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Inner-city ritual centre: reflect + facilitate culture

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03

johannesburg inner city

chapter overview

This paper aims to develop a method of including the discourses and the cultural practices of the marginalised black people in the architectural representation of the inner city. This chapter illustrates the marginalisation and exclusion of blacks both physically and in architectural representation. The historical exclusion of black discourses in the built environment will be illustrated by photographic collage which shows the importation and prevalence of western architectural styles and typologies. The chapter will list some of the segregational laws and illustrate the prevalent attitude that blacks did not belong in the city.

The chapter demonstrates the demographic shift that has occurred in the Johannesburg inner city. It also investigates layman attitudes towards cultural practices and architectural representation in the city, and contrasts these against the official plans for culture in the city. The hybrid nature of post colonial culture will be used as theoretical support of the notion that the black people's embrasure of western modernisation and urbanisation is not a complete negation of their traditional black practices and discourses. These people perform practices and hold values that are not entirely facilitated and reflected in the inner-city. An argument will be made for the development of a new cultural building typology "The Inner City Ritual Centre," which would facilitate some of the marginalised cultural practices.

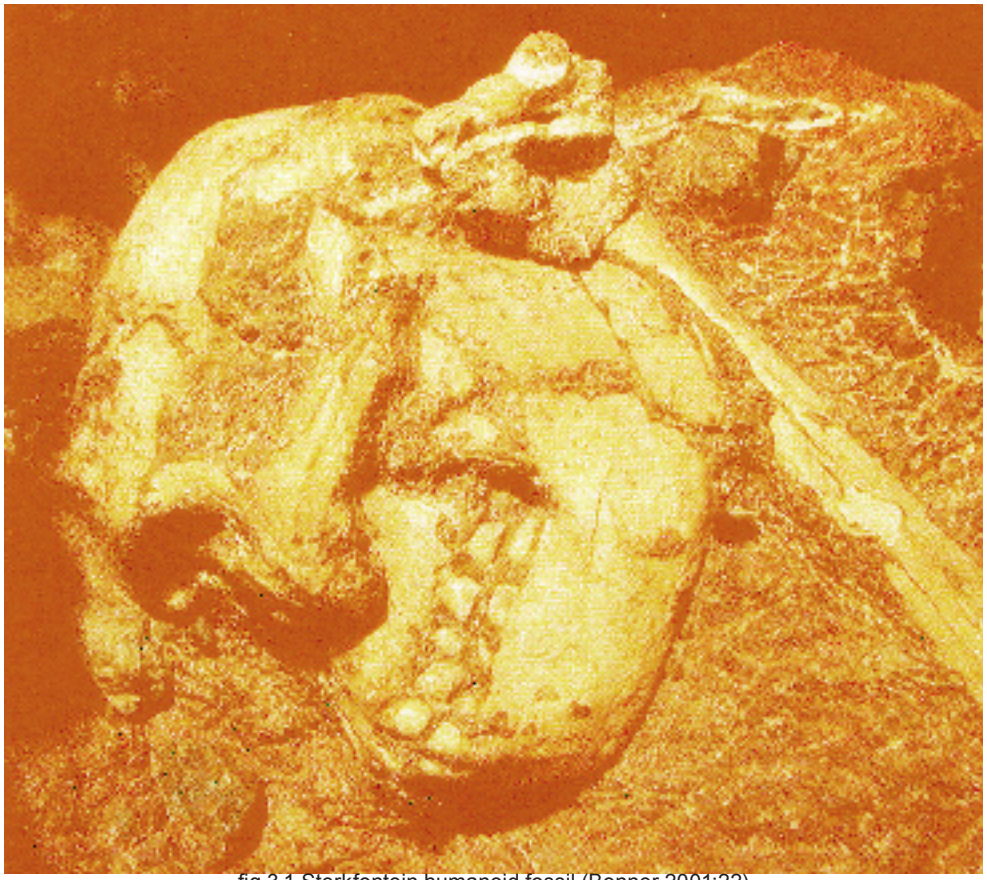


fig 3.1 Sterkfontein humanoid fossil (Bonner 2001:22)



fig 3.2 eland rock carving (Bonner 2001:139)

Archeologists have discovered an area slightly north of Johannesburg, known as The Cradle of Mankind. There is evidence to suggest that it was the San people and their ancestors who first occupied the areas from the Magaliesberg to the Witwatersrand hills (Bonner 2001). Fossils, tools and rock art are the only remaining evidence of these people's existence. A recurrent theme of San rock art is the eland bull, which they believed possessed mystical powers (Bonner 2001). In 2008 an eland sculpture (mentioned in greater detail in chapters to follow) was erected in Braamfontein in an attempt to acknowledge the first inhabitants of these lands and to give a glimpse of the forgotten narrative.

According to Bonner (2001), the Twsana/Sotho people occupied this same region of Guateng from the Witwatersrand to the Magliesberg (named after the Tswana chief Mogale) in very large village settlements. These settlements were recounted by explorer William Burchell who described them in 1812 CE "as sprawling villages with populations in excess of ten thousand people." (Chipkin 1993:3).

Tswana Sotho and Ndebele



figure 3.3The town of Dithakong drawn by William Burchell in 1812 showing a typical pre colonial Twsana village in Witwatersrand area (Chipkin 1993:2)

The Tswana/ Sotho tribes controlled the area until Mzilikazi fleeing from tribal conflict in the south brought fierce battles and subjucated the Tswana people. According to Bonner (2001:177), the Tswana chiefdoms already weakened by internal disputes and famine could not resist the military organisation of the Ndebele.

Around the 1830's the war weary Voortrekkers dissatisfied with British rule in the Cape and hungry for a land of their own, started to penetrate into African held land in the interior. In 1832 Harris a big game hunter in the region recalled that the "intrusion into the interior, had kindled a flame which could only be quenched with blood." (Bonner 2001:187)

The Voortrekkers routed Mizilikazi who fled north and occupied the area known today as Matebeleland, in the south of Zimbabwe. The Tswana tribes who had helped drive out Mzilikazi "returned to their lands to find the Boers firmly in occupation, and many of them became landless labourers." The Boers named the Magaliesberg after chief Mogale but not all his land was returned to him, further stoking the flames of racial tension.



fig 3.4 painting of boer camp by Charles Bell (Bonner 2001:22)

Chief Mogale attempted to orchestrate an uprising but was defeated and consequently he fled with many of his people to the area controlled by the Sotho chief Moshoeshoe near the Free State and Lesotho.

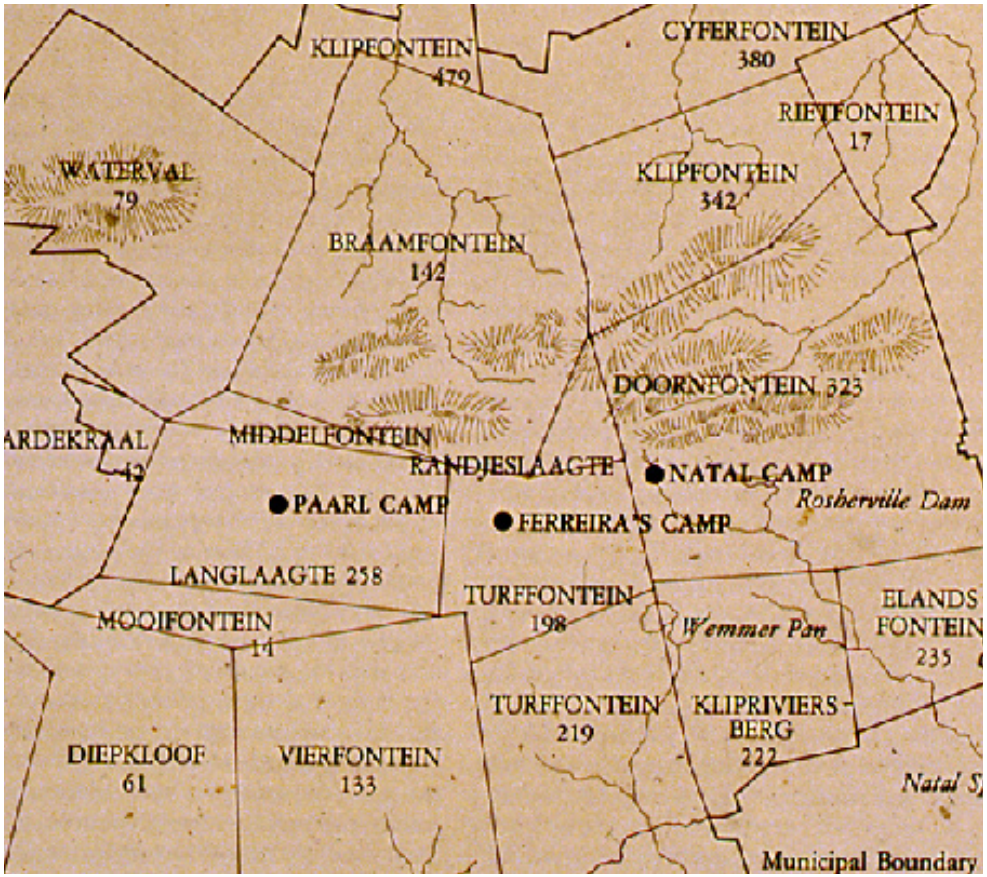


fig 3.5 farm boundaries and mining camps (van der Waal 1986:1)

The land was divided for agricultural purposes by the Boer farmers as shown in fig 3.5. The area indicated above as Randjeslaagte was the left over land, which was not claimed for agricultural purposes because of the lack of water and inaccurate survey methods (Bonner 2001) This left over land then reverted to government ownership. .

gold fever 1886

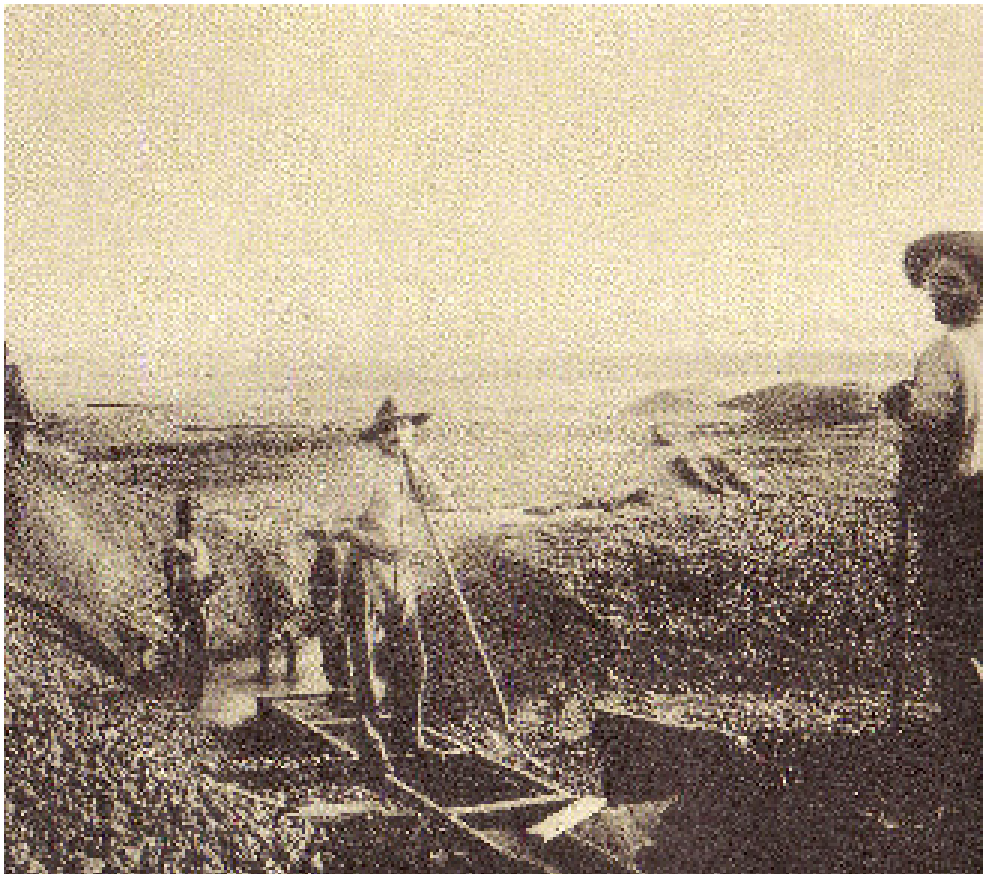


fig 3.6 early mining (Bonner 2001:201)



fig 3.7 farm boundaries and mining camps (van der Waal 1986:1)

In 1886 C.E. gold was found in the Witwatersrand and almost overnight the area was inundated by diggers and prospectors all seeking to make their fortune in mining (Bonner 2001). Initially the town of Johannesburg was laid out on the Randjeslaagte which was situated conveniently between the two biggest ‘diggers’ camps. The site was divided up using the grid system which was in line with Colonial tradition and offered the most economical use of land (Silverman 2007). The architectural development of Johannesburg is well documented and the following pages only give a pictorial glimpse of the some of the predominant architectural styles of each period.

mining camp 1886-1890

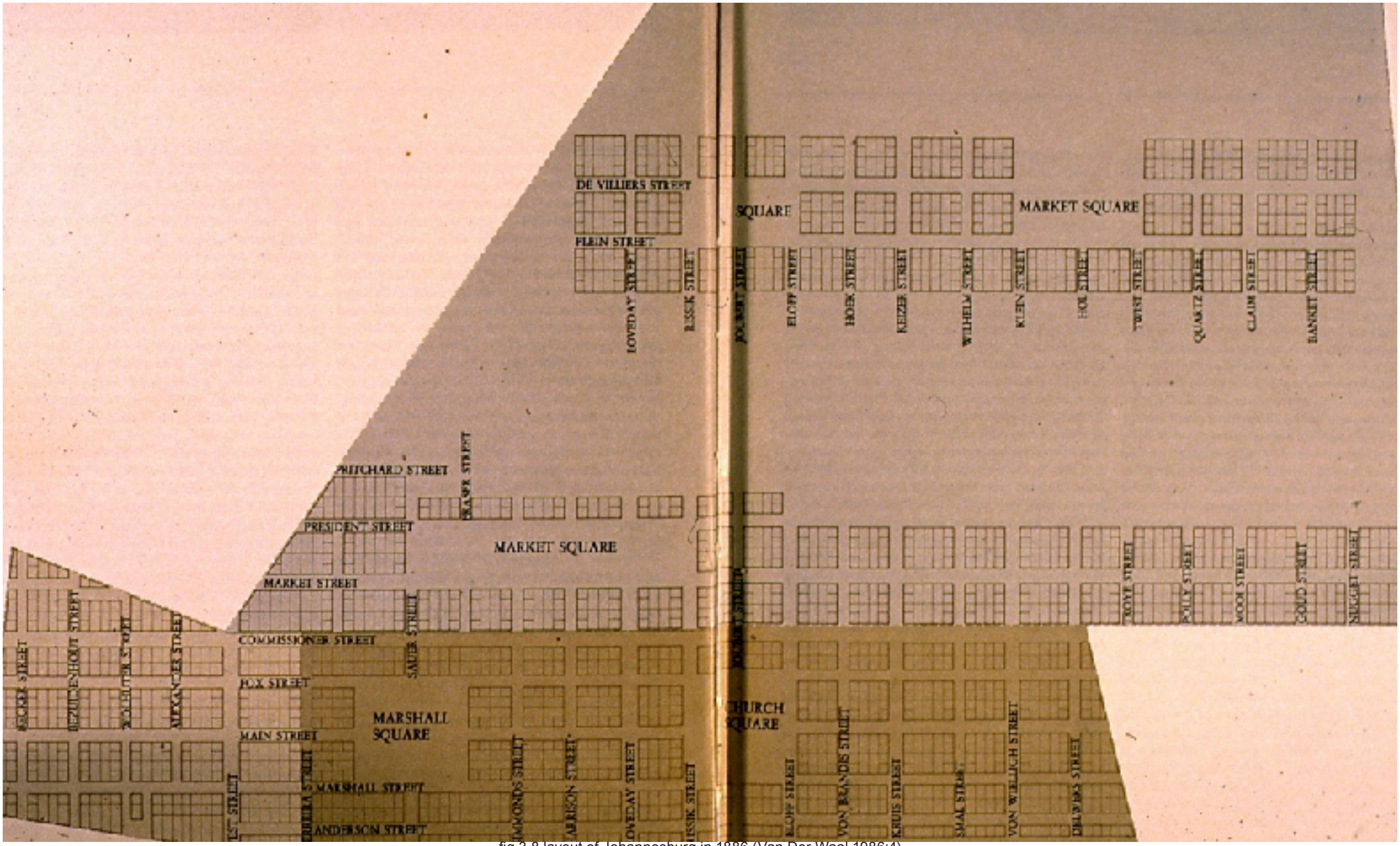


fig 3.8 layout of Johannesburg in 1886 (Van Der Waal 1986:4)

victorian town



fig 3.9 corner house 1895 (Van Der Waal (1986:66)



fig 3.10 market square 1890 (van der Waal 1986:56)

By 1890 CE the wealth generated from the mining activities had propelled the small mining camp into a Victorian mining town (Van Der Waal 1986).

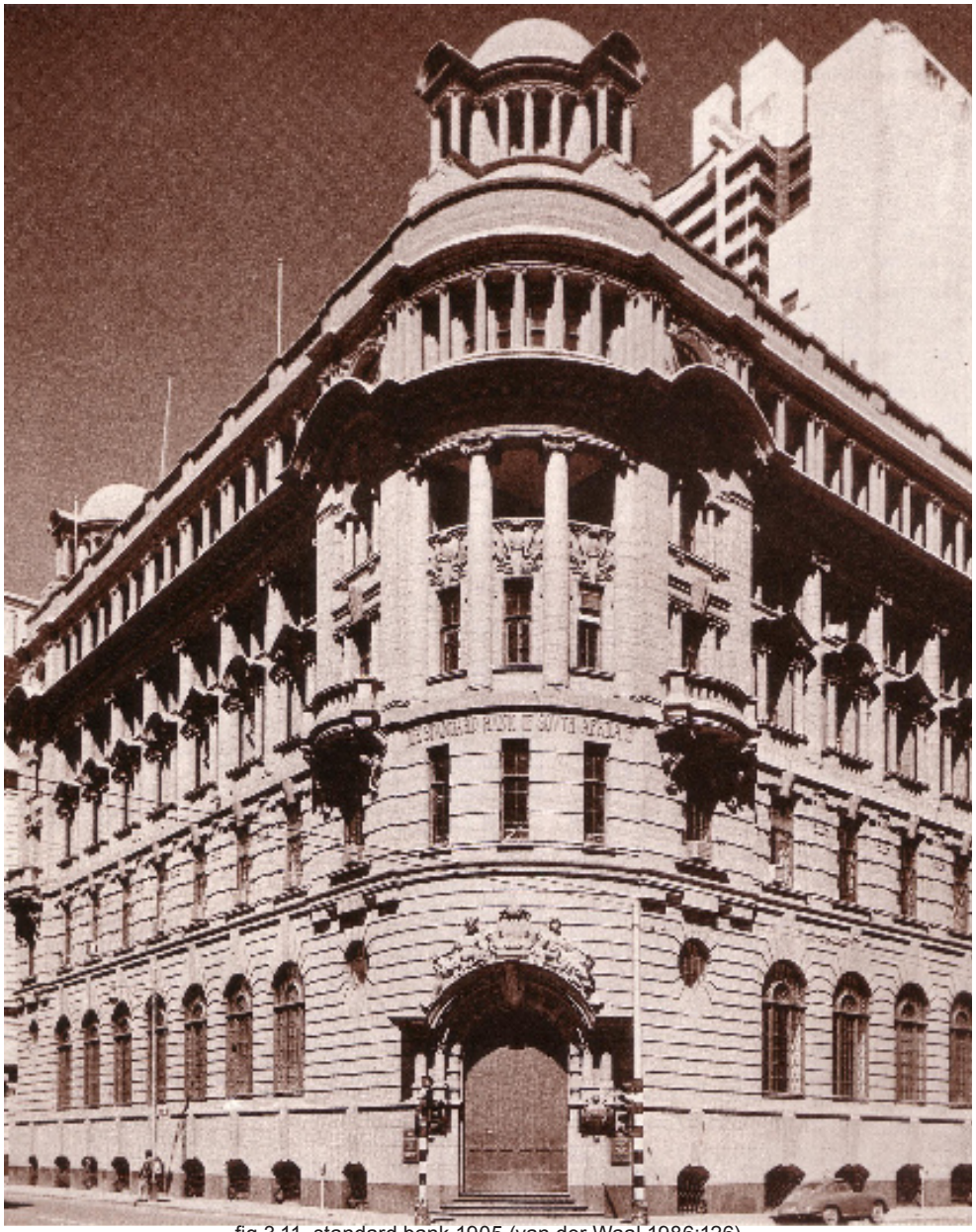


fig 3.11 standard bank 1905 (van der Waal 1986:126)

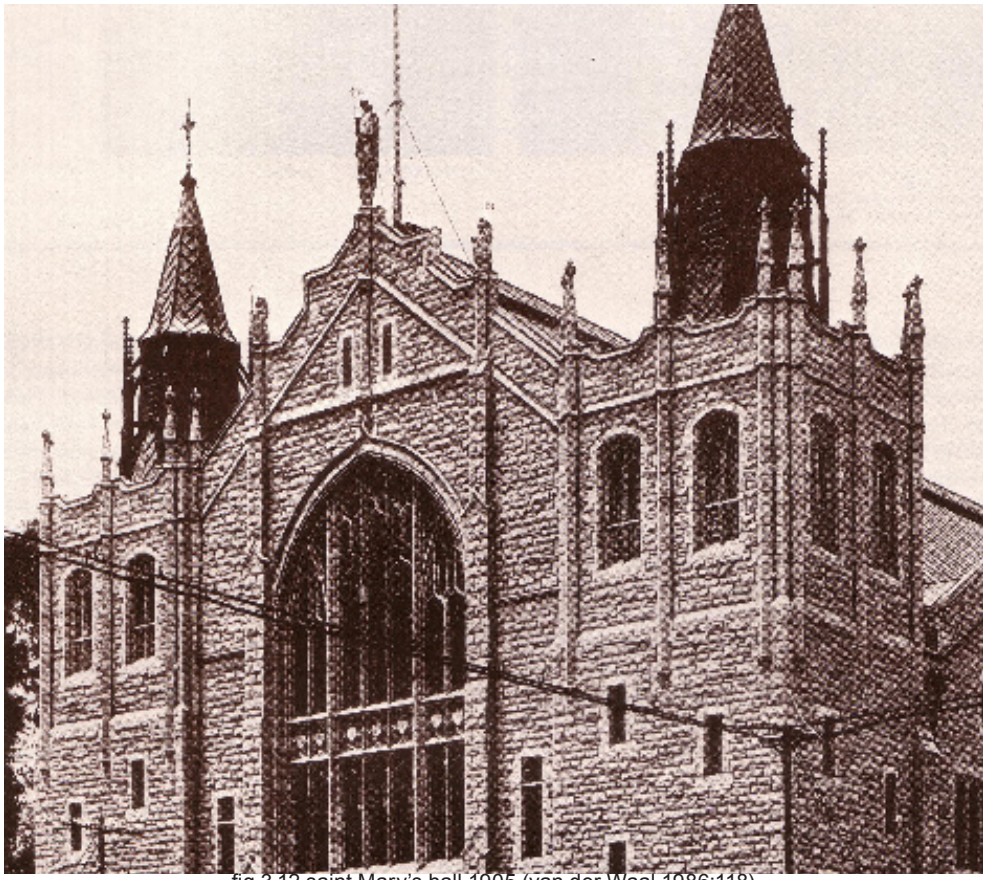


fig 3.12 saint Mary's hall 1905 (van der Waal 1986:118)



fig 3.13 radoma court 1938 (Van Der Waal 1986:66)

racial exclusion and marginalistaion -brief history

Without dwelling on the entire history of Apartheid and colonialism the following section derived from Chipkins (1993) narrative of the inner-city illustrates that black discourses and practices were excluded from architectural representation within the Johannesburg inner-city. The focus is on the inner city hence townships are only briefly covered.

Chipkin (1993:195), states that black people were present in Johannesburg from its very conception, driven to the city by “vast scale dispossession,” these people lived on the fringes of society. Early black settlers were found on the “peripheries of mining properties and abandoned claims or encamped on wasteland adjacent to garbage dumps and spoil tips” (Chipkin 1993:197).

In 1904 the bubonic plague broke out in the kaffir and coolie locations of the Johannesburg inner city prompting the municipality to rased them to the ground. The land they had occupied, was subsequently renamed Newtown. Black people also lived in slumyards on white owned properties, in and around the innercity from Fordsburg to Vrededorp (Chipkin 1993).
In 1922, the Stallard commission on local government carried the following recommendation with regard to black people “the native...should only be allowed to enter urban areas, which are essentially the white man’s creation, only insofar as he is required to minister to the needs of the white man and should depart therefrom when he ceases so to minster” (Chipkin 1993:200).
White people relied on the idea of the impermanence and invisibility of black settlements to cope with the moral dilemma of marginalisation (Chipkin 1993), “White persons lived in suburbs, black statistics occupied compounds or locations; and redundant natives lived somewhere in kraals in remote areas.” (Chipkin 1993:200). In 1923 the Urban Areas Act was passed, this act laid the foundation of the racially segregated city.

Other laws which served to marginalise blacks in the city are the Group Areas Act, Act No 41 of 1950, Prevention of Illegal Squatting Act, Act No 52 of 1951, Natives (Abolition of Passes and Co-ordination of Documents) Act, Act No 67 of 1952 Reservation of Separate Amenities Act, Act No 49 of 1953 (Bevon 2004).

There is a long and well documented history of racial marginalisation in the Johannesburg inner city. As this is not a historical paper this history has only been covered briefly. For further reading on this topic, refer to Chipkin’s book “Johannesburg Style” and Van der Waal’s book “From Mining Camp to Metropolis”

demographic shift



fig 3.14 Image of Johannesburg innercity (Author)

According to Beavon, (2004) the racial transformation of the inner city started in the mid seventies and by the eighties, parts of the inner city particularly Joubert Park and Hillbrow had become overcrowded black ghettos.

The financial lure of present day Johannesburg, results in ever increasing flows of rural to urban, as well intercontinental migration. The present day inner city is predominantly inhabited by relatively poor blacks as illustrated by the demographic charts in fig 3.15-3.18. Official statistics place the population of the inner city at approximately two hundred and fifty thousand. However, it is believed that the actual population of the inner city could be substantially higher, due to the vast number of illegal immigrants who often have no fixed abode and constantly try to avoid detection. Ninety percent of the inner city inhabitants are black and half of them are between the ages of twenty and thirty. It is a single male dominated society, with sixty five of the population being male and sixty one percent being single. It is a relatively poor population as only twenty three percent of the households have a combined monthly income of between five thousand and three thousand Rand. Forty seven percent of house holds, live on less than three thousand rand per month. The rentals range from about one thousand two hundred Rand per month for a bachelor flat to over two thousand one hundred Rand for a three bedroom apartment. These rentals in relation to the population's disposable income are high, forcing people to share accommodation through subletting. This factor combined with the national housing shortage, leads to overcrowding and dilapidation of buildings within the inner city.

demographics

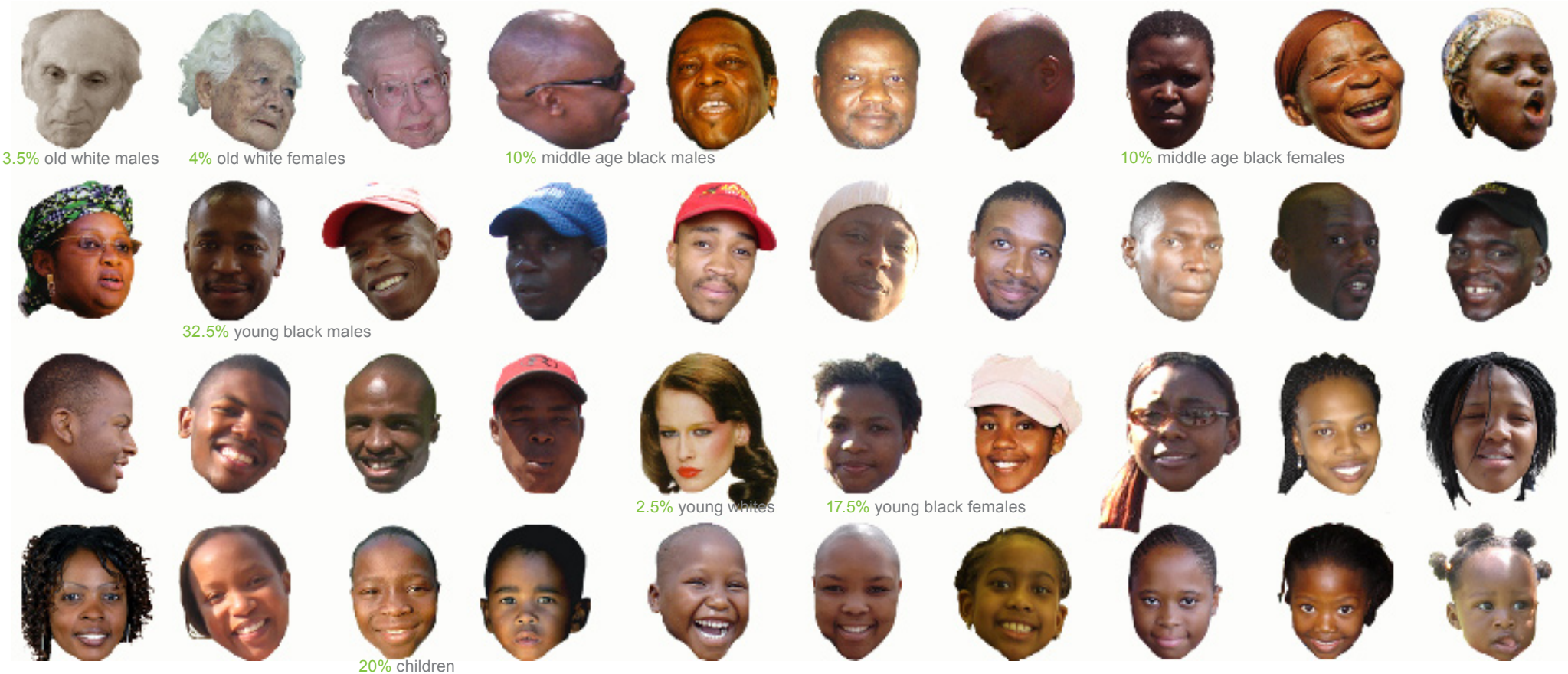


fig 3.15 diagram showing demographics of the inner city derived (Beavon 2004)

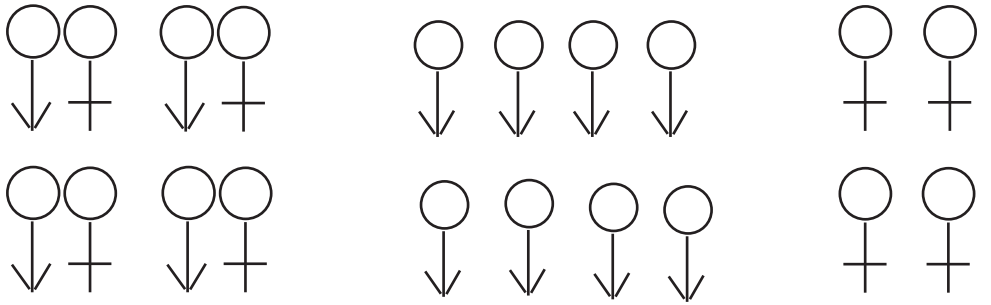


fig 3.17 diagram showing house hold incomes in the inner city derived (Beavon 2004)



fig 3.18 diagram showing house hold incomes in the inner city derived (Beavon 2004)

culture-a lived reality

The following conclusions can be drawn from the responses of twenty respondents, who were randomly selected and interviewed with the aim of ascertaining their views on culture and the inner-city built environment. (for raw data see appendix 1)

Most respondents assert that carrying out cultural practices is important because it fosters a sense of collective identity and belonging in society. In this regard, it was clear that inhabitants of the inner city thought that the city provided inadequate facilities for the performance of many cultural rituals and rites. Respondents complained about having to travel to rural areas or townships for functions such as weddings, funerals and christenings. Those unable to travel to perform such practices used informal spaces in the city as shown in fig 3.19.

Many respondents complained that the city had no place for the ritual slaughter of animals which they uphold as a major constituent of their belief system. A particular respondent, illustrated the notion of cultural hybridity when he pointed out that, due to spatial constraints he sacrificed chickens, which are normally unacceptable by the ancestors. He also pointed out the informal trader that regularly sold him live chickens in the inner city (fig 3.13).

When asked weather they made use of the cities many cultural facilities such as museums and art galleries, most respondents displayed disinterest.

The general consensus on culture and the form of the built environment was that, urban spatial configurations altered traditional ways of living.

Most respondents could not offer opinions on the link between the aesthetic quality of buildings and culture.



fig 3.13 Image showing chicken vendor (Author)



fig 3.19 Image showing chicken sacrifice in the city (NA:2008)

city of johannesburg plans for culture

The city of Johannesburg (CoJ) has developed what it terms an “integrated development plan” for the inner city in which the city’s position on culture and the provision of cultural facilities is outlined. According to the CoJ “Arts, culture and heritage embraces; custom, tradition, belief, religion, language, crafts and all art forms like music, dance, the visual arts, film, theatre, written and oral literature. It permeates all aspects of society and is an integral part of social and economic life” (CoJ 2004)

The city intends to focus cultural activities in the city, within what is termed the cultural arc linking the constitutional court in Hillbow to the Newtown precinct (Dinath 2006). In order to reposition arts, culture and heritage as major contributors to the economy of the inner city, the CoJ proposes the following capital projects; two museum upgrades, upgrading a cultural village, upgrading of an art gallery and two heritage sites as shown in the fig 3.20. (Dinath 2006)

It is clear that the CoJ’s policy on culture within the city, focuses on art galleries and museums “which are often listed as cultural resources of the city that should or do form part of cultural regeneration projects. However these types of ‘cultural’ facilities are less accessible to the everyday public and only validate certain formalised and established forms of cultural production. In this way they can be exclusionary. (Zukin 1995)

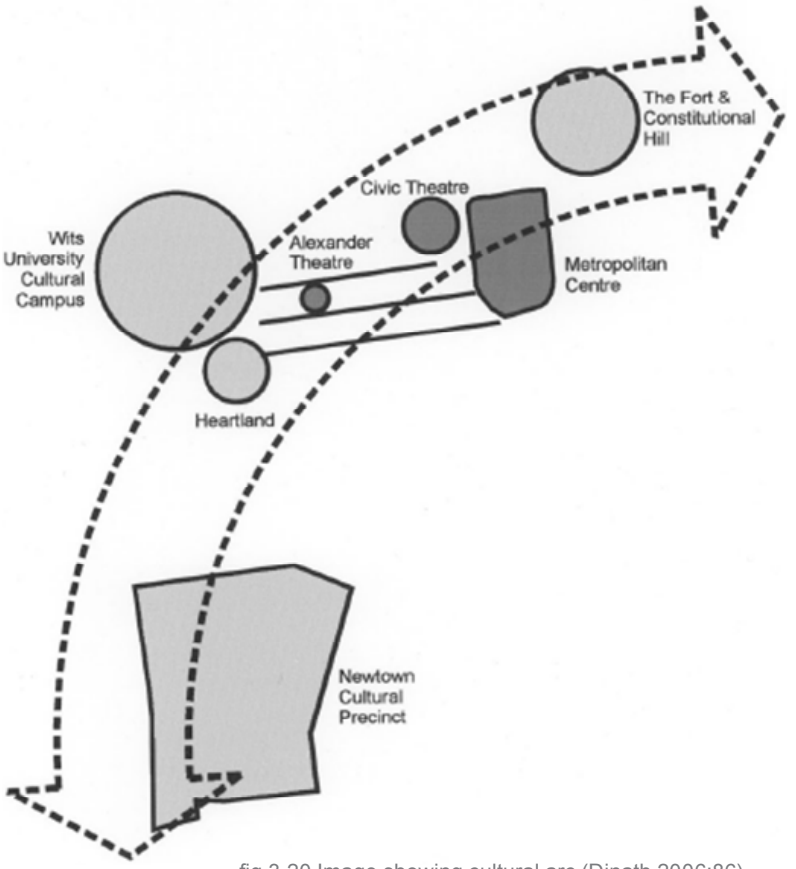


fig 3.20 Image showing cultural arc (Dinath 2006:86)

The cultural village named the Lesedi Village sits just outside the inner-city limits. According to Dinath (2006) such developments tend to reduce and sanitize perceived cultural practices, religious rites, ethnic rites and festivals to match tourist expectations resulting in a type of “staged or reconstructed ethnicity” (Dinath 2006:131). Dinath (2006:131) further states that in such environments “tourists get staged authenticity; instead of getting exotic culture, they get kitsch”

It can be argued that many of the cultural facilities proposed by the city are aimed at increasing spending within the city and are often targeted at pockets of tourists (Dinath 2006). While the investment in arts and institutes of high culture is commendable; the CoJ, whose definition of culture encompasses “custom, tradition, belief and religion” (CoJ 2004), should attempt to facilitate the marginalised cultural practices of the inner city’s inhabitants.

effect of marginalisation

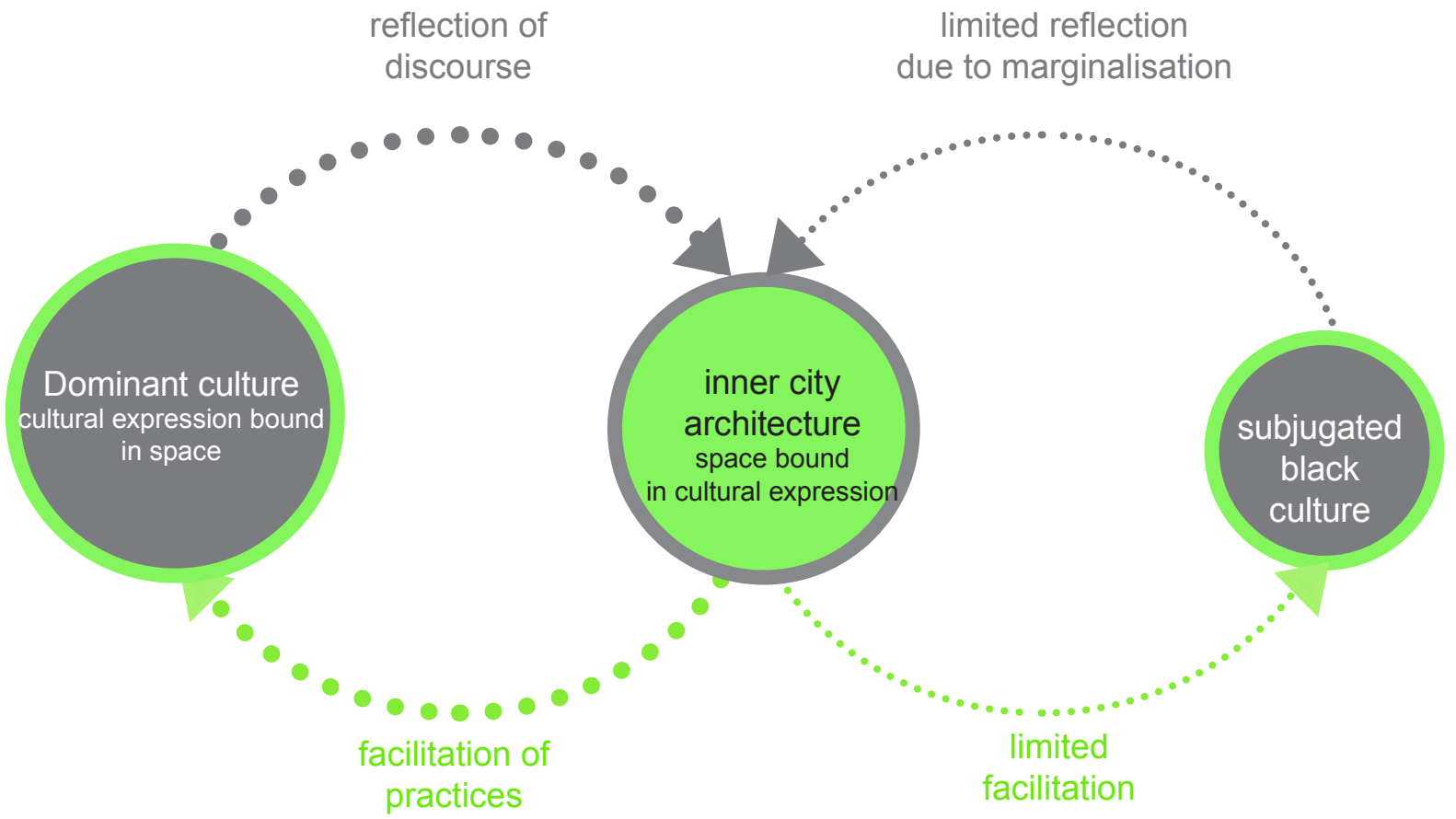


fig 3.21 Image showing the effects of marginalisation (Author)

new building typology

This paper makes the largely uncontested assertion that the practices of black people and their architectural discourses have been historically excluded from representation within the inner city built environment. It also suggests that the Johannesburg built environment today, is still an impediment to these marginalised cultural practices and continues to exclude black discourses from architectural representation. The fig 3.21 illustrates the notion that black discourses and practices, are not given equal importance to the dominant discourses and practices, resulting in a built environment that does not fully reflect or facilitate black culture.

To make a contribution to the creation of a more inclusive built environment, this paper suggests the development of a cultural building typology that facilitates black cultural practices within the inner city. The Faraday Muti Market which is discussed in greater detail in following chapters, is an example of a building typology developed to facilitate the previously marginalised practise of traditional medicine. The building typology proposed by this paper should in a similar manner, facilitate the performance of ceremonies such as weddings, funerals and other collective rituals excluded from the city. It is envisioned that the COJ would initiate the project and through a public private partnership, incentivise the private sector to erect the facility.

In order to develop a building that is a reflection of black culture, the building should embrace and make a conscious attempt to engage with excluded black discourses.

To develop a building typology for the cultural practices marginalised by colonialism and apartheid, it is necessary to develop a theoretical understanding of the manner in which cultures are affected by subjugation and how black cultural values are transformed, through the processes of hybridity. The following section gives an outline of post colonial cultural hybridity, postcolonial architectural hybridity will be dealt with in greater detail, in the following chapters

Before the 1940’s, colonial studies of black culture concentrated on the anthropological aspects of rural life. According to Silverman (2007) these studies were aimed at proving an inherent racial “otherness” of black people to justify segregation and their perceived impermanence in the city. During the 40’s, anthropologist, Ellen Hellmann-Rooiyard whose work was based in urban areas spoke of a reconstitution of black culture in the city. She made the assertion that black people were embracing urbanisation and modernity, making what Silverman refers to as a “powerful case for the permanence of black people in the city” (2007). Hellmann-Rooiyard was arguing that these urban black people had appropriated urbanism, which at the time was considered the privy of white people.

cultural delineation otherness

The notion that every man belongs to a specific culture has long permeated the body of ethnographic knowledge (Dinath 2006). Often boundaries are drawn to delineate the totality of a specific culture. Ethnographers comparatively study cultures, through analyzing differences between them and ascribe certain characteristics as belonging to a “distinct” culture. According to Dinath “This view allows the distinction between belonging to a culture (inside it) and being alien to (outside it) to be entrenched as an essential principle of human existence.” (Dinath 2006:24)

Often cultures are delineated using geo-political borders, this implies that a culture belongs to a specific nationality for instance one might refer to French culture or Chinese culture. This umbrella nationalistic approach implies that all citizens belong to a homogenous culture that is defined by the country and different to those of other countries. This cannot be true because often, as in the case of the Venda people of South Africa and Zimbabwe, geo- political borders are drawn between people of the same culture, giving them separate national identities. Dinath states that in the continually globalizing world of today “international mass migrations and transnational culture flows through mass media expose the invalidity of the nationalist concept of culture.” (Dinath 2006:31) “Cultural borders cannot uncritically be attached to nation/state borders and policed or defended in the same way. There can be no South African Culture because such definition only subsumes the intricate differences in the cultural practices of the citizens and inhabitants of the country.” (Dinath 2006:31)

Our cultural practice often ascribes cultural particularities to the genetic or biological make-up of a certain group of people. “It is still a popular assumption, found as easily among anthropology students as in mass media across the globe, that ethnos – much like ‘tribe’ – and, indeed, like the scientifically discredited notion of ‘race’ – designates a biological fact. These purported ‘natural’ cleavages between humans are easily and widely associated with cleavages of ‘culture.” (Dinath 2006:32)

Theories and definitions of culture that espouse the view that culture is a biological characteristic are referred to essentialism. “To essentialise culture or identity is to assign a fundamental, natural, unquestionably required constitutive quality to a person, social category, ethnic group, religious community or nation. Essentialism falsely suggests an unchanging continuity and discretely bounded organic uncontaminated unity” (Dinath 2006:33). The concept of a delineated, homogenous distinct culture ascribed to a group of people allows for the establishment of cultural boundaries. Those who do not fall into these distinctions are viewed as other or different from one’s self. This type of concept views the self and other as culturally mutually exclusive. In the past this view has been used to justify oppressive segregation and more recently xenophobic attacks. In cities this enables planners to “rationalize spatial segregation.” (Dinath,2006)

These notions of cultural understanding have been challenged by theorists such as Bhahba , Said and Young. These theorists postulate a different

understanding of culture which is termed Postcolonial Hybridity. They espouse the view, that in the post colonial regions of the world, people are finding themselves increasingly “in between” cultures. Years of cross cultural migration and the tensions that arise from the proximity of people who hold different cultural values, results in a continual renegotiating and reconstitution of identity. Post colonial cultural hybridity occurs when the colonised and the coloniser’s values or practices come together in conflict. In a similar manner to Hegels dialetic, the two opposing discourses (synthesis and antithesis), which negate each other are consciously and unconsciously synthesised into a new discourse. It is this process of synthesis which is termed hybridity.

The process of hybridity results in the reconstitution of cultural values and practices due to the intermingling of separate cultural groupings. The result is syncretic cultural discourses and practices. Post colonial hybridity is highlighted in many artistic and cultural expressions. Examples and illustrations of the both cultural and architectural hybridity will be highlighted in the following chapter.

As mentioned earlier in the chapter, Rooiyard asserts that the black people living in urban areas embrace modernity and urbanism. While this is an accurate observation, theories of postcolonial hybridity would argue that the appropriation of the dominant culture’s values by the subjugated is not absolute. In this instance it can be argued that there was no erosion of the black peoples values as Rooiyard put it, there was merely a reconstitution and a development of new black cultural values. The black people living in the city did not completely embrace Western urbanism, they reconstituted their culture to form new syncretic cultural values and practices.

cultural hybridity in urban environments

The implication of post colonial hybridity for the urban practitioner is, that while these people are urban they can not be expected to embrace the western brand of urbanism as they always retain aspects of their so called “rural”, but more accurately black values and practices. These people occupy the space in between discourses they belong to both worlds and to neither. Architects working in the inner city need to rethink the western urban typologies and introduce new hybrid typologies that cater for the hybrid nature of black culture in the city.
The notion of cultural hybridity renders the previous diagram fig 3.21 inaccurate as it depicts the two cultures (dominant and subjugated) as discreet and mutually exclusive entities.

This diagram shown in fig 3.23 is a more accurate reflection of the relationship between the subjugated culture of blacks and the built environment. Even though there are areas of intersection between the subjugated and the dominant culture, the black cultural practices are not fully accommodated and the black discourses are still marginalised.

The following chapter describes postcolonial hybridity in architecture and suggests a method of practice which would result in an environment that facilitates and reflects the hybrid black practices and discourses.

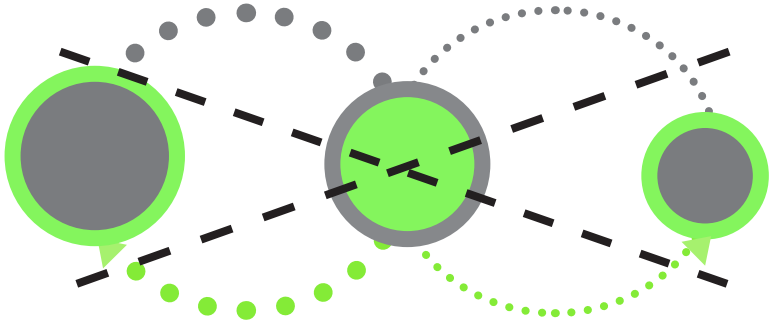


fig 3.22 Image showing cultural arc (Author)

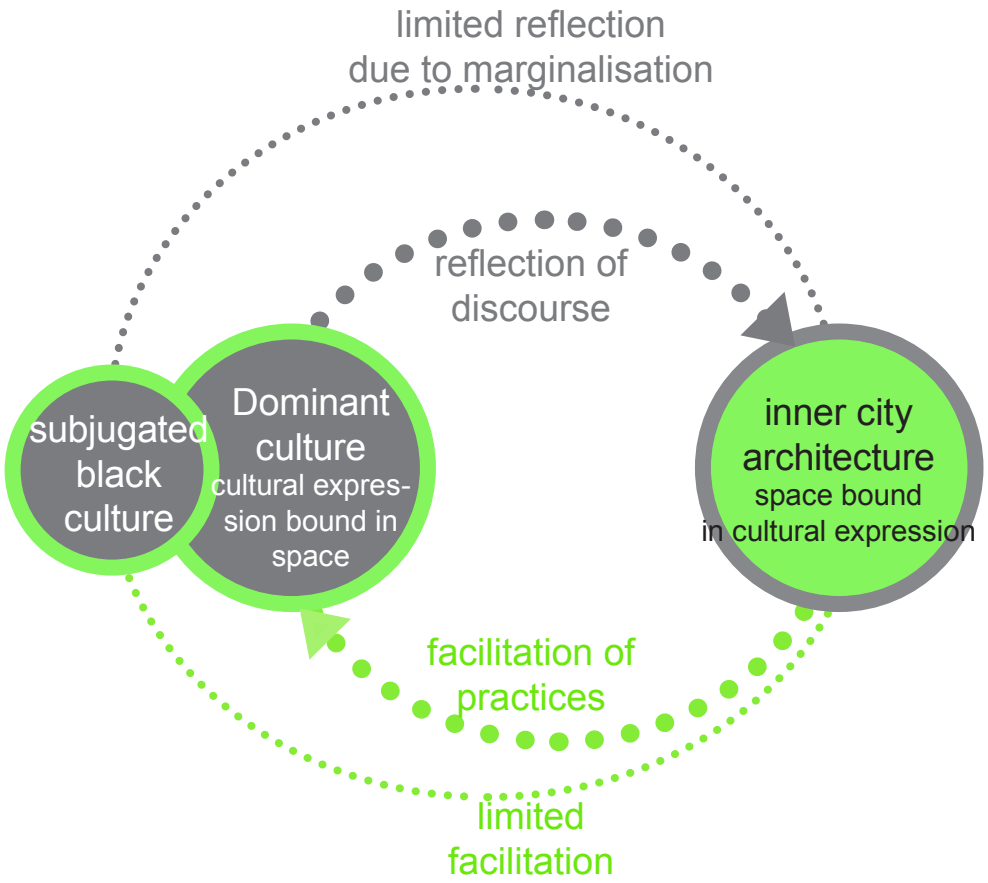


fig 3.22 Image showing cultural arc (Author)