

## 150 Buitengracht (erf 3032), Exhibition Project

### “Boundaries & Fusions: Bo-Kaap’s Buitengracht Street”

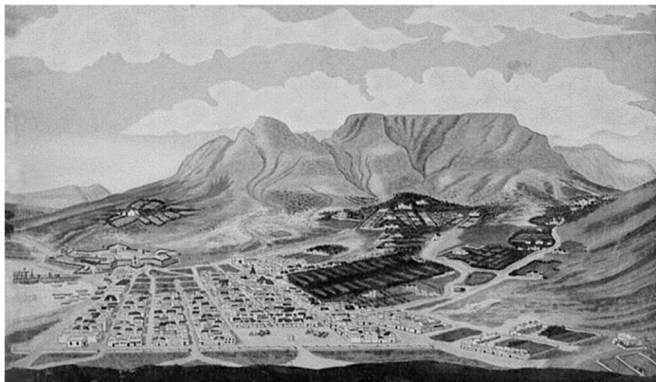
Prepared by Dr. Katie Mooney

#### Background

The developer has expressed an interest in utilising a part of the new development as an exhibition space. The exhibition space will accentuate the visual corridor to 148 Buitengracht (which accommodates a curvilinear parapet house classified as a Grade IIIa heritage resource) whilst encouraging heritage awareness and the sharing of multiple narratives about Bo-Kaap’s layered history. The new building is a meeting point between the past and the present on a shared street with a varied and collective identity, this intersection or fusion, it is suggested, could be explored in an installation the proposed exhibition space.

#### Focusing on Bo-Kaap

*In this provisional and temporal space, the unifying factor is the shared place in which participants dwell, however variously that place is understood and imagined (Cardinal, 2001).*



*Part of a panorama of Cape Town by Johannes Schumacher dated 1777, (Western Cape Archives Repository, M165).*

Cape Town is South Africa’s second largest city, remnants of its colonial and apartheid planning and systemic injustices are etched into the city’s majestic mountain and sea ‘scapes’. Located on the fringes of the CBD lies the residential area of the Bo-Kaap which was established during the last two decades of the eighteenth century and seen as an integral part of the City Centre.

Cape Town is often described as a historic and diverse city deriving its character from its multi-faceted history, the inter-relationships between and among its peoples, the “dramatic scenic setting, historical townscapes and cultural landscapes; its cultural and heritage diversity and the traditions and memories that arise from its past and give life to it in the present.”<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> IMEP, 2005 and Cultural Heritage Tourism Strategy and Action Plan for Cape Town, second draft, prepared by ED/GE Tourism solutions, p. 10.

## Boundaries & Fusions



*Buitengracht Street, circa 1910 (Western Cape Archives Repository, AG16798).*

The cultural use of space has long since been recognised as a way in which the quotidian is navigated and organised by individuals, groups and communities. The way in which shared places, geographical location, neighbourhood ties, cultural nodes and spatiality contribute towards the constitution of cultures and community identities has similarly been acknowledged by anthropologists, community leaders, geographers, government officials, heritage practitioners, historians and urban planners alike. These interactions with urban spaces; boundaries and everyday living on the streets have been explored in a number of research projects some academic and others less so.<sup>2</sup> However shared experiences of the street and cultural landscapes have not been widely presented in exhibitions about the Bo-Kaap.

## Voices & Memories



*Minstrels in the Bo-Kaap, 2014, (Ian Landsberg, Cape Argus)*

The voices of Bo-Kaap residents are for the most part largely absent and muffled.<sup>3</sup> As the oldest residential area in Cape Town, Bo-Kaap is a place of fascinating memories about colonial, apartheid and post-apartheid pasts. Its spatial development largely as a response to increasing immigration, the emancipation of slaves and a demand for housing with moderate rental rates for growing local and immigrant populations is part of its fabric. It is also home to rich histories of mosques and the birth of Islam at the Cape. The Bo-Kaap produced legendary sporting (Hassan Howa and Fahgmie Solomons), performing arts and musical icons (Salie Allie and his sons Yusuf and Armien; the Dante Brothers) and unique musical traditions (Malay choirs;

---

<sup>2</sup> respectively, the Centre for Popular Memory's 2007/8 "Street Stories from Klipfontein, Lansdowne and Main Road" project and Cape Town Partnership's community paper Molo's 2015 series entitled "The World of Bree Street: One Street Many Stories". Further afield Humans of New York is another example of street stories as told by residents.

<sup>3</sup> Although there is a museum in the Bo-Kaap with informative installations, including a video installation about the Bo-Kaap, the history of the Bo-Kaap as told by residents does not feature. In part this could be because of confined exhibition space but also because the museum has not embarked on oral history gathering projects.

Christmas Bands and Minstrel Troupes). The Bo-Kaap's cultural heritage landscape is replete with sites of memory and places of significance such as Lion Battery and Noon Day Gun; Tana Baru Cemetery, the oldest Mosque in South Africa and the oldest houses in Cape Town. The exhibition space and new development is in close proximity to these places.

### Exhibiting 150 Buitengracht & Bo-Kaap Histories



No 148 Buitengracht, Bo-Kaap, undated, (Elliot Collection, E1882, Western Cape Archives Repository).

The exhibition space will be located in a new building on a site located next to one of the oldest houses of the Bo-Kaap. This positioning creates a unique opportunity to initiate a conversation about temporal spatial identities along Bo-Kaap's Buitengracht Street in the broader historical context of Cape Town's transitory cultural landscapes and boundaries. The exhibition space itself juxtaposes the old and new, and the past and present and a fusion of the past and present. The exhibition's main tangible artefacts are the two contrasting sites and their shared location on Buitengracht Street. Site histories could frame the exhibition which would expand to a presentation of interactions and stories of the people that live and work along Buitengracht street. The exhibition could be a combination of illustrated graphic panels featuring select archival material documenting site histories and a soundscape of oral testimonies about living and working on Bo-Kaap's Buitengracht Street.

### Archival collections



Map of Cape Town streets, 1865, (Digital Collections, University of Cape Town)

There are archival collections including maps, deeds of transfer; estate files; and photographs that document the histories of the key sites. In the case of 150 Buitengracht, land ownership reflects urban developments of the City and racial, socio-spatial segregationist policies that were introduced in pre-Apartheid (such as the Slums Act) and Apartheid (for example the Group Areas Act) periods. It must be stressed that although 150 Buitengracht has an enduring history the

built fabric altered many times in its early history and the former buildings were in a state of disrepair and had no heritage value.

### *Oral testimonies and stories*



*Bo-Kaap Stoeps, circa 1950s, (Luckhoff Collection, National Library of South Africa, Cape Town Campus).*

Whilst the history of the Bo-Kaap's development has been widely documented, oral history projects about the Bo-Kaap are rare. The 'lived' experiences of Bo-Kaap residents has not been systematically gathered, preserved or presented.<sup>4</sup> By interviewing a select group of Bo-Kaap residents the exhibition will provide a unique view of the Bo-Kaap as told by residents and develop a co-produced (with interviewees) oral history collection about contemporary city life in

one of Cape Town's oldest residential areas.

Although the content and themes of the exhibition require refinement the overall aims of the exhibition are to:

- present the Bo-Kaap's histories as told by its residents
- promote heritage awareness, and
- encourage the sharing of memories and multiple narratives about the past.

---

<sup>4</sup> An exception and of interest to this project Helen Gibb's 2011 documentary *The Quarter* submitted as part of her Honours project at the University of Cape Town. The documentary investigates issues of identity and community, and the loss thereof. To view the film: visit <https://helengibb.wordpress.com/tag/bo-kaap/>