

## SOME REFLECTIONS ON PLACE, TANGIBLE AND INTANGIBLE HERITAGE AND ON IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION

Fabio TODESCINI\*, Afrique du Sud / South Africa

<sup>1</sup> The Oxford English Dictionary defines heritage as “that which has been or may be inherited; **any property, and especially land**, which devolves by right of inheritance”.<sup>2</sup> The use of the hybrid term “cultural heritage” has, of course, expanded the meaning. With increasing emphasis being placed on the intangible, as contrasted to material (therefore, tangible) culture, there is a further shift in definition to a far more inclusive intellectual territory. Intangible heritage, by definition transcends land and sites, and their associative cultural and social meanings: it comprises non-place-bound rituals and the like, and can and does refer to pretty well anything that human and cultural creativity may wish it to mean. Whilst material fetishism is limiting in matters of cultural heritage, and while autochthonous and local African dimensions of cultural heritage must be placed centrally in many contexts where colonial cultural heritage constructions have tended to prevail, there are aspects of this shift that I have to be blunt, I find less than useful. Indeed, I would submit that “intangible cultural heritage” tends to engage with many interesting, but not always necessarily very relevant, heritage conservation discourses.

Given the marked lack of capacity that is a stark feature of the reality of heritage conservation management in the parts of Africa that I know, particularly in South Africa, the validity, viability and utility of this relatively recent widening and blurring of the conceptual armoury of heritage conservation thinking and practice tends to pose more problems than it solves.

Indeed, in my view, the increased tendency to undertake work under the banner of intangible heritage is tending to precipitate further neglect and erosion of significant tangible heritage resources that are under threat.

Even worse, I notice a growing tendency for heritage conservation agency bureaucrats to operate under the intangible heritage banner for internal agency political and power struggle purposes. As an architect, city planner and urban designer concerned with others about continuities between heritage conservation and necessary and appropriate development in a continent that has suffered the ravages of colonialism and the denigration of local culture, I have to note that the connection between place, memory, meaning and identity construction is not often assisted by speculation about intangible heritage, unless by intangible heritage we mainly mean the values that underlie the vital relationships between people and space and the interdependent constructions of identity that may materialize. Even then, the substantive content and meaning in a given context is far from simple.

Foucault once suggested that the study of social phenomena in pathological societies sometimes reveals clearly what is elsewhere less obvious. Perhaps this is so because of the raw instrumentality that seems to prevail in such contexts. Much of this paper draws from material prepared with a colleague, Derek Japha, and is about an instance of such raw instrumentality. It is intended to contribute to an already rich South African scholarly literature showing just how situational and fluid identity can be, and how various and often bizarre were the ways in which South African identities were constructed, thereafter to be imposed, rejected or assumed by the operation of coercion, choice or unselfconscious acculturation.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> The paper draws extensively from some previous research, as follows: notionally from Todeschini, F (2003) “Situating Settled Landscape Heritage Management in a Developmental Frame of Reference: some considerations and propositions” paper presented at the Simon Van Der Stel Heritage Symposium, Mossel Bay, 13-16 June, unpublished; substantively from Japha, D and F Todeschini, (forthcoming 2003) “Cultural Identity and Architectural Image in the Bo-Kaap, Cape Town”, in AlSayyad, N (ed) *The End of Tradition*, Routledge, San Francisco and London; notionally from Pistorius, P and F Todeschini, (2002) “Cultural Landscapes: a review of concepts and practice”, working paper presented at the Cultural Landscapes and Planning Workshop, September, University of Cape Town, unpublished; and notionally from Todeschini, F (2002) “Situating Buildings in a Broader Framework of Heritage: Settled Landscapes” paper presented at the Heritage Symposium 2002, Paarl, 15-17<sup>th</sup> June, unpublished.

<sup>2</sup> My emphasis.

---

<sup>3</sup> The first South African study to explore these issues, and one of the classic works on acculturation anywhere, was Mayer's Eastern Cape study demonstrating that similar people in rural Transkei communities responded to the indignities of segregation and migrant life with two distinct identities, “Red” and “School”, each with highly elaborated codes, practices and different constructions of the meaning of tradition. Mayer, P., *Townsmen or Tribesmen* (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, Second Edition 1971, first published 1961). Other examples are a study showing how different ethnic identities were assumed by men and women in a single community, Webster, D., “Abafazi Bathonga Bahihlakala: Ethnicity and Gender in a KwaZulu Border Community”, in Spiegel, A., and McAllister, P., *Tradition and Transition in Southern Africa*, (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1991), pp. 243 - 271; and a study showing how ethnic identities were brought into existence by circumstances as ephemeral as an esoteric academic dispute between missionaries as to how a group of languages should be codified, Harries, P., “The Roots of Ethnicity: Discourse and the Politics of Language Construction in South-East Africa” in *African Affairs*, 87 (No. 346, 1988), pp. 25-52. These later studies draw on obvious sources such as Hobsbawm and Ranger's *The Invention of Tradition* of 1983 and Said's *Orientalism* of 1991.

In this process, intangible, and even insubstantial and fabricated, heritage played a part.

The paper reflects on the conservation of a traditional environment called Bo-Kaap (fig. 1), a residential enclave in the fringe of the central city of Cape Town: the town's first area of houses for hire, developed specifically for the urban poor.

Some historical background is necessary to understand the cultural roots of Bo-Kaap. Between 1652 and 1806, when Cape Town was controlled by the Dutch East India Company, the colonial population was drawn from much of the Hanseatic League as well as Holland; there was a diverse population of slaves;<sup>4</sup> dispossessed Khoisan were increasingly forced into the colonial economy and urban environment; and the English occupation in the early 19th century brought British immigrants to enrich an already diverse gene pool. The environment these people created and shared (fig. 2), as depicted in this photograph of the 1850s looking across Bo-Kaap to the centre of the town, reflected cultural influences from the two colonising powers and the homelands of the various immigrant populations. Cape Town's builders, however, were limited by many local factors, and this and its complex cultural roots made Cape architecture distinctive, no-where more so than in Bo-Kaap.

The growth of Bo-Kaap and its character can be seen in the following sequence of illustrations: (fig. 3) a Rasch drawing captioned drawn from life of 1767, with the first block of small houses visible in the left background; (fig. 4) Cape Town's Plan in 1791 with indications that Bo-Kaap was about to grow; (fig. 5) the plan in 1827 with the block pattern of Bo-Kaap established; (fig. 6) a plan of 1865, showing the texture of row houses and courtyards in Bo-Kaap; and a wide-angle panorama (fig. 7) and a street scene from the late-19th century (fig. 8).

By the 1930s Bo-Kaap had become decrepid and was threatened with demolition. However, it avoided the fate of similar inner city areas such as District Six because of a discourse presenting it as the traditional environment of an ethnic identity called "Cape Malay" (fig. 9).<sup>5</sup>

This was an identity that was sufficiently exotic to be thought able to show a country obsessed with difference what it was to have the great desideratum of apartheid, an own culture, the subject of South Africa's curious brand of anthropology, *volkekunde*.<sup>6</sup>

The term "Malay", as used in South Africa, had roots in slavery but no ethnic meaning.<sup>7</sup> 63,000 slaves were imported to the Cape in the 18th and early 19th centuries, in approximately equal numbers from India, Africa, Madagascar and South East Asia, with less than one per cent from what is now Malaysia.<sup>8</sup> This diversity required some shared means of communication; a need at first satisfied by the trading languages of the Indian Ocean basin, Melayu and Malayo-Portuguese, the use of which was probably what gave the term "Malay" its local currency.

After about 1770 these languages were replaced by the indigenous Creole language of Afrikaans, the first recorded written instance of which was a translation of a passage from the Koran, penned in Arabic script.<sup>9</sup> This is an indicator of another ingredient in Cape slave identity, Islam, which was brought originally by Indonesian political exiles but was later spread mainly by Indian Muslim slaves from Bengal.<sup>10</sup> Throughout the 19th century, at the Cape the term "Malay" was used to refer to Muslims of whatever origin, including, according to contemporary commentators, "Arabs, Mozambicans, Khoi, Christian perverts and blooming Englishwomen", the latter described as having "gone Malay".<sup>11</sup>

<sup>4</sup> The contribution of slaves to Cape building culture is an interesting and much debated question of particular relevance to environments such as Bo-Kaap. While the case is strong that language and food customs, for instance, were creolised, no feature of architectural form at the Cape has been adduced by any historian of architecture as evidence of influence on local space making and building practices from any slave culture. Of course, many slaves, free-blacks and, after emancipation, ex-slaves were expert craftsmen in a range of building trades, and constructed many of the buildings in colonial Cape Town. But it seems that they built in an image that was imposed on them. The dissenting voice is the historian Robert Shell, but his case for slave influence on Cape architecture is based only on the necessity for architectural form to respond to slave arson and to security demands, not on demonstrated cultural transfers from slave places of origin. Shell, R., *Children of Bondage* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1994), Chapter 6.

<sup>5</sup> District Six was bulldozed in one of the most notorious apartheid removal exercises.

<sup>6</sup> *Volkekunde*, loosely translated as "the study of peoples", was a disreputable South African form of cultural anthropology propounding the concept of *ethnos*, the unit formed by a relationship between a people and their culture. According to proponents of *volkekunde*, *ethnos* is made cohesive by a genetic and psychic unity, creating by adulthood a *volkskonditioneerde persoonlikheid* (ethnically conditioned personality) that is difficult to change. See Sharp, J., "Can We Study Ethnicity?" *Social Dynamics*, 6 (1), 1980.

<sup>7</sup> For the origins of the term see Bradlow, F., "The Origins of the Early Cape Muslims" in Bradlow, F., and Cairns, M., *The Early Cape Muslims* (Cape Town: A. A. Balkema, 1978), p. 83-84. The term's first official appearance was in the census of 1875. See Ridd, R., "Creating Ethnicity in the British Colonial Cape: Coloured and Malay Contrasted", Africa Seminar paper, Centre for African Studies, UCT, 31st March, 1993, p. 9.

<sup>8</sup> For the origins of the term see Bradlow, F., "The Origins of the Early Cape Muslims" in Bradlow, F., and Cairns, M., *The Early Cape Muslims* (Cape Town: A. A. Balkema, 1978), p. 83-84. The term's first official appearance was in the census of 1875. See Ridd, R., "Creating Ethnicity in the British Colonial Cape: Coloured and Malay Contrasted", Africa Seminar paper, Centre for African Studies, UCT, 31st March, 1993, p. 9.

<sup>9</sup> See Davids, A., "The Words the Slaves Made", paper presented to the "Cape Slavery and After" Conference, UCT Department of History, 1989, p.1.

<sup>10</sup> Davids, A., *Mosques of Bokaap* (Athlone, Cape: S.A. Institute of Arabic and Islamic Studies, 1980), pp. 35-36 and p. 41.

<sup>11</sup> See Mayson, J., "Malays of Cape Town, South Africa", in *Transactions of the Manchester Statistical Society* (Manchester: Cave and Severs Printers, 1855), p. 11; and Duff-Gordon, L., *Letters From The Cape* (London: OUP, 1927), p. 37.

During the first half of the 20th century “Malay”, became a self-descriptive term for many Afrikaans-speaking Muslims with free-black or slave roots, who hoped that what was accepted by whites as an elite black identity would bring advantages in a racist context.<sup>12</sup> This position, subsequently to be vigorously opposed, came to be known as “Malayism”.<sup>13</sup>

Together with Malayists, a key role in the construction of the identity “Malay” was played by I.D. du Plessis,<sup>14</sup> poet and academic at the University of Cape Town, authority on “Malays”, friend and confidante of many Nationalist leaders and a future official in the Nationalist government.<sup>15</sup>

Du Plessis' academic and literary texts<sup>16</sup> set out to constitute “Cape Malay” ethnic subjects, with a shared ethnic heritage, physiognomy and group character. Their south-east Asian ancestors, according to Du Plessis,<sup>17</sup> were not the uncivilised men of the soil or the semi-civilised men of the sea, but the Orang Melayu, the Malay Men, the Javanese, Sudanese and Balinese who constituted the civilised Malays, with a culture, literature and religion.

These men, so we are told, were introspective, polite, kind to women, children and animals; inclined to speak slowly, to be passive and indolent, but with a tendency to run amok when aroused. Cape Malays, however, were bigger, with aquiline features indicating Arab infiltration, still with oriental reserve, though much less inclined to run amok. “Malays”, for Du Plessis, were a social asset, the trusted servants of the old settlers who had kept the group values of honesty, industry and respect for authority; and, like every people, their identity had always been rooted in a traditional terrain: (fig. 10, Chiappini St) the semi-eastern environment they had made in the Malay Quarter, Bo-Kaap, the centre of Malay life, just as London is the centre of English life.

These literary musings are significant because Du Plessis was soon to become a high official in a state in which ethnic identities were demarcated and separated by law, therefore well placed to impose his thought far beyond the boundaries of the poem and the text. The catalyst for him to do so was that the Malay Quarter, traditional home of the “Cape Malays”, was facing obliteration.

In the early 1930s there was constant agitation in Cape Town about slums. After the passage of the Slums Act in 1934 the Cape Town City Council began to declare slums and arrange for their demolition so that the land could either be sold to commercial interests or new workmen's flats could be built. By the late 1930s Bo-Kaap was a designated slum,<sup>18</sup> most properties had been expropriated and a massive renewal scheme had been designed,<sup>19</sup> of which this is one of the drawings (fig. 11).

The “Group for the Preservation of the Malay Quarter”, (fig. 12) led by Du Plessis and consisting of prominent white mainly Afrikaner intellectuals,<sup>20</sup> was formed in this context. It enlisted the support of the state heritage agency, the Historical Monuments Commission, and set out to block the Bo-Kaap renewal scheme and initiate a restoration program instead. While the City was reluctantly prepared to support some conservation, for the next 20 years its view was to remain that most houses in Bo-Kaap were decayed and best demolished.

<sup>12</sup> D.F. Malan, future nationalist prime minister, had said already in the 1920s that “the Malay community ... constructed the country's history together with the white man, ... [who] did not come here to bring civilisation to the Malays. They were always civilised, and they constructed a language together with the white man, which is therefore also their language”. See UG 20/1954, p. 32, quoted in Jeppe, S., “Historical Process and the Constitution of Subjects”, B.Hons Thesis in African Studies, UCT, 1986-87.

<sup>13</sup> For a history of Malayism, see Davids, A., “From Complacency to Activism: the Changing Political Mood of the Cape Muslims from 1940 to 1985”, Unpublished Paper, p. 5 ff. For a good summary of identity pressures, see a letter by the curator of the Bo-Kaap Museum, Nazeem Lowe, to the *Cape Argus*, 18/9/99.

<sup>14</sup> Our account of Du Plessis' role in the construction of Malay identity has benefited from the first study of the subject, Jeppe, S., “Historical Process and the Constitution of Subjects”, B.Hons Thesis in African Studies, UCT, 1986-87.

<sup>15</sup> Du Plessis had been at school with Hendrik Verwoerd, Nationalist Minister of Native Affairs, Prime Minister and chief theorist of the *apartheid* concept. He had been an employee of Dönges - minister in the Nationalist government from 1948-67 – when he had been a sports journalist and Dönges the editor of the influential Cape nationalist newspaper *Die Burger*. He was a friend of D. F. Malan, the first nationalist Prime Minister, and had been at university with Paul Sauer, Nationalist Minister of Transport. See Du Plessis, I. D., *Aantekeninge Uit Tynstraat*, (Kaapstad: Tafelberg-Uitgewers, 1975).

<sup>16</sup> The key texts in addition to the one listed above are *Lied van Ali, en Ander Gedigte* (Kaapstad: Nasionale Pers, 1931); *Uit die Slaamse Buurt: Kaapse Sprokies, Fabels en Legendes* (Kaapstad: Nasionale Pers, 1939); *Die Vlamme Fez: Verse deur I.D. Du Plessis* (Kaapstad: Unie-Volkspers, 1943); *The Cape Malays* (Cape Town: Maskew Miller, 1944, republished 1946, 1947, 1972); *Tales from the Malay Quarter* (Cape Town: Maskew Miller, 1945?); *The Malay Quarter and Its People* (Cape Town: Balkema, 1953).

<sup>17</sup> Except where otherwise indicated, this and the following paragraphs are reconstructed quotes and paraphrases from two of the texts listed above: *The Cape Malays*, Chapter 1, and *The Malay Quarter and Its People*, Chapter 1; and from the pamphlet issued by the Group (of which later), “The Malay Quarter: The Case for Preservation”, Unpublished, SAHRA Archive.

<sup>18</sup> See Truluck, T., and Cook, G., “Preservation of Bo-Kaap, Cape Town: changes in attitudes and actions”, in *Tree* 29: 1991, pp. 19-21. This paper was based on newspaper reports and records in the City Council Archive. Since the authors did not examine documents in the SAHRA (then National Monuments Council) Archive, the account they give of the preservation program is partial and inaccurate.

<sup>19</sup> This was for 1520 apartments, with 500 proposed for the site occupied by the existing housing, and the balance on the vacant Scotschekloof site, which the city had also acquired. This scheme was approved by the CCC's key planning committees in 1936. Drawings have not survived, except for those for a section of the Scotschekloof scheme, which are in the possession of the Cape Town City Council.

<sup>20</sup> The members included: Dr. E. Jansen, then Governor General who became Minister of Native Affairs in the Nationalist government; two Chief Justices, H. van Zyl, and E. Watermeyer; G. van Zyl, a former Governor General; C. Te Water, South African Ambassador to the court of St. James and I.D. Du Plessis.

Although in 1946 a block of 17 houses was jointly identified for restoration and restored over the next few years, the City pursued its demolition and renewal agenda, and tension continued to simmer until the preservationists invoked the intervention of the central state department responsible for managing racial segregation.

The environment for such intervention in a local matter had been radically altered by the Nationalist election victory in 1948, which placed the politics of ethnic identity solidly on the national agenda and saw Du Plessis take up a key position in the new state bureaucracy. At his prompting, a provisional Group Areas proclamation was issued,<sup>21</sup> the effect of which was to restrict ownership of property in Bo-Kaap to “Malays”, and to block the City from selling land for general commercial use. Since this did not prevent the demolition and renewal concept, provided that any new housing would be only for “Malays”, the City continued to pursue this option, producing a series of designs and continuing to demolish expropriated properties, while humouring the conservationists by promising to restore a few more houses, if they agreed to the redevelopment.

Du Plessis and the Monuments Commission finally lost patience and approached Du Plessis' Minister, P.W. Botha, who in addition to “Coloured Affairs”, under which “Malay” issues fell, was also responsible for the Group Areas Act and for the state-housing agency.<sup>22</sup> Botha persuaded the Cabinet to fund a restoration program and threatened that if the City did not execute it, then the state would expropriate the properties already expropriated by the City, restore them itself, transfer them back to the City and recover the costs.<sup>23</sup> The City capitulated and from then on worked on the restoration and reconstruction of Bo-Kaap with Monuments Council advisors, supervised by a specially formed state committee of which Du Plessis was a member.<sup>24</sup>

The restoration/reconstruction program had two aspects: replacing the existing community with one designated “Malay”; and reconstructing the environment to represent this “Malay” community with supposedly typical “Malay” architecture.

The replacement of the population was a significant apartheid removal exercise. The orthodox historical view was that the area was first inhabited by European artisans and some free-blacks, but that it had become predominantly “Malay” around 1850. In fact, while many Muslims did live there, it had never been exclusively “Muslim”. The first historian to examine street directories of the period, Achmat Davids, himself a Muslim and Bo-Kaap resident, concluded that Bo-Kaap's population had always been mixed, that as he put it, the poor of all races had always shared a common home there.<sup>25</sup> This was still so in the 1940s, by when in the first block of houses restored by the City less than 40 per cent of inhabitants were Muslim.<sup>26</sup>

Du Plessis had always blamed supposed social problems in Bo-Kaap on non-Malay outsiders. “Malay” memories of a once idyllic environment, he suggested, had been crushed between the millstones of conflicting cultures - by which he meant black people - and conservation therefore required both rehabilitation of “Malay” architecture and reconstitution of the diluted “Malay” community in an ethnically pure neighbourhood.<sup>27</sup>

This concept was taken up by the Monuments Commission, which suggested that restoration and cultural purity were linked, and that the state should therefore get rid of those other than “Malay”.<sup>28</sup> In 1964, Botha's department, by then bizarrely renamed “Community Development”, informed the City that it intended to remove “disqualified persons” from the area, and requested lists of the racial designations of Bo-Kaap inhabitants and resettlement plans for those other than “Malays”. Suitable “Malays” to take the place of those removed and to occupy restored and reconstructed houses were found through a survey conducted by Du Plessis' staff.<sup>29</sup>

Over the next 20 years the environment for this “Malay” community was subtly but progressively transformed by the conservation and reconstruction program, and to understand the nature of this transformation, we need to return to the urban and architectural history of the area.

The basic point is that in the general Cape Town context, there is nothing culturally unexpected about the Bo-Kaap environment. The street pattern was the same as that of all contemporary urban extensions, as shown in this plan of 1854 (fig. 13) where the New Market area and the first blocks of District 6 on the other side of town are also shown.

<sup>21</sup> Du Plessis' annual reports as Commissioner of Coloured Affairs make it clear that he regarded dealing with Group Areas Act issues as one of the major tasks of his Division and that his department co-operated closely with the Land Tenure Advisory Board – the Group Areas implementation agency later replaced by so-called Group Areas Boards. See, for example, the Report of the Commissioner of Coloured Affairs for the year 51/52, UG 45/52 (Pretoria: Government Printer), p. 9, where Du Plessis states that the Division of Coloured Affairs was in close touch with the Board's local committee in Cape Town.

<sup>22</sup> Letter from William Fehr to the Secretary of the HMC reporting the contents of a telephone call to Du Plessis, 5th May 1961. SAHRA Archive.

<sup>23</sup> See the report in the *Cape Times*, 1st May, 1965.

<sup>24</sup> The drawings for this scheme are in the possession of the Cape Town City Council. “Urban renewal” was *apartheid* speak for the removal of black people from inner city areas. This arrangement of responsibilities was an entirely logical move, given that the implementation of the Group Areas Act depended on the national housing program.

<sup>25</sup> Davids, A., “Community Participation in Conservation and Urban Regeneration: the Case of Bo-Kaap” in Japha, D., and Japha, V., (eds.) *Proceedings of the National Urban Conservation Symposium* (Cape Town: Oakville Press, 1990), p. 87. See also, Townsend-Freedman, L., and Townsend, S., *Bokaap faces and façades : a record of the passing scene in Cape Town's Malay Quarter with a brief account of its architecture and the Muslim inhabitants* (Cape Town: H. B. Timmins, 1977).

<sup>26</sup> MOH Survey, Cape Archives, 3/CT 4/2/1/1/720 20/6/46.

<sup>27</sup> Du Plessis I.D., and Lückoff, C., *The Malay Quarter and Its People* (Cape Town and Amsterdam: A. A. Balkema, 1953), Chapter 1.

<sup>28</sup> “Memorandum on the Proposed Proclamation of the Malay Quarter as a National Monument”, hand annotated as being by written by William Fehr for presentation to the Minister of the Interior at an interview on the 10th April, 1961. SAHRA Archive.

<sup>29</sup> SAHRA Archive.

Over the years Bo-Kaap buildings were also entirely typical of their periods, in terms of plans, block forms, details and materials. Initially, some were thatched, as in the case of the oldest surviving Bo-Kaap building (fig. 14, Spolander House). Others at the same time were flat-roofed, as in this early house (fig. 15) with a curvilinear parapet and Cape Dutch joinery. That these were the typical forms of Cape Dutch urban building is shown in a drawing of 1778 (fig. 16, Schumacher). Bo-Kaap buildings then took on the hybrid forms of the early period of British occupation, as in this flat roofed house (fig. 17) with English joinery and plaster details. Next came the international colonial forms of the Victorian and Edwardian periods (figs. 18-19).

None of these types, including the flat roofed house, presented in the Du Plessis discourse as the "Malay" traditional house, was linked to any particular cultural group in the town. If many Bo-Kaap buildings were flat roofed, this was because most late 18th and early 19th century urban buildings were flat roofed, as these images from outside Bo-Kaap show: a drawing of the 1820s of the area around the harbour (fig. 20, Sherwill); a drawing in town around 1850 (fig. 21); a photograph of a working class area in Simonstown (fig. 22); and a photograph of Toffee Lane, in another working class area in Cape Town (fig. 23).

In its current form, however, Bo-Kaap is an area reconstructed in an ideal image of "Malay" exoticism, privileging the flat roofed house type, with its supposedly eastern character. The aspiration to capture this image recurs in every conservation proposal from the very first block of 17 houses in the 1940s, and has persisted even in the conservation practices of the present day. Here are two examples of proposals for new buildings in Bo-Kaap from Council schemes done in 1959 and 1972 (figs. 24-25).

Bo-Kaap was reconstructed not by demolition and rebuilding in a single act, but by several tactics attuned to an environment in which unmaintained, Council-owned buildings were progressively deteriorating beyond repair. First, harder battles were fought to preserve what was thought typical than what was not. Second, subsequent additions thought to detract from the typical were removed (fig. 26), as in the case of the house on the left in this 1970s photograph, with restoration about to begin on the houses on the right. Third, collapsed or demolished buildings were replaced with flat roofed buildings, irrespective of their original forms. While many Bo-Kaap buildings were flat roofed, many were not, as can be seen in this panorama of about 1930, (fig. 18) also showing, incidentally, flat roofed houses with added verandahs. Council reports suggest that more than half of the present Bo-Kaap flat-roofed buildings were either copies of typical buildings measured on other sites, or reinterpretations of such buildings (fig. 27).

If the cultural and architectural conservationists therefore succeeded in constructing a "Malay" community in an idealised Malay setting, the present historical moment has brought new pressures and twists to a story not lacking in irony. Now that the Group Areas Act has been repealed and houses in Bo-Kaap can be bought and sold freely on the open market, proximity to town and quaint charm have made it susceptible to gentrification. Many new buyers are not Muslim, and some Muslim residents now claim, as did Du Plessis, that the influx of outsiders will destroy the local fabric of the area. A public participation process initiated recently by the City with resident Muslims evoked widespread concern for the protection of what they saw as their religious, cultural and architectural heritage.

In this new context, the identity "Malay" is once more contested. A year ago a newly formed group called the Forum for Malay culture in South Africa proposed that Bo-Kaap should be renamed the Malay Quarter. The majority of residents at a public meeting resisted this to the extent that local Muslim politicians had to intervene to restore order in the face of severe confrontation. Thus, for now, Bo-Kaap keeps its name.

What have been the authentic roles of place – memory – meaning: preserving intangible values in monuments and sites in this cameo story?

---

## ABSTRACT

Cultural landscapes typically comprise intangible as well as tangible elements, both 'natural' and 'modified'. To their regular users, whose cultures have constructed them at least in part, these landscapes have significant meanings. Sometimes the cultural significance of such landscapes are obvious even to outsiders, but typically, even in those cases, hidden meanings and levels of significance are real to some and not to others. In the general South African context of rapid population growth, urbanization and new settlement establishment, both the identification and the management of intangible elements of cultural landscapes has to be strongly tied to contemporary developments: in other words, the management of cultural landscapes, on the one hand, has to be conceptually and practically linked to development planning and spatial adaptations, on the other. Utilizing a range of material from South Africa, the paper makes proposals for an appropriate conceptual and methodological framework for the proper conflation of intangible elements, when consideration is given to policy concerning cultural landscapes and planning.

---

## \*Fabio TODESCINI

Prof. Fabio Todescini is an architect, city planner and urban designer and is active in academia and professional practice. He is a past Director of the School of Architecture and Planning at the University of Cape Town. He is Program Convenor of the Master of City Planning and Urban Design, the Master of Architecture (Urban Design), and the Master of Philosophy (Southern and East African Research Cooperation for Habitat) Degree Programs. His research interests include: issues of urban structure and form, urban design, and conservation planning. He has published work in the fields of conservation planning, planning history, urban growth management, transportation policy and local area policy planning. He does contract research and professional work for NGOs and government departments on policy discourses in the fields of urban structure and form and conservation planning, with a particular focus on Western Cape settlements.