• Paper / Proposal Title:
The relationship between the changing social practice and the built fabric of the Bo-Kaap

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• Presentation Method. I would like to:
  i. present in person (with a written paper)
  ii. present via pre-recorded film (with a written paper)
  iii. submit a written paper only (and not present)

• Abstract (300 words):
The Bo-Kaap, an inner city neighbourhood in Cape Town, provides both tangible and intangible remnants of South Africa’s troubled past. Settled by freed Muslim slaves after the abolition of slavery in 1834, the area recalls a legacy of racial segregation and social injustice, but at the same time has provided its residents with a distinct sense of community. This can be read through both the historic built fabric, but more significantly in the thresholds and open spaces of the area, where various social practices have – and continue to be – enacted. These buildings and spaces construct identity and place.
The Bo-Kaap was established in the 18th century on the slopes of Signal Hill, above the ever-expanding city of the Cape of Good Hope. This residential suburb has since had a perpetual history of contestation. This study analyses the evolution of the architectural and urban fabric of the Bo-kaap which gave rise to a unique urban Cape vernacular architecture. The development of this vernacular is unpacked chronologically, linking key historical moments to specific changes in the architectural development. These key historical moments start with the colonisation of the Cape (1652) followed by freedom of religion (1804), the abolition of slavery (1834), declaration of the Bo-Kaap as a slum area under the Slum Area Act (1934), declaration of the Bo-Kaap as a Malay Group Area under the Group Areas Act (1956) and ends with the current urban pressures of gentrification due its proximity to the city.

The study demonstrates how various outdoor spaces – tangible remnants - such as the stoep, the lane, the street and the court, play important roles in constructing local identity. The paper argues that any new interventions in the area should take cognisance not only of the existing built fabric - the tangible remnants - but equally significantly, acknowledge the open spaces in which social rituals are enacted – the intangible remnants.

• Author(s) Biography (200 words each):

My name is Mishkah Collier and I have recently graduated with my Masters degree in Architecture from the University of Cape Town. I was born, raised and educated in Cape Town, South Africa.

My personal interests include finding ways in which architecture can contribute to developing inclusive urban spaces that are sensitive to both people and context. My postgraduate studies have taught me that design requires collective effort in order to respond to the past, present and future challenges and issues of this country. Thus, I believe that successful architecture is the result of collaborative work, sensitivity to context and response to human needs.

Having grown up in the Bo-kaap, a residential suburb abutting the central city of Cape Town, I’ve witnessed its constant state of flux and the urban pressures that continue to disrupt its historical urban fabric and social character. This realisation prompted my interest in the Bo-Kaap as both a physical and social space of past and present contestation, which culminated in my focus of the Bo-Kaap and its community for my Masters dissertation. My dissertation addressed the social and cultural engagement of everyday and sacred practices of the Bo-Kaap in order to ultimately re-presence its community within the city.