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Embodying Diaspora and Identity of Cultural Values in Cape Malay Architectural Heritage of Bo-Kaap, Cape Town

Menghayati Diaspora dan Identiti Nilai Budaya dalam Warisan Seni Bina Cape Malay di Bo-Kaap, Cape Town

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ABSTRACT

Bo-Kaap, Cape Town, is a historically layered urban landscape shaped by colonial displacement, enslavement, Islam, and post-emancipation settlement. This study examines how its architectural heritage embodies diasporic identity and cultural values through everyday dwelling practices. It develops an integrated framework drawing on Lefebvre's Production of Space, Hall's Cultural Identity and Diaspora, and Halbwachs' Collective Memory. An interpretive qualitative case-study approach combines architectural documentation, spatial analysis, semi-structured interviews, and expert/community validation. Findings show that the dwelling, Auwal Mosque, and neighbourhood operate as interconnected cultural texts through which three values are expressed: faith and religiosity; family and intergenerational continuity; and communal solidarity. Spatial organisation, thresholds, façade articulation, materiality, religious orientation, and relationships between private and communal spaces demonstrate how cultural values become materially and socially embedded while adapting to colonial and contemporary urban conditions. The study contributes to diaspora, ethnic studies, and architectural heritage scholarship by connecting cultural identity with lived spatial practices. It proposes a community-centred heritage perspective that recognises buildings, memories, relationships, and everyday practices as interdependent dimensions of living heritage.

Keywords: Architectural heritage; Diasporic identity; Cultural values; Cape Malay; Bo-Kaap

ABSTRAK

Bo-Kaap di Cape Town merupakan landskap bandar berlapis sejarah yang terbentuk melalui perpindahan kolonial, perhambaan, perkembangan Islam dan penempatan selepas pembebasan. Kajian ini meneliti bagaimana warisan seni bina Bo-Kaap membentuk dan menzahirkan identiti diaspora serta nilai budaya melalui amalan kehidupan dan kediaman harian. Kerangka teori bersepadu menggabungkan Production of Space oleh Lefebvre,

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Cultural Identity and Diaspora oleh Hall, dan Collective Memory oleh Halbwachs. Pend katan kajian kes kualitatif interpretif menggabungkan dokumentasi seni bina, analisis ruang, temu bual separa berstruktur serta pengesahan pakar dan komuniti. Dapatan menunjukkan bahawa kediaman, Masjid Auwal dan kejiranan berfungsi sebagai teks budaya yang saling berkaitan melalui tiga nilai utama: keimanan dan keagamaan; keluarga dan kesinambungan antara generasi; serta solidariti komuniti. Susunan ruang, ambang, artikulasi fasad, pengunaan bahan, orientasi keagamaan dan hubungan antara ruang persendirian dengan ruang komuniti memperlihatkan bagaimana nilai budaya dijelmakan secara material dan sosial sambil menyesuaikan diri dengan keadaan bandar kolonial dan kontemporari. Kajian ini menyumbang kepada kajian diaspora, etnik dan warisan seni bina dengan menghubungkan identiti budaya kepada amalan ruang yang dihayati, serta mengemukakan pendekatan warisan berpusatkan komuniti yang mengiktiraf bangunan, memori, hubungan sosial dan amalan harian sebagai dimensi warisan hidup yang saling bergantung.

Kata kunci: Warisan seni bina; Identiti diaspora; Nilai budaya; Cape Malay; Bo-Kaap

INTRODUCTION

Architectural heritage is increasingly understood not simply as the conservation of historic buildings, but as a dynamic cultural process through which communities negotiate identity, memory, belonging, and continuity (Bhabha 1994; Hall 1990; Ingold 2000). This perspective is particularly relevant to diasporic communities, whose identities are continuously reconstructed through cultural practices, social relationships, collective memory, and attachment to place rather than transmitted unchanged from an ancestral homeland (Davids 1980; Toffa 2008). Within this context, dwelling extends beyond physical habitation to encompass the ways communities establish belonging, reproduce cultural values, and materialise identity through everyday spatial practices (Toffa 2008). Bo-Kaap, Cape Town, provides a significant setting for examining this relationship because its architectural heritage has developed through complex histories of enslavement, colonialism, political exile, migration, Islam, and cultural interaction across the Indian Ocean world (Bhabha 1994; Hall 1990; Ingold 2000). Historically associated with the Cape Malay community, Bo-Kaap represents a culturally hybrid and evolving Cape Muslim landscape rather than a direct transplantation of Southeast Asian Malay culture (Donaldson et al. 2013; Visser et al. 2013; Terblanche 2022; Jessa & Rogerson 2025). Its houses, stoops, streets, mosques, and communal spaces embody the interaction between religious practice, family life, collective memory, and neighbourhood relationships (Smith, 2006; Harrison 2013). Previous architectural scholarship has examined the relationship between built form, inhabitants, and cultural identity, while subsequent studies have highlighted conservation, gentrification, tourism, redevelopment, and displacement as major threats to the neighbourhood's living heritage (Donaldson et al. 2013; Visser et al. 2013; Terblanche 2022; Jessa & Rogerson 2025). These pressures raise a fundamental heritage question: what is being sustained when architectural heritage is conserved—the physical fabric alone, or the cultural values and social relationships that make such places meaningful? (Smith, 2006; Harrison 2013). Despite substantial scholarship on Bo-Kaap's architectural character, historical development, conservation, and socio-spatial transformation, the relationship between cultural values, diasporic identity, dwelling, and architectural heritage remains comparatively under-theorised (Donaldson et al. 2013; Visser et al. 2013; Terblanche 2022; Jessa & Rogerson 2025). In particular, scholars have paid insufficient attention to how faith and religiosity, family and

intergenerational continuity, and communal solidarity are enacted through everyday spatial practices and translated into relationships among the house, stoep, street, mosque, and neighbourhood (Donaldson et al. 2013; Visser et al. 2013; Terblanche 2022; Jessa & Rogerson 2025). Consequently, architecture may be interpreted predominantly as material heritage or a visual marker of identity rather than as an active medium through which cultural values are performed, negotiated, transmitted, and reproduced (Aliyu & Ismail 2023). This limitation matters in critical heritage scholarship, which conceptualises heritage as a process of meaning-making involving memory, identity, social practice, and community participation (Aliyu & Ismail 2023).

Accordingly, this study aims to examine how faith and religiosity, family and intergenerational continuity, and communal solidarity shape diasporic dwelling and are expressed through the architectural and spatial heritage of Bo-Kaap. It conceptualises diasporic dwelling as a process through which displaced cultural identity becomes spatially anchored and continually reproduced through everyday practices. Within this framework, the house operates as a repository of family memory and intergenerational continuity; the stoep mediates domestic and communal life; the street and neighbourhood facilitate social interaction and solidarity; while the mosque functions as an important spatial infrastructure of faith, collective identity, and community cohesion.

The study contributes to existing knowledge in three ways. First, it extends Bo-Kaap scholarship from predominantly object-centred and conservation-oriented interpretations towards a value-centred understanding of architectural heritage. Second, it connects diaspora studies with architectural and heritage discourse by positioning dwelling as a process through which cultural identity becomes spatially and materially negotiated. Third, it advances a lived and relational conception of heritage, in which architectural significance derives not only from historic fabric but also from the cultural values, memories, relationships, and practices through which communities sustain meaning and belonging. Bo-Kaap is therefore approached not merely as a historic architectural precinct, but as a living diasporic landscape in which faith, family, and communal solidarity continuously mediate the relationship between identity, dwelling, and heritage.

LITERATURE REVIEW

HISTORICAL TRAJECTORIES OF CAPE MALAY DIASPORA, IDENTITY, AND COMMUNITY FORMATION

The historical formation of the Cape Malay community in Cape Town cannot be understood through a linear narrative of migration from a singular geographical homeland (Jappie 2012; Laffan 2026). Rather, it represents a complex diasporic formation produced through forced mobility, colonial displacement, Islamic networks, cultural adaptation, and the gradual making of place (Haron 2015). The term "Cape Malay" itself is historically contingent and remains contested, since the community that came to be identified by this designation comprised people of diverse origins, particularly from the Indonesian archipelago, South Asia, Africa, and Madagascar (Cochrane & Chellan 2017). Recent scholarship consequently emphasises the need to distinguish between the historical diversity of Cape Muslims and the later consolidation of "Cape Malay" as a social and cultural identity (Cochrane & Chellan 2017).

The origins of this diasporic formation are closely associated with the establishment of the Dutch settlement at the Cape in 1652 and the subsequent expansion of the Dutch East India Company’s colonial and commercial networks across the Indian Ocean (Donaldson et

al. 2013). Between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, enslaved people, political exiles, and convicts were transported to the Cape from territories under Dutch influence, including Java, Sumatra, the Moluccas, and other parts of Southeast Asia (Alhourani 2025). These movements were embedded within a wider system of colonial labour extraction and political control rather than voluntary migration (Cochrane & Chellan 2017). Importantly, therefore, the Cape Malay diaspora should be interpreted within the historical geography of the Indian Ocean, where mobility connected Southeast Asia, South Asia, Africa, and the Cape through networks of commerce, warfare, enslavement, and religious exchange (Morton 2020).

Islam became one of the most significant cultural forces through which these displaced populations developed forms of collective identity (Morton 2020). Muslim political exiles and religious scholars played an important role in consolidating Islamic learning and social networks at the Cape (Shem-Tov 2021). The presence of figures such as Shaykh Yusuf and later Tuan Guru contributed to the institutionalisation of Islam, while mosques, religious schools, burial grounds, and domestic prayer spaces became important sites of social organisation (Sonn, 1993). Mosques were not simply religious structures but institutions through which community life, education, social interaction, and collective memory were organized, functioning simultaneously as a religious institution and a mechanism of community formation (Sonn, 1993).

The development of Cape Muslim identity was further shaped by processes of cultural and linguistic transformation (Isaacs et al. 2013). Although Malay and related languages initially played important roles among Southeast Asian Muslims, the community progressively adopted Cape Dutch and subsequently Afrikaans as its principal spoken language (Versteegh 2015). The emergence of Arabic-Afrikaans textual traditions demonstrates that cultural continuity did not necessarily depend upon linguistic continuity (Worden 2016). Rather, Islamic knowledge, memory, and identity were translated into new linguistic and cultural environments (Isaacs et al. 2013). Arabic-Afrikaans writing represented an important transformation in Cape Muslim intellectual history, while surviving Jawi textual traditions have subsequently become resources for recovering Malay-Indonesian ancestry, genealogy, and heritage (Jappie, 2011). This suggests that diaspora is an active process of cultural reconstruction in which fragments of the past are continually reinterpreted in the present (Jappie 2012).

The nineteenth century marked a particularly significant stage in community consolidation (Worden 2016). The gradual emancipation of enslaved people after 1834 enabled greater residential concentration and contributed to the expansion of Muslim communities in the area subsequently known as the Bo-Kaap (Worden 2016). Residential clustering, religious institutions, and social networks provided a spatial foundation through which a dispersed population could develop a stronger sense of collective belonging (Toffa 2008). The Bo-Kaap evolved into a cultural landscape in which religious practice, kinship, commerce, education, and everyday social interaction became spatially interconnected (Shem-Tov 2021). Contemporary scholarship treats Cape Malay as both a historical category and a socially constructed identity that emerged through processes of cultural negotiation and classification, confirmed by genetic and historical reconstructions of African, Asian, and European contributions (Isaacs et al. 2013).

The twentieth century introduced another decisive layer of identity formation through colonial and apartheid racial classification (Donaldson et al. 2013). The Population Registration Act of 1950 incorporated "Cape Malay" within the broader apartheid category of Coloured identity (Donaldson et al. 2013). At the same time, spatial segregation and subsequent Group Areas legislation intensified the significance of neighbourhood as a

repository of collective memory and identity (Jessa & Rogerson 2025). The Bo-Kaap increasingly became a symbolic anchor through which histories of slavery, Islam, family, resistance, and cultural continuity could be remembered and articulated (Terblanche 2022). Consequently, the historical trajectory of the Cape Malay community represents a movement from displacement to cultural consolidation, and from cultural consolidation to spatially embedded belonging (Hall 1990). Diasporic identity was reconstructed through religious practice, family networks, language, memory, community institutions, and everyday engagement with place (Bhabha 1994). Houses, streets, mosques, and communal spaces transformed displacement into a lived geography of belonging (Toffa 2008).

SOCIAL STRUCTURE, CULTURAL VALUES, AND ARCHITECTURAL CHARACTERISTICS OF CAPE MALAY IDENTITY IN BO-KAAP

The social structure of Cape Malay society in Bo-Kaap may be understood as a relational system operating across individual, family, and community levels, interconnected through Islamic belief, kinship, cultural practice, and collective belonging. At the individual level, identity is constituted through religious commitment, moral conduct, cultural knowledge, and participation in everyday practices that affirm belonging. At the family level, the household and extended kinship network function as primary institutions for transmitting religious teachings, cultural knowledge, collective memory, traditions, and responsibilities across generations. At the community level, these relationships extend into networks of neighbours, mosques, religious institutions, and shared public spaces, producing reciprocal obligations, social cohesion, and collective identity (Davids 1980; Jappie 2012). This structure should not, however, be understood as static or homogeneous, since Cape Muslim identity emerged through complex histories of enslavement, migration, political exile, colonialism, racial classification, and cultural interaction across the Indian Ocean (Shem-Tov 2021).

Within this social structure, cultural values refer to the collectively held principles, meanings, and practices through which Cape Malay society understands appropriate relationships between the individual, family, community, faith, and place. Three interconnected values are particularly significant: faith and religiosity; family and intergenerational continuity; and communal solidarity. Islam provides an overarching ethical and spiritual framework through which these values are consolidated and reproduced. Faith and religiosity establish moral obligations towards God and community; family provides the principal context for nurturing religious practice, cultural memory, and intergenerational transmission; while communal solidarity reinforces mutual assistance, reciprocity, hospitality, and collective responsibility.

Historically, the built environment of Bo-Kaap provides a material and spatial embodiment of these interconnected social norms and cultural values. Its historic narrow-fronted dwellings, street-facing entrances, stoeps, continuous street edges, compact urban blocks, pedestrian routes, and mosques establish spatial relationships between private domestic life, neighbourhood interaction, and religious practice (Toffa 2008; Townsend 2015). The house provides the principal setting for family life, religious practice, hospitality, and intergenerational transmission; consequently, domestic space becomes a repository of memory and cultural continuity. The stoep, positioned between interior and street, operates as a socially productive threshold where privacy and communal interaction are negotiated through conversation, observation, hospitality, and everyday encounters. The street extends

these relationships into the public realm, enabling social interaction and neighbourhood solidarity, while the mosque provides an institutional and spatial anchor for faith, collective worship, education, and community cohesion (Davids 1980; Jappie 2012). These relationships demonstrate that Bo-Kaap's architectural significance lies not simply in its morphology or visual character, but in the ways spatial configurations facilitate and sustain culturally meaningful practices.

Together, the social structure, cultural values, and architectural characteristics of the Cape Malay community reveal a coherent social-spatial system in which identity, memory, faith, and belonging are mutually constituted. The built environment of Bo-Kaap is therefore not merely functional or aesthetic, but a material expression of cultural values that continue to shape everyday dwelling and heritage practices. Accordingly, the following section examines in greater depth the interconnected values of faith and religiosity, family and intergenerational continuity, and communal solidarity, and considers how these values have shaped Cape Malay social life, spatial practices, and architectural identity from their historical formation to the contemporary context of Bo-Kaap.

THE ROLE OF FAITH AND RELIGIOSITY VALUE IN SHAPING CAPE MALAY CULTURAL IDENTITY AND COMMUNITY LIFE

Faith and religiosity constitute foundational cultural values referring to how Islamic belief, religious practice, moral conduct, and spiritual consciousness are incorporated into everyday life (Davids 1980). Under conditions of enslavement, displacement, colonial domination, and social marginalisation, Islam provided a framework through which displaced communities reconstructed collective memory, social relationships, and cultural identity (Sonn, 1993). The characteristics of this value are manifested through worship, religious education, ethical conduct, family practices, communal rituals, textual traditions, and participation in mosque-centred social life (Jappie 2012). The establishment of the Auwal Mosque in 1794 provided a dedicated space for prayer, religious instruction, and social organisation when Muslim religious expression was constrained by colonial authority (Davids 1980). Religious knowledge was sustained through textual traditions like Jawi manuscripts, which preserved Malay-Indonesian intellectual heritage (Jappie 2012). Intangible religious expressions, including the adhan (call to prayer), remain vital markers of Muslim belonging and living heritage (Shem-Tov 2021). Faith connects historical memory with contemporary life, bridging religious practice with language, family traditions, heritage institutions, communal spaces, and architectural environments (Harrison 2013).

THE VALUE OF FAMILY AND INTERGENERATIONAL CONTINUITY IN CAPE MALAY SOCIETY

Family and intergenerational continuity represent the mechanism through which Cape Malay society sustains identity, memory, religious knowledge, social relationships, and heritage across generations (Jappie 2012). Family extends beyond biological kinship to encompass extended networks, ancestral connections, shared histories, and reciprocal responsibilities (Worden 2016). Intergenerational continuity refers to the transmission, negotiation, and reinterpretation of cultural knowledge, values, practices, memories, and material inheritances between generations (Smith, 2006). Historically, family provided social resilience amid enslavement, displacement, colonialism, and apartheid-era spatial disruption (Worden 2016). The household functioned as a primary setting where Islamic values, family histories, language, foodways, customs, and collective memories were learned and reproduced (Toffa

2008). This value is practiced through daily intergenerational interaction, religious instruction, storytelling, culinary traditions, commemorative practices, genealogical knowledge, inherited objects, and family-owned artisanal businesses (Jappie 2012). Socially, it strengthens belonging; culturally, it preserves traditions; religiously, it supports Islamic transmission; and spatially, it reinforces attachment to homes, streets, mosques, and neighbourhoods (Harrison 2013).

THE CHARACTER OF COMMUNAL SOLIDARITY VALUE IN CAPE MALAY SOCIETY

Communal solidarity refers to the collective commitment to mutual support, reciprocal responsibility, shared belonging, and the maintenance of communal identity (Terblanche 2022). Emerging from historically diverse populations of enslaved individuals, exiles, scholars, and migrants, solidarity became an essential mechanism through which social relationships, Islamic values, and cultural practices were sustained (Laffan 2026). In Bo-Kaap, solidarity is practiced through neighbourhood hospitality, food-sharing, family gatherings, religious celebrations, neighbourly interaction, and mutual assistance (Donaldson et al. 2013). These practices were supported by the close spatial configuration between houses, stoeps, streets, mosques, and gathering spaces (Sato et al. 2002). Despite pressures from slavery, apartheid segregation, forced removals, gentrification, changing property ownership, and tourism, collective attachment to place and established social networks demonstrates the enduring importance of communal solidarity in maintaining place-based belonging (Jessa & Rogerson 2025).

EVOLUTIONARY TRAJECTORIES AND CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES OF CAPE MALAY ARCHITECTURE IN BO-KAAP

Bo-Kaap represents a historically layered urban landscape shaped by colonial urbanism, migration, Islam, socio-economic transformation, and local adaptation (Townsend 2015). The name "Bo-Kaap" derives from Afrikaans/Dutch meaning "Upper Cape", reflecting its elevated position on the slopes of Signal Hill above central Cape Town (Townsend 2015). Historically referred to as the Malay Quarter, the neighbourhood developed progressively from the eighteenth century, initially through rental housing constructed on the city's outskirts (Sato et al. 2002).

- **18th Century (Waalendorp & Colonial Foundations):** Residential expansion began with Jan de Waal's development of Waalendorp in the 1760s within Cape Town's colonial urban grid (Townsend 2015). Early rental housing (huurhuisjes) consisted of modest, single-storey, narrow-fronted dwellings adapted to Signal Hill's sloping terrain (Sato et al. 2002). Constructed using local stone, brick, mud mortar, lime plaster, and timber, these early structures exhibited Cape Dutch vernacular traits: single-storey massing, flat roofs concealed behind parapets, narrow plots, and direct street frontages (Toffa 2008).
- **19th to Early 20th Centuries (British Era, Emancipation & Densification):** Following emancipation (1834) and population growth, Muslim artisans and families settled heavily in the area (Worden 2016). Architectural styles

expanded to incorporate Georgian and Victorian vocabularies, introduced through refined doors, fanlights, windows, parapet mouldings, verandahs, and pitched roofs (Townsend 2015). The urban morphology remained dense, characterised by continuous rows of small houses, narrow streets, stoops, and strong pedestrian relationships (Sato et al. 2002).

- **20th to 21st Centuries (Apartheid, Conservation & Gentrification)**: Despite apartheid spatial policies and contemporary gentrification, Bo-Kaap retains its historic street grid, fine urban grain, human scale, and high concentration of pre-1850 buildings (Donaldson et al. 2013). Today, the layered Cape Dutch, Georgian, Victorian, and Edwardian dwellings, vibrant, colourful façades, stoops, narrow streets, and historic mosques form a distinct living cultural landscape (Toffa 2008).

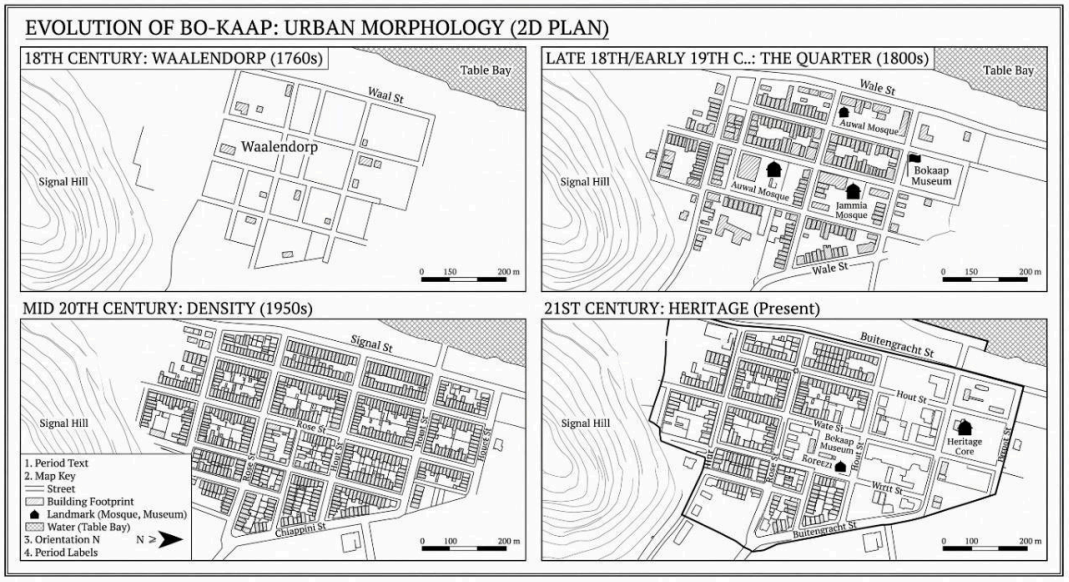


FIGURE 1. Evolution of Bo-Kaap morphology from the 17th to 21st century (source: Author 2026)

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK DEVELOPMENT

The study develops an integrated theoretical framework synthesising three complementary perspectives (Lefebvre 1991; Hall 1990; Halbwachs 1992):

- **Henri Lefebvre's Production of Space (1991):** Serves as the spatial foundation, conceptualizing space as socially produced through the interplay of spatial practices (perceived space), representations of space (conceived space), and representational/lived spaces (Lefebvre 1991). Dwellings and neighbourhoods are viewed not as neutral containers, but as dynamic socio-spatial products (Lefebvre 1991).
- **Stuart Hall's Cultural Identity and Diaspora (1990, 1996):** Positions identity as dynamic, relational, and continuously constructed through representation, memory, and cultural practice rather than an inherited static essence (Hall 1990).
- **Maurice Halbwachs' Collective Memory (1992):** Explains how cultural memories are socially constructed, transmitted, and anchored within physical spatial frameworks (spatial frameworks of memory) (Halbwachs, 1992). Dwellings, streets, and mosques act as material repositories of shared ancestral and communal memory (Halbwachs, 1992).

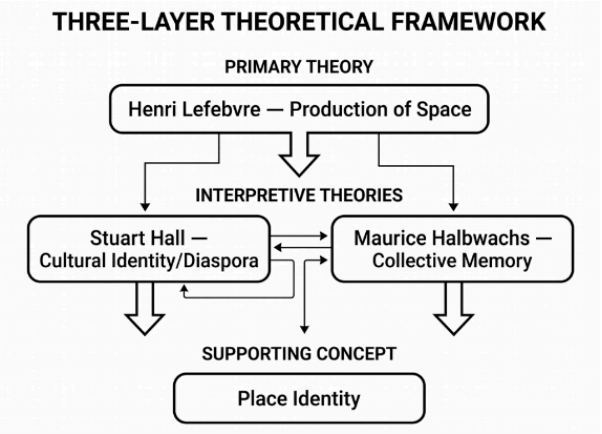


FIGURE 2. Theoretical Framework for conceptualising the Cape Malay architectural heritage as a socially produced and culturally mediated environment (source: Author 2026)

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts an interpretive qualitative research paradigm to examine how the Cape Malay community in Bo-Kaap, Cape Town, negotiates and expresses diasporic identity and cultural values through its architectural heritage. The interpretive approach recognises the built environment as a socially and culturally constructed phenomenon in which architectural form acquires meaning through lived experience, memory, religious practice, family relationships, and communal interaction. Rather than treating Bo-Kaap architecture as a static historical artefact, the study investigates dwelling as an ongoing process through which faith and religiosity, family and intergenerational continuity, and communal solidarity translate into spatial practices and architectural expressions. This approach is particularly relevant to Bo-Kaap, where residential architecture, mosques, streets, and stoeps collectively constitute a living cultural landscape associated with Cape Muslim identity and community continuity.

The study used a qualitative case-study strategy to examine in depth the relationship between cultural values, dwelling practices, and architectural form. The study conceptualises architecture as both a material artefact and a cultural text, interpreted through its spatial organisation, physical characteristics, patterns of use, and associated narratives. Architectural observation, visual documentation, semi-structured interviews, and expert validation were therefore integrated to establish methodological triangulation. The analysis focused particularly on the relationship between the domestic dwelling and its wider socio-spatial context, including the house, stoep, street, mosque, and neighbourhood. This matters because Bo-Kaap's historical townscape contains a substantial concentration of pre-1850 buildings and multiple architectural traditions, including Cape Dutch, Georgian, Victorian, and Edwardian forms.

CASE SELECTION CRITERIA

Case selection was guided by four interrelated criteria to ensure that the selected architectural cases were capable of revealing the relationship between Cape Malay diasporic identity, cultural values, and the built environment of Bo-Kaap, Cape Town. First, each selected case was required to demonstrate clear historical and cultural significance to Cape Muslim community life in Bo-Kaap, supported by evidence of its historical occupation, religious use,

domestic practices, or association with communal activities. This criterion establishes the cases as meaningful cultural expressions within the historical formation and continuing identity of the Cape Malay community.

Second, the selected cases were required to demonstrate discernible relationships between architectural and spatial characteristics and the three cultural-value determinants examined in this study: faith and religiosity; family and intergenerational continuity; and communal solidarity. This criterion enables the study to move beyond the description of architectural form towards an interpretation of how cultural values are embedded, expressed, negotiated, and reproduced through spatial practices and everyday community life.

Third, the cases were required to retain sufficient architectural and spatial integrity to support an interpretive examination of their form, materiality, spatial organisation, thresholds, patterns of use, and relationship to the surrounding urban fabric. Architectural integrity is considered not merely in terms of physical preservation, but also in relation to the continuity of meanings and practices associated with the places. Such an approach recognises that heritage significance may reside in the interaction between material fabric, social practices, collective memory, and cultural identity.

Fourth, the selected cases needed to provide evidence of continuing, remembered, or historically documented domestic and communal practices through which cultural values and diasporic identity have been maintained, transformed, or renegotiated. This criterion positions Bo-Kaap's architecture as living heritage, in which cultural significance is continually produced through the interaction between people, place, memory, and practice, rather than being understood solely as preserved historical fabric.

MULTI-SCALAR CASE-STUDY STRUCTURE

The empirical investigation operates across three spatial scales (Sato et al. 2002): the dwelling, the mosque, and the neighbourhood. The dwelling represents the domestic scale at which family values, intergenerational transmission, religious practices, memory, and everyday cultural practices are embodied and reproduced. The mosque represents the religious and institutional scale through which faith, collective worship, social interaction, and communal identity are sustained. The neighbourhood represents the broader socio-spatial scale through which communal solidarity, collective memory, social relationships, and shared belonging are expressed. Examining these three layers comparatively enables the study to trace how cultural values operate across individual, familial, religious, and communal scales, and how these values collectively contribute to the negotiation and continuity of Cape Malay diasporic identity within the evolving architectural heritage of Bo-Kaap.

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

The architectural analysis was organised into two interconnected dimensions: form and space. Form was examined through setting, scale, massing, façade composition, openings, roof form, materials, structural elements, ornamentation, and architectural details. Spatial analysis examined access, thresholds, circulation, hierarchy, privacy, domestic functions, courtyard relationships, and connections between private and communal domains. Particular attention was given to the stoep as an intermediary threshold between dwelling and street, and to the relationship between residential architecture and nearby mosques. Such analysis enables

architectural features to be interpreted in relation to the social practices and cultural values through which they acquire meaning.

A semiotic interpretive framework was subsequently employed to examine how architectural elements communicate cultural meanings. Rather than assuming that a particular architectural feature possesses a fixed symbolic meaning, interpretation was developed through the triangulation of physical evidence, observed practices, historical documentation, and participants' narratives. The analytical framework therefore examined the relationship between architectural sign, spatial practice, cultural value, and diasporic identity. The three principal values provided the thematic structure: (1) faith and religiosity, examined through prayer, religious learning, orientation, domestic religious practices, and relationships with mosques; (2) family and intergenerational continuity, examined through household organisation, family occupation, inherited objects, domestic traditions, memory, and continuity of place; and (3) communal solidarity, examined through hospitality, neighbourly interaction, collective religious practices, shared spaces, and relationships between dwelling and neighbourhood. These dimensions are consistent with historical evidence identifying mosques as institutions of worship, education, and community interaction within Bo-Kaap.

Semi-structured interviews with residents, family members, heritage stakeholders, and knowledgeable community representatives were used to investigate how participants understand the cultural meanings of domestic and communal spaces. Interview questions addressed the three interconnected values and their manifestation in dwelling practices, architectural features, family memories, religious activities, and neighbourhood relationships. Interview data were analysed through thematic coding, comprising descriptive, interpretive, and relational coding. Descriptive coding identified references to particular spaces, practices, architectural elements, and memories; interpretive coding connected these observations to faith, family continuity, and communal solidarity; and relational coding examined how the three values interact to shape identity, dwelling, and attachment to place. To strengthen interpretive validity, findings were subjected to expert and community-based validation involving architectural, heritage, historical, and cultural perspectives. Divergent interpretations were retained where appropriate rather than reduced to a single predetermined meaning. This approach recognises that Bo-Kaap is a historically diverse Cape Muslim formation and that architectural meanings are continually negotiated through changing social and urban conditions. The continuing importance of family histories, religious institutions, and community stewardship is also reflected in Bo-Kaap's heritage recognition, where community spirit and the protection of religious, cultural, and architectural heritage remain central concerns.

The research was undertaken through three analytical phases.

Phase One comprised historical research, architectural documentation, spatial observation, and identification of relevant cultural practices.

Phase Two integrated architectural and interview data to interpret how faith and religiosity, family and intergenerational continuity, and communal solidarity are expressed through dwelling form and spatial relationships.

Phase Three involved triangulation and expert/community validation to establish convergences, differences, and relationships between cultural values, architectural characteristics, and diasporic identity. The resulting methodological framework positions

diaspora, cultural values, and architectural heritage as an interconnected analytical system, enabling Bo-Kaap to be examined not merely as a historic neighbourhood but as a continually negotiated landscape of identity, memory, belonging, and living heritage. The overall research methodology and analytical framework are presented in **Figure 3.**

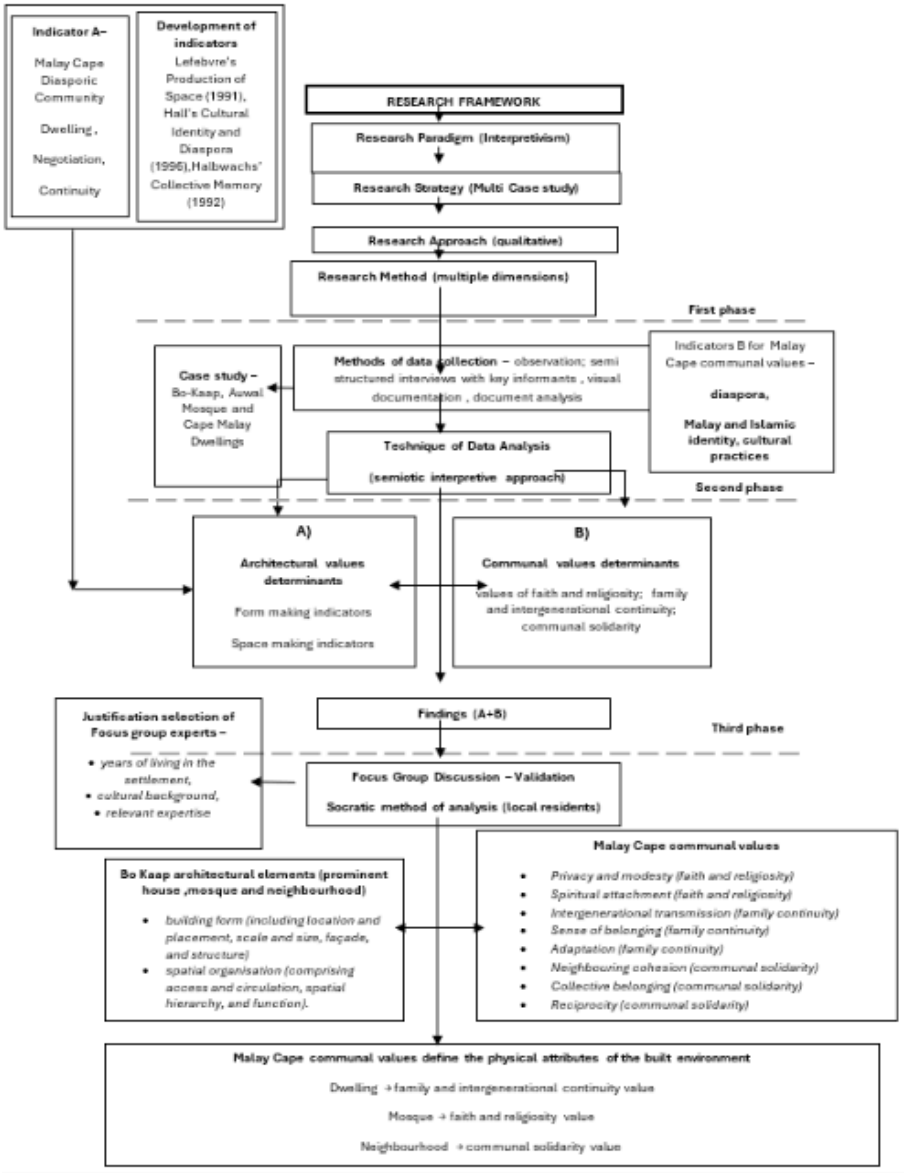


FIGURE 3. Research Methodology Framework (source: Author 2026)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

CASE STUDY CONTEXT: BO-KAAP NEIGHBOURHOOD, AUWAL MOSQUE, AND CAPE MALAY DWELLINGS

This study examines Bo-Kaap, Cape Town, as a historically layered cultural landscape through three interconnected architectural and spatial scales: the dwelling, the Auwal Mosque, and the neighbourhood. The empirical analysis evaluates the dialectical relationship between spatial structures and cultural values across three interconnected scales (Lefebvre 1991). Rather than approaching these elements as isolated architectural objects, the study

considers them as mutually constitutive components through which Cape Malay diasporic identity, cultural memory, religious values, family continuity, and communal relationships have been spatially produced and reproduced. This multi-scalar approach is particularly relevant because Bo-Kaap's heritage significance derives not only from its surviving historic buildings, but also from the continuing relationship between architectural fabric, social practices, religious institutions, collective memory, and community identity. The City of Cape Town identifies Bo-Kaap as an important cultural landscape in which tangible architectural heritage intersects with continuing intergenerational social and cultural practices, while the area was formally declared a National Heritage Site in 2019 (City of Cape Town 2021; SAHRA, 2019).

CASE STUDY A: FAMILY AND INTERGENERATIONAL CONTINUITY VALUE — INFLUENCES ON THE DOMESTIC CAPE MALAY DWELLING

The traditional Cape Malay house serves as a primary spatial mechanism through which family structures, kinship ties, and generational knowledge are sustained (Toffa 2008).

Location, Placement, and Urban Configuration: Dwellings are organized in dense, continuous rows directly abutting the street pavement (Sato et al. 2002). Shared party walls and narrow lot frontages minimise physical separation between adjacent families, creating an urban layout where domestic life remains deeply integrated with extended kinship networks (Sato et al. 2002).

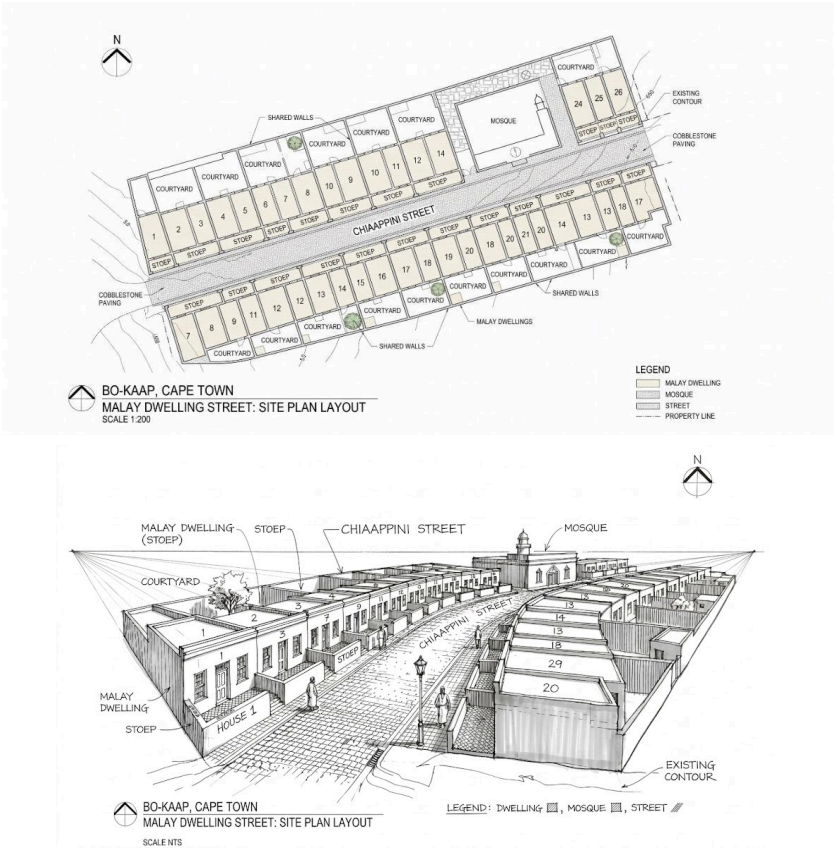


FIGURE 4. Plan layout and street view of Cape Malay dwellings in a continous row indicating the intergenerational continuity values from the compact integrated arrangement of the dwellings facing the open street (source: Author 2026)

Scale and Functional Accommodation Despite compact rectangular footprints dictated by 18th- and 19th-century plot dimensions, domestic spaces are highly multi-functional (Sato et al. 2002). Front rooms (voorhuis) seamlessly transition between daily family relaxation, formal guest reception, intergenerational storytelling, and domestic religious gatherings (mewlid or prayer circles) (Toffa 2008). Incremental additions (upper storeys, rear room extensions) reflect family adaptations to accommodate multi-generational living over time (Toffa 2008).

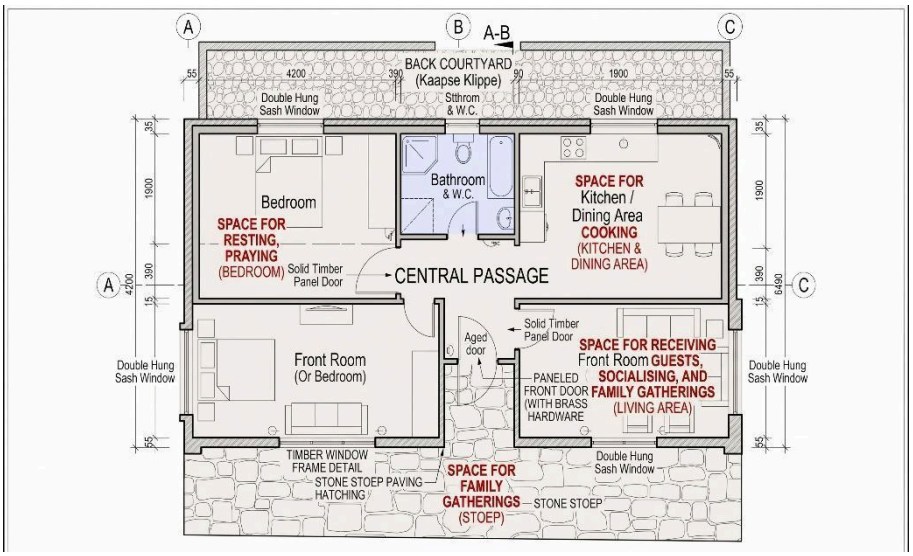


FIGURE 5. Floor plan layout of a Cape Malay dwelling indicating the functionality of each space within a compact house plan (source: Author 2026)

Access, Circulation, and Spatial Hierarchy: Circulation inside the house regulates social privacy and hospitality through graduated spatial thresholds (Toffa 2008):

- **Street (Public):** The open urban thoroughfare (Toffa 2008).
- **Stoep (Semi-Public / Semi-Private Threshold):** Raised masonry platform along the street elevation where residents sit, converse with neighbours, and monitor street activity (Townsend 2015).
- **Entrance Doorway (Transitional Threshold):** Often featuring divided Dutch doors (stable doors) or decorated fanlights, permitting ventilation and conversation while controlling physical entry (Townsend 2015).
- **Central Passage / Voorhuis (Semi-Private):** Primary reception zone for guests and extended family (Toffa 2008).
- **Kitchen / Rear Courtyard (Kaapse Klippe) (Private):** Intimate domestic family core reserved for cooking, meal preparation, and inner family life (Toffa 2008).
- **Bedrooms (Strictly Private):** Secluded spaces for resting and personal prayer (Toffa 2008).

TABLE 1. Spatial hierarchy and primary relationships in Cape Malay dwellings (source: Author 2026)

Spatial Zone	Degree of Privacy	Primary Relationship
Street	Public	Neighbourhood / broader community interaction (Toffa 2008)

Spatial Zone	Degree of Privacy	Primary Relationship
Stoep	Semi-public / Semi-private	Family–neighbour everyday interaction (Toffa 2008)
Entrance	Transitional	Visitor–household relationship management (Toffa 2008)
Interior Social Space	Semi-private	Family gatherings & guest reception (Toffa 2008)
Private Rooms / Kitchen	Private	Intimate household life & family routine (Toffa 2008)

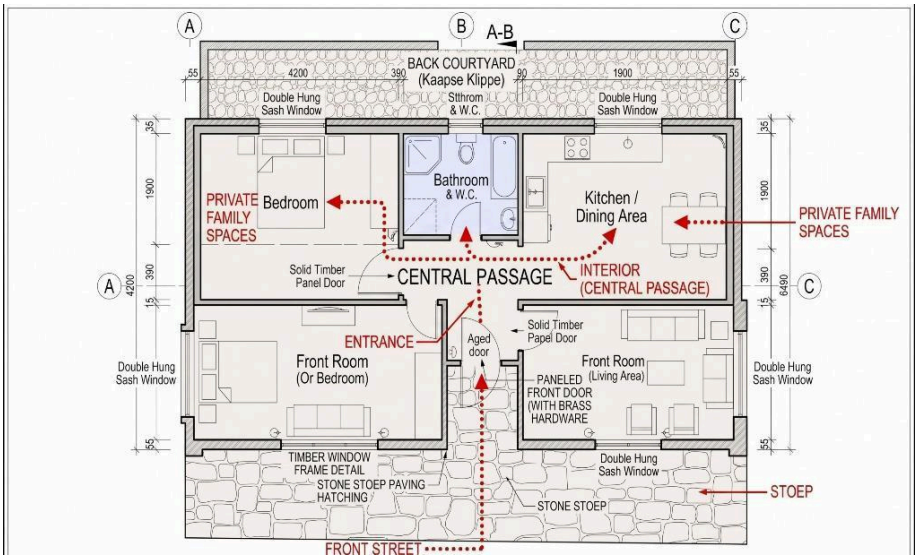


FIGURE 6. Floor plan layout of Cape Malay dwellings indicating the circulation at different degrees of social interaction according to the relationship between household members, relatives, guests and outsiders (source: Author 2026)

The Stoep as a Social-Cultural Mechanism: The stoep acts as an indispensable socio-spatial threshold (Townsend 2015). Positioned between the private living room and the public sidewalk, it allows elders to sit and transmit neighbourhood history to children, facilitates informal hospitality (offering tea and sweet treats to passers-by), and fosters intergenerational vigilance across the streetscape (Toffa 2008) **(refer to Figures 6 and 7).**

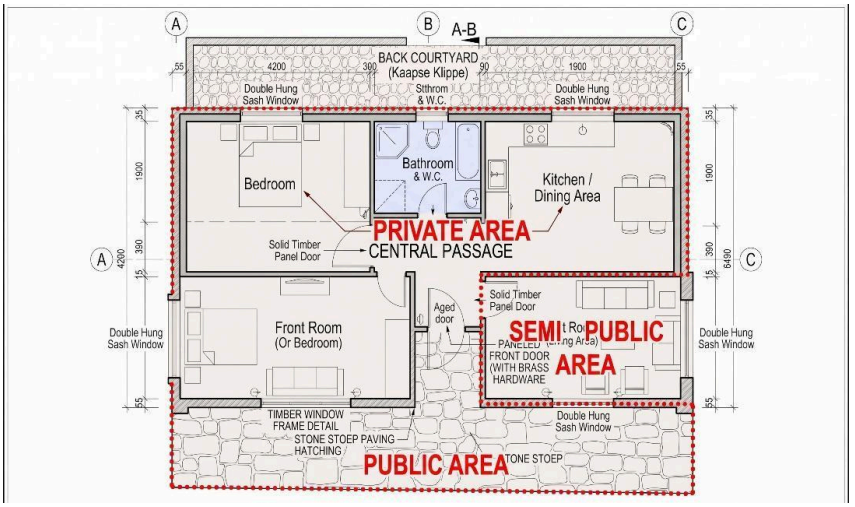


FIGURE 7. Floor plan layout of Cape Malay dwellings indicating the spatial hierarchy of the spaces from the Street → Stoep → Entrance → Interior → Private family spaces symbolising the value of hospitality, which can be understood as part of the broader social and cultural practices of Cape Malay family life (source: Author 2026)

Façade Articulation, Structure, and Materiality: Symmetrical window rhythms, double-hung sash windows, timber panelled doors, plaster mouldings, and vibrant exterior paint choices combine individual household expression with streetscape cohesion (Townsend 2015). Periodic maintenance, repainting, and structural repairs passed down through family generations reinforce a sense of ancestral stewardship and place attachment (Shem-Tov 2021).

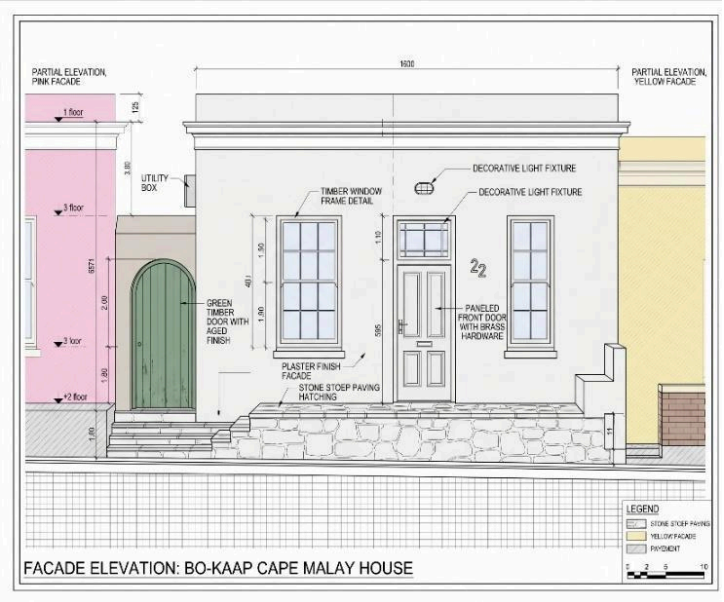


FIGURE 8. The repetitive alignment of adjoining façades creates a cohesive streetscape, embedding individual family identities within a shared cultural landscape (source: Author 2026)

SYNTHESIS CASE STUDY A: FAMILY VALUE AS A SPATIAL–CULTURAL DETERMINANT

The relationship between family, intergenerational continuity values, and Cape Malay domestic architecture can therefore be conceptualised as a process in which family values shape spatial practices. In contrast, spatial arrangements simultaneously reinforce family relationships (see Table 2). Ultimately, the Cape Malay dwelling in Bo-Kaap can be

understood as a repository and active medium of intergenerational cultural continuity. Its location and relationship to the neighbourhood establish familial belonging within a broader community; its scale and building form accommodate collective domestic life; its façade negotiates the boundary between household and community; and its structure and material fabric preserve traces of successive occupation. At the spatial level, access, circulation and hierarchy regulate relationships between family members, visitors and neighbours, while the functional organisation of the dwelling provides the setting in which cultural practices are repeatedly performed and transmitted. The dwelling therefore becomes more than an architectural object: it is a lived cultural framework through which Cape Malay family identity is remembered, reproduced, adapted and negotiated across generations (**refer to Table 2**).

TABLE 2. The family and intergenerational value are well manifested in the architectural manifestation of the dwellings in Bo-Kaap to show cultural significance (source: Author 2026)

Family & Intergenerational Value	Architectural Manifestation	Cultural Significance
Family Cohesion	Compact, interconnected dwelling layouts	Encourages continuous daily interaction (Toffa 2008)
Intergenerational Living	Adaptable spaces & room additions	Supports co-habitation across generations (Toffa 2008)
Privacy & Modesty	Graduated hierarchy from entrance to rear	Regulates guest access & preserves family intimacy (Toffa 2008)
Hospitality	Front reception rooms near main entry	Facilitates cultural norms of welcoming guests (Toffa 2008)
Religious Continuity	Clean, dedicated interior prayer spaces	Transmits Islamic rituals within the home (Aliyu & Ismail 2023)
Family Memory	Retention of inherited items & building fabric	Connects current residents with ancestors (Toffa 2008)
Cultural Transmission	Shared family spaces (kitchen/ living area)	Facilitates informal learning & storytelling (Toffa 2008)
Adaptability	Vertical/horizontal room additions	Enables long-term family occupancy (Toffa 2008)

CASE STUDY B: FAITH AND RELIGIOSITY VALUE — INFLUENCE ON THE AUWAL MOSQUE

The Auwal Mosque (established 1794 on Dorp Street) illustrates how Islamic values directly shape institutional building form and spatial organization (Davids 1980).

Location and Urban Embeddedness: Rather than standing isolated in a grand plaza, the Auwal Mosque is physically embedded within the residential streetscape on Dorp Street (Davids 1980). Built directly on property provided by freed Muslim Coridon van Ceylon and led by Tuan Guru, its location integrates daily congregational prayer directly into the domestic rhythm of the surrounding neighbourhood (Davids 1980).



FIGURE 9. Site plan of Auwal Mosque and view towards Dorp Street (source: Author 2026)

Scale, Function, and Historical Adaptation: The mosque originated through the conversion of a two-storey warehouse structure rather than monumental purpose-built architecture (Davids 1980). Subsequent modifications (including major extensions in 1807 and 1936, and minaret additions) highlight how architectural form adapted over time to accommodate growing congregations (Townsend 2015). Beyond daily prayer, the mosque historically housed Tuan Guru's madrasah—the first formal Islamic school in South Africa—establishing the mosque as a crucial centre for textual education, Arabic-Afrikaans literacy, and community governance (Jappie 2012).

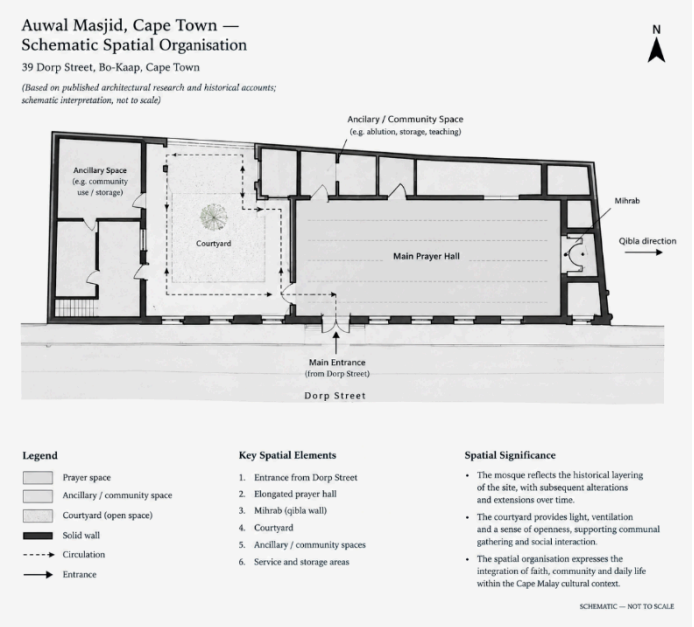


FIGURE 10. Floor plan layout of the mosque indicating the functionality of each space within a mosque context (source: Author 2026)

Spatial Hierarchy, Access, and Orientation: Spatial organisation is strictly ordered around religious practice (Davids 1980):

- **Street Entrance:** Direct access from Dorp Street via an arched doorway (Davids 1980).
- **Ablution & Courtyard Areas:** Cleansing zones providing physical and spiritual transition (Aliyu & Ismail 2023).
- **Main Prayer Hall (Musalla):** An open, unadorned carpeted space designed for aligned congregational prayer rows (Davids 1980).
- **Qiblah & Mihrab:** The niche inserted into the wall establishes the directional orientation toward Mecca, serving as the spiritual focus of the interior architecture (Davids 1980).

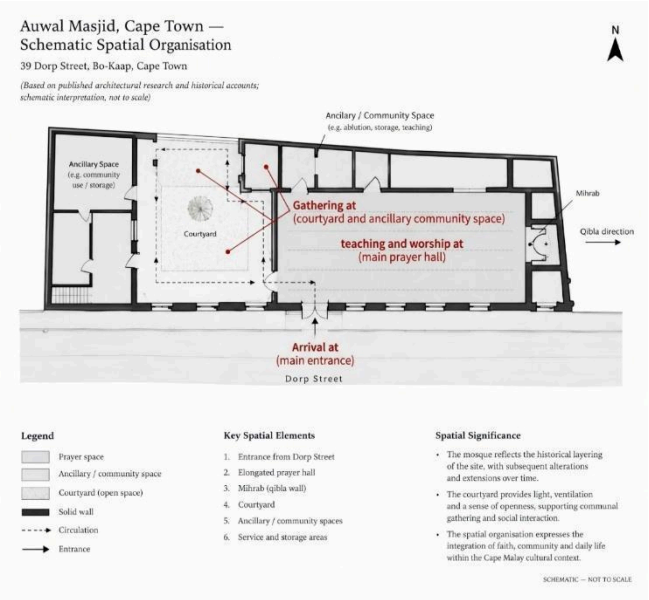


FIGURE 11. Floor plan layout of mosque indicating the spatial hierarchy of the spaces from the Public realm → threshold → communal religious space → focused prayer spaces symbolising the value of faith and religiosity (source: Author 2026)

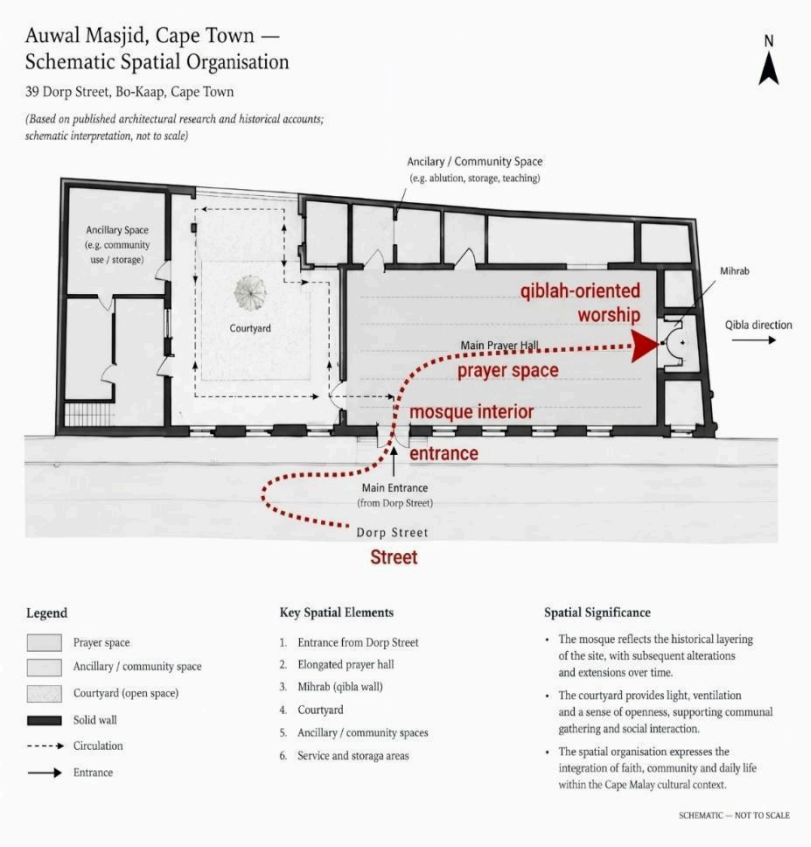


FIGURE 12. Floor plan layout of the mosque indicating the circulation that reinforces the religious setting (source: Author 2026)

Façade Expression and Material Adaptation The exterior façade balances local Cape vernacular expressions (flat parapets, plaster finishes, shuttered windows) with subtle Islamic

architectural identifiers (a modest minaret, green-and-white color schemes, and Arabic calligraphy above the entrance) (Townsend, 2015). It reflects an authentic diasporic synthesis: adapting local colonial building techniques while maintaining clear Islamic identity (Toffa, 2008).

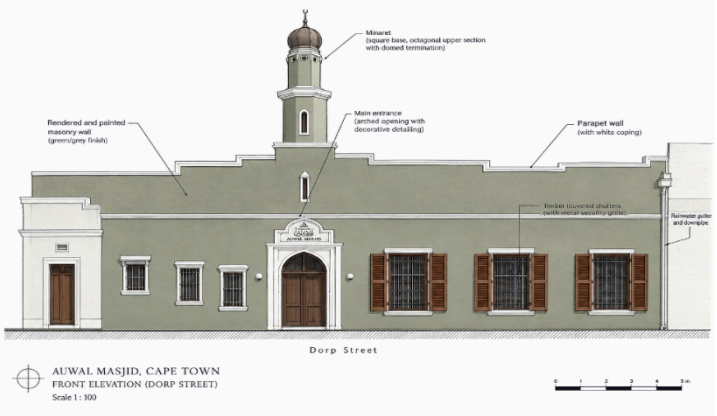


FIGURE 13. The mosque façade communicates the value of faith and religiosity through its simplistic design style that blends in with the surrounding urban community rather than solely represented as an ornamental expression of Islamic architecture (source: Author 2026)

SYNTHESIS CASE STUDY B : VALUE OF RELIGIOSITY AND FAITH AS A GENERATOR OF ARCHITECTURAL MEANING

The significance of Auwal Mosque is consequently not reducible to its physical form. Its architectural meaning emerges from the interaction between religious belief, ritual practice, community memory and spatial experience. The relationship may be represented as: Islamic faith - Religious requirements and practices- Spatial orientation and organisation- Collective worship and learning- Intergenerational transmission- Collective memory and identity that shaped Cape Muslim diasporic identity. This relationship is particularly relevant to the concept of diaspora. Auwal Mosque was established by a Muslim community whose members had diverse geographical origins and whose religious identity was maintained within the colonial Cape. The mosque therefore provided a physical institution through which displaced and locally established Muslims could sustain religious practices, knowledge and collective identity. The history of Tuan Guru is especially significant in this respect: after his release from imprisonment on Robben Island, he established a madrasah and subsequently played a central role in the establishment of Auwal Mosque. The mosque can therefore be interpreted as a spatial anchor of diasporic identity, through which religious continuity was transformed into a tangible architectural and institutional presence within Cape Town **(refer to Table 3).**

TABLE 3. The faith and religiosity value are well manifested in the architectural manifestation of the Auwal Mosque in Bo-Kaap to show Islamic religious significance (source: Author 2026)

Faith & Religiosity Value	Building-Form Manifestation	Spatial Manifestation	Cultural Meaning
Religious Identity	Dedicated mosque building & minaret	Publicly identifiable sacred space	Formal affirmation of Muslim presence (Davids, 1980)
Accessibility to Worship	Positioned directly on residential street	Direct entrance from sidewalk	Seamlessly integrates prayer into daily life (Davids, 1980)
Qiblah Alignment	Mihrab niche incorporated into wall	Directional orientation to Mecca	Establishes sacred order & spiritual unity (Davids, 1980)
Collective Worship	Flexible, open prayer hall	Unobstructed carpeted floor	Fosters equality & communal solidarity (Davids, 1980)
Religious Education	Integrated classroom/ madrasah spaces	Teaching areas & library	Transmits Islamic knowledge across generations (Davids, 1980)
Continuity & Resilience	Evolving modifications (1794–present)	Continuous sacred usage	Demonstrates endurance against persecution (Davids, 1980)
Community Solidarity	Multi-purpose ancillary spaces	Shared gathering & charity zones	Serves as a social support hub (Davids, 1980)
Diasporic Identity	Vernacular Cape styling with minaret	Local material adaptation	Expresses a unique Cape Muslim identity (Davids, 1980)

CASE STUDY C: COMMUNAL SOLIDARITY VALUE — INFLUENCE ON THE MALAY MUSLIM NEIGHBOURHOOD

Communal solidarity represents the overarching socio-spatial framework binding individual households and religious institutions into a cohesive urban fabric (Terblanche 2022).

Urban Density and Street Network Bo-Kaap's urban layout features short blocks, narrow cobblestone streets, and steep pedestrian paths traversing Signal Hill (Sato et al. 2002). Dwellings built right up to property lines create continuous street walls that act as shared "outdoor living rooms" (Sato et al. 2002). The high spatial density fosters constant visual contact and casual everyday interaction among residents (Donaldson et al. 2013).

Visual Cohesion, Façade Coloration, and Streetscapes The iconic vibrant paint colors on house façades—ranging from bright pinks, purples, and yellows to vivid greens and blues—represent both individual family expression and collective neighborhood identity (Townsend 2015). Historically expanded post-apartheid as an assertion of freedom, identity, and heritage pride, these colorful streetscapes present a unified, cheerful front against urban displacement (Terblanche 2022).

Thresholds of Interaction: Stoeps and Pedestrian Routes The physical stoep serves as the main urban catalyst for neighborhood solidarity (Toffa 2008) (**refer to Figure 4**). Raised above street level, it provides a secure vantage point from which residents converse across narrow streets, keep watch over neighborhood children, exchange greetings, and distribute food during festivals such as Eid or Ramadan (Toffa 2008).

SYNTHESIS CASE STUDY C: VALUE OF COMMUNAL SOLIDARITY AS A SOCIO-SPATIAL RELATIONSHIP

The influence of communal solidarity can therefore be understood as a relationship between physical proximity and social interaction. The process may be conceptualised as: Compact urban form - Close relationship between houses and streets- Frequent opportunities for social encounter- Reciprocity and mutual interaction- Shared memories and belonging develop to a Collective identity. This is particularly important for understanding Bo-Kaap as a diasporic cultural landscape. The neighbourhood provides a physical environment within which a historically diverse Muslim population could establish and sustain collective cultural practices. Sato et al. identify Bo-Kaap as an eighteenth-century non-white quarter whose inhabitants had diverse Asian origins and note the persistence of its historic grid and concentration of mosques.Therefore, communal solidarity should not be reduced to an assumption of ethnic homogeneity. Instead, it can be understood as a socially produced sense of belonging that developed through shared religious affiliation, neighbourhood relationships, historical experience and repeated occupation of place **(Refer to Table 4).**

TABLE 4. The communal solidarity value is well manifested in the architectural manifestation of the Bo-Kaap neighbourhood to show communal significance (source: Author 2026)

Communal Solidarity Value	Building-Form Manifestation	Spatial Manifestation	Cultural Implication
Collective Belonging	Closely positioned row houses	Interconnected residential streets	Embeds individual families in a shared landscape (Sato et al. 2002)
Reciprocity & Care	Street-facing windows & low stoeps	Eyes on the street & high visibility	Enhances neighborhood safety & mutual aid (Sato et al. 2002)
Hospitality	Stoep platforms & divided doors	Interactive house-street interface	Encourages informal social encounters (Sato et al. 2002)

Communal Solidarity Value	Building-Form Manifestation	Spatial Manifestation	Cultural Implication
Social Interaction	Human-scaled 1-2 storey massing	Pedestrian-friendly thoroughfares	Facilitates vibrant outdoor community life (Donaldson et al. 2013)
Religious Solidarity	Strategic distribution of mosques	Walking paths linking houses to mosques	Unifies neighborhood around spiritual centers (Donaldson et al. 2013)
Cultural Continuity	Preservation of historic street grid	Intact historic urban morphology	Connects current residents to ancestral history (Sato et al. 2002)
Collective Memory	Vibrant façades & distinct landmarks	Shared public visual markers	Strengthens local pride & place attachment (Donaldson et al. 2013)
Community Resilience	Dense, continuous urban edges	Cohesive physical precinct	Protects against gentrification & displacement (Donaldson et al. 2013)

ETHNIC STUDIES IMPLICATION

This study has implications for ethnic studies by demonstrating that ethnic and diasporic identity is produced not only through ancestry or historical classification, but also through everyday relationships among faith, family, memory, community, and place. The Bo-Kaap case further highlights that the Cape Malay identity is historically layered and socially constructed through diverse Indian Ocean histories rather than representing a homogeneous ethnic origin. This perspective encourages ethnic studies scholarship to read the built environment as an active site of cultural reproduction, where religious institutions, domestic spaces, thresholds, streets, and neighbourhood relationships sustain and reinterpret collective identity. The findings also indicate that heritage recognition should consider intangible practices and community agency alongside architectural fabric. For ethnic communities experiencing migration, displacement, redevelopment, or heritage commodification, the continuity of identity may depend on the ability to maintain cultural practices and social relationships within changing spatial conditions. Accordingly, a value-centred reading of heritage can strengthen interdisciplinary links between ethnic studies, architecture, heritage conservation, and community-based cultural research.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that Cape Malay architectural heritage in Bo-Kaap cannot be understood solely as a collection of historic buildings or stylistic artefacts; rather, it constitutes a material and spatial expression of diasporic identity through which cultural values are continually remembered, practised, negotiated, and transmitted. By examining

faith and religiosity, family and intergenerational continuity, and communal solidarity across the interconnected scales of the mosque, dwelling, and neighbourhood, the study reveals how intangible cultural values become embedded within the everyday production and experience of the built environment. At the religious scale, faith and religiosity are manifested through the mosque as both a sacred and social institution. The mosque extends beyond its function as a place of worship to become a locus of religious learning, collective memory, community gathering, and intergenerational transmission. Spatial practices associated with prayer, religious education, communal observance, and Islamic conduct demonstrate how religious values are materially and socially reproduced within the built environment. The mosque therefore represents an important architectural medium through which Cape Malay Muslim identity has been sustained while simultaneously adapting to the historical and cultural conditions of Cape Town. At the domestic scale, family and intergenerational continuity are reflected through the dwelling as a lived environment in which cultural knowledge, religious practices, familial relationships, memories, and behavioural values are transmitted across generations. Spatial organisation, thresholds, degrees of privacy, domestic gathering spaces, and the relationship between the house and street demonstrate that the dwelling operates not merely as shelter but as a repository of collective and familial memory. Elements such as the stoep are particularly significant because they mediate between domestic privacy and neighbourhood interaction, enabling everyday practices of hospitality, observation, conversation, and intergenerational encounter. Cultural continuity is therefore understood not as the preservation of an unchanged architectural form, but as an ongoing process through which inherited meanings are adapted to changing social circumstances. At the neighbourhood scale, communal solidarity emerges through the spatial relationship between dwellings, streets, religious institutions, and shared places. The compact urban structure and close relationship between buildings and streets create opportunities for social interaction, mutual recognition, hospitality, collective religious activity, and shared experiences. The neighbourhood consequently functions as a collective cultural landscape in which individual households are connected to a wider network of social and religious relationships. The significance of Bo-Kaap lies therefore not only in the architectural character of individual buildings but in the relationships between them and the social practices that continually reproduce a sense of belonging. Taken together, these three dimensions demonstrate that cultural identity is produced through the interaction of material form, spatial practice, memory, and social values. The dwelling, mosque, and neighbourhood should consequently not be interpreted as isolated architectural objects, but as interconnected spatial environments within which diasporic identity is lived and negotiated. This perspective contributes to architectural heritage and ethnic studies by demonstrating how built environments participate actively in the construction and continuity of cultural identity. It also challenges approaches that treat heritage primarily as a static physical resource by foregrounding the relationship between tangible architectural fabric and intangible cultural practices. The findings further contribute to scholarship on diaspora, identity, and cultural continuity by demonstrating that architectural identity is neither entirely inherited nor simply imposed by physical form. Instead, it emerges through continuing processes of adaptation, remembrance, religious practice, family life, and community interaction. The Bo-Kaap case therefore illustrates how a diasporic community negotiates belonging within a historically transformed urban environment while maintaining connections with inherited cultural and religious values. This understanding is particularly important in heritage contexts where cultural identities are shaped by migration, displacement, colonial histories, urban transformation, and contemporary pressures of redevelopment and commodification. From a heritage-management perspective, the findings suggest that conservation should extend beyond the protection of individual buildings towards the safeguarding of relationships between

buildings, spatial practices, cultural memory, and community life. The heritage significance of Bo-Kaap is therefore located simultaneously in its architectural fabric and in the social practices through which that fabric continues to acquire meaning. Such an approach can support more culturally sensitive conservation policies that recognise residents and communities as active custodians, interpreters, and producers of heritage rather than merely passive beneficiaries of preservation.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Despite these contributions, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study is geographically situated within Bo-Kaap, Cape Town, and focuses specifically on the architectural heritage associated with the Cape Malay Muslim community. The findings should therefore not be regarded as universally representative of all Cape Muslim communities or of diasporic Malay communities elsewhere. The historical construction of the term Cape Malay itself encompasses diverse geographical, ethnic, and cultural origins, making the identity a historically layered and negotiated category rather than a homogeneous ethnic designation. Second, the study concentrates analytically on three principal cultural values—faith and religiosity, family and intergenerational continuity, and communal solidarity—and examines their expression through the mosque, dwelling, and neighbourhood. Although these dimensions provide a useful framework for interpreting architectural identity, other cultural values, including hospitality, gender relations, economic practices, political agency, food traditions, language, education, and relationships with the wider Cape Muslim community, may also influence the production and interpretation of architectural heritage. Third, the interpretive qualitative approach places emphasis on architectural form, spatial organisation, cultural meaning, historical evidence, and observed or documented social practices. While this approach provides depth in understanding the symbolic and cultural dimensions of the built environment, it may not fully capture the diverse lived experiences and potentially divergent interpretations of contemporary residents, younger generations, heritage practitioners, religious leaders, and other community stakeholders. Finally, the study recognises that architectural heritage is dynamic. Contemporary urban development, tourism, gentrification, changing household structures, demographic transformation, and evolving religious and cultural practices may continually reshape the relationship between people and place. Consequently, the cultural meanings identified in this study should be understood as situated interpretations rather than fixed or universal characteristics of Bo-Kaap's architecture.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could extend this study through comparative, longitudinal, and participatory approaches. Comparative research between Bo-Kaap and other diasporic Muslim or Malay communities across the Indian Ocean world could investigate how migration, religion, memory, and cultural adaptation produce different architectural expressions of identity. Such studies could compare Bo-Kaap with Malay-Muslim settlements in Southeast Asia, Sri Lanka, Mauritius, or other historically connected communities to examine both continuities and divergences in diasporic architectural practices. A second direction concerns the development of a more comprehensive cultural-value-to-spatial-expression framework. Future studies could investigate how values such as faith, family, solidarity, hospitality, privacy, dignity, reciprocity, and collective memory are translated into contemporary housing, community facilities, religious buildings, and neighbourhood planning. Particular attention could be given to how inherited spatial principles are transformed rather than simply replicated in contemporary architecture. Third, empirical research involving residents and

successive generations of the Bo-Kaap community would strengthen understanding of how cultural meanings are experienced and negotiated today. Interviews, focus groups, behavioural mapping, participatory photography, oral histories, and spatial-ethnographic methods could reveal differences between older and younger generations in their perceptions of heritage, identity, belonging, and architectural continuity. Future studies could also employ mixed-method and spatial-analytical approaches, including space syntax, GIS mapping, behavioural observation, photographic documentation, and quantitative surveys, to investigate relationships between spatial configuration and patterns of social interaction. Such approaches could complement interpretive readings of architectural meaning with empirical evidence concerning accessibility, movement, interaction, territoriality, and changing patterns of occupation. Finally, greater attention should be directed towards the relationship between heritage conservation and contemporary urban transformation. Research could examine how conservation policies, tourism, property-market pressures, gentrification, and community aspirations affect the continuity of cultural practices and residents' relationships with inherited buildings and neighbourhood spaces. This would enable future scholarship to move beyond the preservation of architectural fabric towards a more socially grounded model of living heritage, in which cultural identity is sustained through the continuing interaction between people, place, memory, and everyday practice. Overall, the Bo-Kaap case demonstrates that diasporic architectural heritage is not simply a record of the past but an active cultural process. The continuing relationship between faith and the mosque, family and the dwelling, and communal solidarity and the neighbourhood illustrates how cultural values are materially expressed while simultaneously being reinterpreted through changing social conditions. Understanding this dynamic relationship provides a foundation for approaching architectural heritage not as a static representation of identity, but as a continuously negotiated process through which communities remember, inhabit, reproduce, and redefine their sense of belonging.

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