. While struggling to make a living Nkovane began making demos and sending them to people with the hope of getting a foot in the music industry door.

> After many rejections and disappointments, Nkovane was finally discovered by Shirimani while working as a cleaner at Shandel Music. It was Shirimani who transformed Nkovane into Penny Penny, the "king" of Tsonga disco. Majapelo writes, "Shirimani … taught him the tricks of the trade [and] before long [Penny] … was writing songs. His debut album, *Shaka Bundu*, achieved platinum status and the second one achieved triple platinum" (Mojapelo 2008: 147).[24]

In addition to his signature bass sound, Shirimani introduced other features to Tsonga disco that sets him apart from his precursors, as he says, "let's say you look at Paul Ndlovu's disco and Peta Teanet and look at Joe's disco and look at Joe's style, mine is different" (Interview 3 April 2009), and different it is. Like his predecessors he makes use of keyboard riffs, but Shirimani's music is dominated by a sustained synthesized string sound. Sustained strings are a common feature of American and Tsonga disco, and in Shirimani's music they seem to appear more constantly than in any of his predecessors' music. For example in "*Marabastad*" (an area in Pretoria), "Yandee" (the name of a person), "*Khethile Khethile*" ('Once you have chosen, you have chosen, i.e. there is no going back), "Mapule" (the name of a person), "Cheap Line", and "*Biya*" ('Beer'), the sustained synthesized strings appear almost throughout the pieces with few breaks.

Another synthesized sound that Shirimani has a fondness for is steel drums. He admitted to liking the sound and therefore often uses it. A steel drum motif can be heard in "*Marabastad*" (from 1:18) which keeps recurring in the piece. Penny's "*Hai Kamina*" ("Not in my house") begins with the following synthesized steel drum motif:

Figure 11. "*Hai Kamina*" as recorded by Penny Penny. Transcription by author.

[23] See Thomas F Johnston articles for further reading on these dances.

[24] Penny is also known as Shaka Bundu, but in the song of that name it refers to a pretentious relative.

The motif appears again later in the song and it is exemplary how Shirimani uses synthesized steel drums in his music as a short melodic line which keeps recurring at different intervals in the songs. In the same song, there appears another of Shirimani's much loved synthesized sounds, conga. The song begins with the steel drum motif supported by the hi-hat before the kick enters with a short synthesized conga rhythmic pattern. Penny's powerful voice penetrates with the words "Do you?" This functions as a question, which is then answered by the following riff:

Figure 12. "*Hai Kamina*" as recorded by Penny Penny. Transcription by author.

These stabs are played on electric bass saxophone, another of Shirimani's favourite sounds.

The same sax sound can be heard in "*Marabastad*", "*Biya*", both from the album *Nivuyile* (1995), "*Yandee*", "*Sathana*", and "*Dom Dom*", from the album, *The Best of Joe Shirimani* (2003).

William Hanks concludes that genre offers "a framework that a listener may use to orient themselves; producers to interpret the music; and a set of expectations" (cited in Gloag and Beard 2005: 72). This assertion is apparent at the above mentioned performance of Shirimani in Phomolong. Shirimani maneuvered through the expectant crowd towards the stage to the sound of his intro on the albums *Miyela* (Be still) and *Tambilu Yanga* (Matters of my heart) while the MC encouraged the crowd to welcome him. The intro track was then replaced by a dance track to which his dancers responded. After grabbing the microphone from the MC, Shirimani proceeded to the front of the stage where he began waving his hand up and down as if asking the audience to respond. This they did. With an unplugged microphone in hand, Shirimani began singing along to the backing track. The first song, "Hlamala" (A person's name), was different from the style for which he is known. Its tempo is faster than most of his other material. Also, the song employs a *kwaito* technique of rhyming a few words over and over again. For the remainder of this track's performance, Shirimani positioned himself further back from the front of the stage, giving the dancers the center stage, a clear expression that this piece was a dance track and therefore that dancing is the fundamental part of the performance.

The next song, "*Tshelete*" ('Money') did not sound like Shirimani's usual work either; it too was faster and did not contain his signature bass sound. The audience seemed to be confused. There was very little screaming, shouting and clapping when he performed these two songs. It was after the second song that Shirimani officially introduced himself proudly proclaiming: "*Penny i n'wananga* (Penny is my child), Esta M is my daughter". While waiting for his next track to begin playing, the audience started shouting, "Penny, Penny, Penny".

After Shirimani formally introduced himself, the song '*Nosi*' ('Bee') was played. The audience's reaction proved the popularity of the song: screams were heard as the thumping, signature bass blasted out of the inadequate speakers. This song's reception, compared to that of the first two songs underpins Holt's statement in which he argues that "genre is not only in the music but also in the minds and bodies of particular groups of people who share certain conventions" (2007: 2).

While the signature bass sound, the electronic saxophone and steel drums distinguishes Shirimani's music from that of Ndlovu and Teanet, the lyrical subject matter is similar to that of his predecessors. In both his and Penny's songs, domestic, love, and social matters are common themes. "*Dom Dom*" ("Stupid head") challenges the domestic servitude stereotype.

It is unusual practice among the Tsonga for a man to be involved in domestic chores as implied in Ndlovu's "*Khombo Ra Mina*". In "*Dom Dom*" Shirimani challenges this stereotype. He sings of people who call him stupid for helping his wife but when she slaves away for him no one says anything: "*Ilodlaya mani*?" (Who has she killed [to deserve such ill treatment and accusations of witchcraft?]). Shirimani not only challenges men to help their wives at home but also defends women who are often victims of witchcraft accusations when their husbands show them too much affection.[25]

Written by Penny and Shirimani, "*Hai Kamina*" addresses the issue of educated and empowered women who become disrespectful towards their husbands. Here women are

Ho ni nese mina	I am a nurse
A ka mani?	In whose house?
Hayi kamina	Not in my house

reminded of their 'place' in the home, pointing out that even if they are educated; their authority is limited to the workplace. It is interesting to note how in "*Dom Dom*" Shirimani suggests equality in relationships, while "*Hai Kamina*" suggests a more submissive position for women. Such are the contradictions of the different worlds and audiences Tsonga musicians live in and address.

Some of the social issues addressed in Shirimani's and Penny's songs include the AIDS problem in South Africa. In "Ibola AIDS" ('iBola and AIDS') Penny cautions people to fear the disease saying that even bishops and leaders are scared of it. In "*Hayi Kashi Nditshane*" ('Small dish') Penny complains about false religious leaders who demand exorbitant amounts of money as offerings from their congregations. In "Education", Penny encourages young people to put education first in their lives. Domestic or social issues, like in Tsonga traditional music, are an important subject in Tsonga disco song texts. This is in contrast to American disco which disregarded such issues and was more about "self, celebration, ecstasy and escapism" (Hamm 1988: 35; Barker and Taylor 2007: 236).

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[25] Junod's *The Life of a South African Tribe* addresses witchcraft practice among the Tsonga in detail (1962).

In addition to relying on love and domestic themes, as part of their social commentary Shirimani and Penny also employed lyrics that affirm ethnic identity. There is a common belief that Shangaans used to hide their identity due to socio-cultural marginalization (see Madalane 2011). When political freedom came with its "unity in diversity" values, Shirimani used the opportunity to "uplift" Shangaans. Shirimani elaborated, "Shangaans, we used to undermine ourselves. I am the one who helped to uplift us. It is me, with Penny, who helped Shangaans take pride in who they are' (Interview 4 April 2010). Penny added,

> Shangaans were hiding themselves, that's when I got happy because I uplifted the Shangaans where they were. Others were making themselves Zulu; some were making themselves other things. But because I said Shangaan is English, Shangaans became proud, they came out. I was proud because of that song (Interview 4 April 2010).

Other songs that relate to this type of ethnic mobilization include Shirimani's "*Bomba*" ("Take pride"). This song from the *Gabaza* album (1999), affirms Shirimani's position on ethnic mobilization. In the song he takes pride in having achieved "uplifting" Shangaans or Tsongas, as Tsongas have now reclaimed their identity; they are no longer hiding and therefore encourage other ethnic groups to maintain their ethnic pride. It is in this song that he also encourages other people to take pride in their ethnic identity. This overt reference to ethnic mobilization and affirmation significantly alters the formerly apolitical and non-ethnically explicit nature of Ndlovu's disco to a more succinctly ethnically aware subgenre. Tsonga disco thus became, during Penny Penny and Shirimani's period, a medium for cultural expression afforded to them and

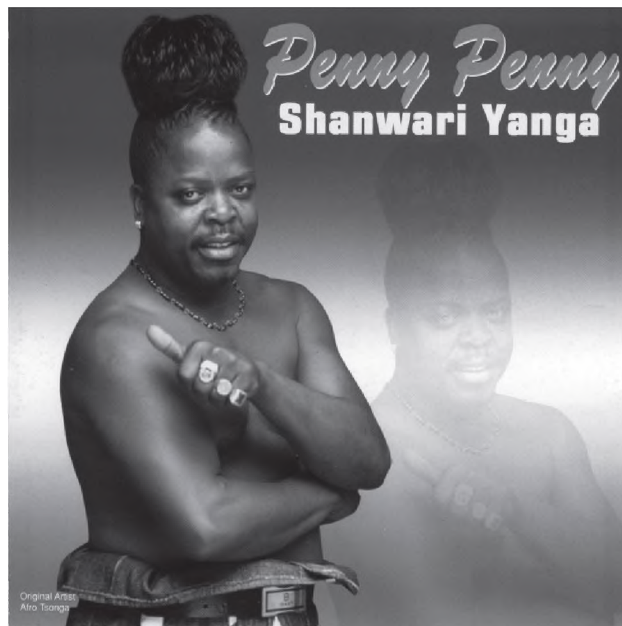

Figure 13. Eric Nkovane, known by his stage name Penny Penny. CD sleeve cover.

encouraged by democracy and the "unity in diversity" discourse. It functioned as a tool to show cultural pride for a specific ethnic group, as opposed to Ndlovu's music which lacked such overt sentiments.

Tsonga disco in society

Richard Dyer, in his article "In Defense of Disco", characterizes disco as being "romantic", referring to the music's ability to give its participants an out of body experience which he calls "ecstasy" (1979: 106). Though the romanticism of disco Dyer talks about refers in part to an emotional escape experience, Barker and Taylor describe a more physical or social aspect of disco as escape arguing minorities, including gays, lesbians, blacks, hippies and Latinos, used disco as an escape mechanism from the injustices and prejudice of societies in the 1970s (2007: 236).

In Johannesburg, the early to mid-1980s possibly saw disco function in similar ways. Ndlovo's producer, Peter Moticoe told how, although the 80s was a time of protest song because of the socio-political state of the country, people also needed to dance and have a good time, and disco provided the platform for this. SABC Media Librarian, Themba Mtshali pointed out how he and friends went to discos to dance, booze and womanize. Discos in Johannesburg, according to Mtshali and Moticoe, not only functioned as a place of escape for the ordinary man, but occasionally provided sanctuary for comrades. Moticoe shed a tear as he remembered how they sometimes hid struggle comrades with their instruments and often helped them cross the border to neighboring countries when they went on tour. He narrated how they sometimes hid the comrades within the drum kit and helped them cross the border to Swaziland when going there for performances. "Today these guys are big in the government, they hold big positions, yet they don't remember us, to them we are just entertainers" (P. Moticoe Interview 4 May 2011).

Critical analysis

A symptom of Bourdieu's power, capital, and habitus concepts, the labelling of this music as Tsonga disco is evidence of the lack of both social and economic capital by the musicians, thus resulting in their inability to have power over what they would like their music to be labelled. My interlocutors expressed frustration at the ethnic labelling of their music, citing major inconveniences such as not being playlisted on other South African radio stations because of the ethnic label. This further proves Bourdieu's habitus concept in that, not only were the artists systemically disadvantaged socially and economically because of the apartheid system, they also lacked social and financial capital to independently have control over every aspect of their music. All the musicians discussed, during the period under consideration here, were at the time, for recording, production, distribution, publishing, and marketing, relying on companies owned by foreign investors who were content to comply with the apartheid system's policies. This also justifies disco music being encouraged amongst the black population because, according to Hamm, disco was

> By the mid-1980s, the grand media strategy theorized in the 1960s was finally in full operation. All of South Africa, and Namibia as well, was blanketed by a complex radio network ensuring that each person would have easy access to state-controlled radio service in his/her own language, dedicated to mould[ing] his intellect and his way of life by stressing the distinctiveness and separateness of 'his' cultural/ethnic heritage ... The majority of programme time was given over to music, selected for its appeal to the largest possible number of listeners within that particular group, functioning to attract an audience to radio service whose most important business was selling ideology (1991: 169).

The state owned radio relied on record companies to provide the music and the record labels relied on the radio station for playing and publicizing their music thus increasing record sales. Thus, the relationshiop between the radio stations and the record labels was mutually beneficial; whereas for the musicians, it was what Bourdieu refers to as dominant/dominated, with the record label being the dominant while the musicians were being dominated. Though the musicians profited through gaining fame and income – compared to what the record labels made through the musicians and their music – the musicians continued reliance on record labels proves that they remained dominated. Through institutioanlized racism, social exclusion, limited economic sources, and ethnic segregation, these musicians were propelled to consume a certain type of music and thus make that particular type of music, which was made available to them as their frame of reference for producing their own creative work.

As a black recording artist myself, I can testify to the challenges of trying to autonomously make a living without the assistance of the various institutions such as the state owned broadcaster and record companies. In post-apartheid South Africa, it remains a great challenge to succeed without the aid of these institutions for financial support, even with the advent of the internet. Thus, one could argue that the music produced by the musicians is a direct result of their socio-economic, cultural, political, and historical circumstances. It is important to note that though disco was played on black radio stations, it was not played on the white radio stations. Principal technician at the SABC, Rob Lens, and senior archivist for sound restoration at the SABC, Marius Oosthuisen, both told me that disco was not played on the white radio stations because it was considered "evil". Oosthuisen pointed out that they never heard disco on air but bought the records from an Indian shop out of town. 'You could not find disco in the outlets in town such as OK' (interview 28 January 2011). Oosthuisen and Lens elaborated that because there was a lot of falsetto (for example in the Bee Gees sound) in disco, it was considered unmanly 'to sing like that', and therefore associated with gay culture; at the time homosexuality was illegal in South Africa (interview 28 January 2011). While the national broadcaster could not feed its own people 'demonic' music, it felt the music was appropriate for the 'natives'. Because it was dance music, it was believed that 'natives will respond to rhythm [rather] than harmonic or melodic elements' (Hamm 1991: 150). Secondly, disco's texts were apolitical and therefore met the Publications Board requirements for music to be played on air for black South Africans. South African trumpeter Hugh Masekela referred to disco as a 'social tranquilizer': "I love you, baby, we'll boogie all night. Shake your money-maker. Do it to me tonight. Do it to me three

times. Now we are trapped, man. Disco is a social tranquilizer; you don't recognise other things. We can't boogie for the whole year" (cited in Ansell 2005: 198).[26]

By 'other things', Masekela was referring to the political situation in the country in the 1980s. By this time "the struggle [had] intensified, censorship had been stepped up, even from the severe restrictions of the 1970s and woven more tightly into the structures of the police state" (Ansell 2005: 197). Musicians whose music was political went into exile and those who remained in the country had to comply with state policies or their music would be banned. Disco's non-political nature gave it a free pass with the state broadcaster, thus becoming an instant hit and before long, black South African musicians were appropriating disco into their own music practices (Hamm 1988: 33).[27] This can be seen in the music of all the musicians discussed above. Though some of their lyrics may refer to ethnic identity, like that of Shirimani and Penny, none of the music discussed is political. Therefore, although the musicians discussed partially became successful because of their artistic mastery, it is evident that the state broadcaster had influence over who became a success and who did not, which then again highlights the power relation between the state and the musicians; that is, the music is the result of the social infrastructure.

Conclusion

Ndlovu's music career seems to epitomize the fortunes of disco itself. He emerged into the music industry, quickly became a national icon and tragically died in the second year of his solo career. However, like the impact of disco, whose heyday was short-lived but with a legacy that continues to live on in other popular music such as house, hip hop, rap and techno (Bidder 2001, Brewster and Broughton 1999, Snoman 2004), Ndlovu's legacy lives on in the rhetoric of today's Tsonga disco artists. These artists may have created their own musical identities and they may no longer necessarily reference Ndlovu's sound in their music, but Tsonga disco remains their forefather.

As a subgenre, Tsonga disco attests to Holt's assertion of popular music genre being fluid. Though the label has remained, it is clear from the discussion above that the music continues to take on new shapes. Hamm's cross-fertilization also resonates throughout these examples as it has been observed that much of Tsonga disco uses both domestic and international genres while remaining apolitical. It is only the imitation that seems to be absent in Tsonga disco, as none of the musicians have ever directly mimicked American musicians. Importantly, the trajectory of Tsonga disco also reveals how popular music is influenced by socio-political circumstances.

In this article I traced the emergence of Tsonga disco. Further, I discussed the musical techniques employed by the musicians. Lastly, I argue that the music was influenced by the socio-political infrastructure. My findings include that, Ndlovu was the first musician to be labelled and marketed as a Tsonga disco musician. Peta Teanet, following Ndlovu's death, made reference to Ndlovu by citing some of the musical motifs

[26] See Madalane 2011

[27] See Madalane 2011

found in Ndlovu's music. Thus, he acknowledged Ndlovu's influence on him though he paved his own path and had his own 'idiolect'. Though Joe Shirimani and Penny Penny continue to use some of the musical elements found in Ndlovu's music, they also have paved their own musical route and remain unique in their own right. Lastly, I have also presented the views of the musicians and how they view their music, how the music has been developed, and how the socio-political enviroment played a role in how the music developed. There remains much space for further inquiry, such as investigation of audience reception, detailed music analysis, and more ethnographic inquiry into perspectives on the music, especially with regard to the ethnic mobilization subject.

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