

# A RITE OF PASSAGE

[AN EXPLORATION OF CULTURAL CATALYTIC SPACES IN THE URBAN CONTEXT]

Vipua Rukambe

# **A RITE OF PASSAGE**

## *AN EXPLORATION OF CULTURAL CATALYTIC SPACES IN THE URBAN CONTEXT*

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Architecture (Professional)

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**BUILDING:** *LEKHULENI INITIATION SCHOOL FOR GIRLS*

**Address:** Mamelodi- Pienaars River Precinct (GPS Coordinates: 25°42'22.10"S,  
28°22'02.68"E. )

**Function:** *LEKHULENI INITIATION SCHOOL FOR GIRLS*

**Research Field:** Heritage and cultural landscape



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## WITH SPECIAL THANKS TO:

To my Heavenly Father for this blessing and privilege.

- To You, who have gone before me, paved the way and made this journey possible.

-To my loving parents for their unwavering support

- My friends and family, for your understanding.

- To Buhle Mathole for your love and guidance at every point in this journey.

-To Una Stuurmann for giving me the confidence to walk passionately in the direction of my dreams.

-To all who have been there along this Journey of *Making and being Made*.

## BLACK WOMAN

Black women with all your might,  
Black woman you are truly a beautiful sight.

Black woman with your beautiful face,  
You are definitely a credit to your black race.

Black woman say it loud,  
Being black is being proud.

Black woman in this unbearable land,  
Stop a minute and take your black brother's hand.

Black woman you are mother, woman and a friend,  
Without a black woman a black man can't win.

Black woman education and respect are your goals,  
All these are said, but seldom showed.

Black woman, be proud of what you are, because it  
Will always take you very far.

Black woman whose fore-parents were once a slave,  
If you apply yourself you can have it made.

Black woman always watch what you do,  
Being black makes everyone else watch you.

God made Heaven, God made Earth.  
Beautiful black woman consider yourself... What God made first.

Wilton Antonio Mc Glory

## Abstract

A rite of passage is the exploration of cultural catalytic spaces in the urban context.

### **A space where The traditional ritual is celebrated.**

The project is an exploration that addresses a grand narrative of what happens as generations of African people move from the rural context into the Peri-urban township of Mamelodi. The narrative explores the loss of traditional practices experienced as people find themselves in Mamelodi due to limitations imposed by geographical constraints through narrative as a generator of design.

Generations of Women in this context have kept the fabric of the township in tact and have created strong social networks that have helped them survive the harsh conditions found here. The women of Mamelodi are the breadwinners, the mothers, the custodians and by mobilising the women an entire community is empowered.

The project draws inspiration from the collective cultural memory of the central cattle pattern of traditional Bantu settlements found in the rural areas, where the women come from. The project looks at an Architecture of inversion by placing the women at the center of this layout using the central cattle pattern as a template, through the design of a *Kgotla* designated for women.

A social space dedicated for the women of Mamelodi, a space that reclaims public space for those that keep the fabric of this township in tact. A beacon that celebrates traditional practices in the township of Mamelodi.

The project looks at how architecture can help in the preservation of traditional cultural practices.

A celebration of Traditional ritual enhanced by the daily ritual of the women of Mamelodi through the design of The:

LEHKULENI INITIATION SCHOOL FOR GIRLS.



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**1.1 Background- The Narrative**

**1.2 Problem Statement**

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# **INTRODUCTION**

# **01**

# 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 BACKGROUND– THE NARRATIVE

In the hopes of securing better living and working conditions we left home, our “ikhaya”, our homestead. With the hopes of access to urban labour markets and well-located land to settle on, we left our ancestors behind in hopes of creating livelihoods for our loved ones. We left behind our strongest ties, where our connections to those who had passed on were made concrete; we left behind a place where our rites of passage took place, where our children could be introduced to our ancestors. We left behind our strongest connection, our strongest ties, our ikhaya, our home.

A place of connectedness where our connections could be made concrete through rituals which would allow us to communicate with deceased family members. We found ourselves pushed to the peripheries of all we had aspired to, to the geographical constraints of the city, in the township of Mamelodi, Pretoria.

We could no longer practice our rituals in the city and so we called it “*Esilungweni*” (*Place of the white people’s ways*) (Watson 2009:69)..

We no longer had contact with the ancestors, which occurred primarily through the keeping of cattle, and most of our rituals were based in the cattle byre, without this connection to our ancestors our new homes in the city could never be considered as our ikhaya. It was never home, living in the city became unbearable as our urban dwellings contributed to the process of individualization which was at odds with our communal African culture (Watson 2009:69).

Without our cultural practices and rituals, we were lost in the city, an ephemeral and transitional passage between the ikhaya and the indlu. Our absent rituals could no longer help us in defining our true African selves. The city finally had to adapt to us in order to prevent the death of our unique humanity lost in Liminality, a transitional space neither one, nor the other, neither here nor there, rather a third space in between.

**The Urban context had to adapt. We were and ARE here to stay.**



Fig. 1.1 Collage of rural- urban migration (Boiteto, 2016).



## 1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Pretoria is a city that exemplifies a geography of power. Its urban topography; structural design and symbolic Architecture all reflect the ambitions of an Afrikaner nation, which sought independence and sovereignty at all costs ( Van der Klashorst 2013:17).

Since a democratically elected government came to power in 1994, this modernist capital city no longer fulfills its mandate for nation building and ideological expression (Van de Klashorst 2013:17).

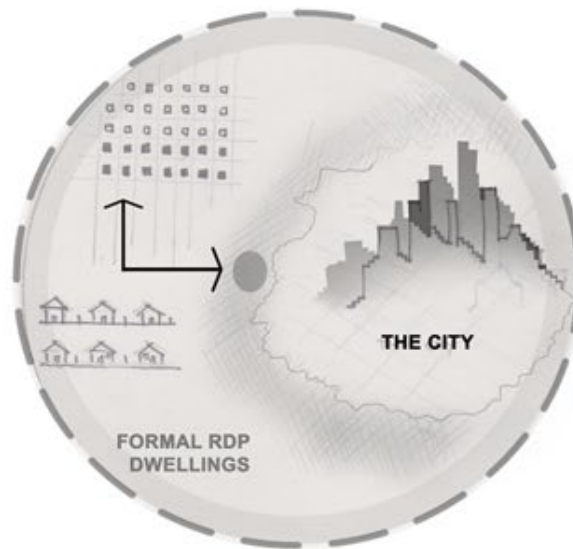
Our urban vision is to view Mamelodi as no longer being in a transitionary state but this is our iKhaya, this is our home- stead. Where new generations will be born and have their strongest ties to their ancestors, where ritual practices should take place in order to strengthen and maintain these bonds.

From the perspective of the urban planning theories, there has been a recent shift towards accepting and responding to the realities of social difference and multiculturalism, and yet planning finds itself trapped by the liberal philosophical foundations rooted in Western ideologies of space use which still shape its thinking (Watson 2009:70). The Urban issue is that the planning is rooted in the eradication of slums through upgrade programs and removal of informality in and around the city but Abrahamse (2011:43) states that when informality is embedded in the city, it allows those mono- functional spaces of the overly planned, 20th century city to offer a more mixed-use, fine-grained and dense urban environment. By addressing and engaging with difference the city's modernist planning ideas that were in service of the apartheid state begin to fall away, creating a more agile and flexible layer of urbanism within the city.

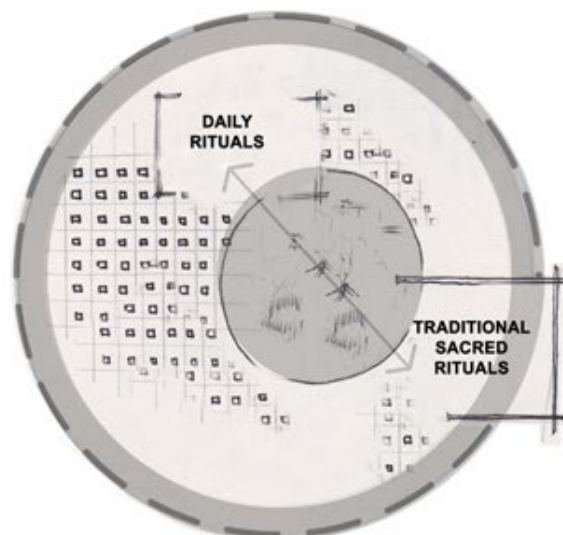
The real problem lies in the fact that the South African city relies on western norms that fails to integrate form, tempo- rality and event according to (Da Costa & Van Rensburg 2008: 43). Ceremonial rituals and practices have continued to take place in backyards or public realms such as the closing off of streets to carry out certain traditional practices. This is evidence of the city's failure to incorporate temporality and event found in many African cultures and this is especially pertinent in the South African township context where Western norms have had a pervasive formalist influence on the spatial structure and layout (Da Costa & Van Rensburg 2008: 43).



### THE GENERAL ISSUE



### THE URBAN ISSUE



### THE ARCHITECTURAL ISSUE

Fig. 1.2 Diagrams of issues (Author 2016).



## 1.3 THE ISSUES

### GENERAL ISSUE- EXPECTATIONS AND REALITIES

Ikhaya: a place of connectedness where our connections to our ancestors could be made concrete through rituals. Our homesteads, where through our traditional rituals we could connect with those who had passed on.

We left our ikhaya for the city in hopes of securing better living and working conditions. With the hopes of access to urban labour markets and well located land to settle on we left our ancestors behind. A place where our rites of passage took place, where our children could be introduced to our ancestors, we left behind our strongest connection, our strongest ties our ikhaya, our home.

Perceived as temporary sojourners rather than permanent residents we found ourselves pushed to the peripheries of all we had aspired to, to the geographical constraints of the city, in the Township of Mamelodi.

### THE URBAN ISSUE -THE IKHAYA AND THE INDLU

We no longer had contact with the ancestors, which occurred primarily through the keeping of cattle, and most of our rituals were based in the cattle byre, without this connection to our ancestors our new homes in the city could never be considered as our ikhaya. It was never home, living in the city became unbearable as our urban dwellings contributed to the process of individualisation which was at odds with our communal African culture. We could no longer practice our rituals in the city and so we called it "Esilungweni" (Place of the white people's ways).

Without our cultural practices and rituals, we were lost in the city, an ephemeral and transitional passage between the ikhaya and the indlu. Our absent rituals could no longer help us in defining our true African selves. The city finally had to adapt to us in order to prevent the death of our unique humanity lost in Liminality, a transitional space neither one, nor the other, neither here nor there, rather a third space in between.

The Urban context had to adapt. We were and ARE here to stay.

### THE ARCHITECTURAL ISSUE -THE SACRED AND THE PROFANE

The architectural question lies in finding a method of addressing The Everyday Rituals that people carry out in the urban context that can enhance and establish The Sacred Traditional Ritual in an architectural space through the principles of Ubuntu.

Socio-cultural forces shape the built environment; our African cities need to be emancipated from the ideas that the western norms are superior, universal or the most appropriate, we need to be freed from our colonial pasts.

Through this dissertation i aim to investigate the potential of architecture to react to and accommodate this shift in our perception of the urban context in accommodating multiculturalism and the other. The proposal aims to facilitate contemporary interpretations of traditional African values and aesthetics through the fusion of Ubuntu principles in a condition of modernity and progress. Through analysing ikhaya concepts and indlu realities.



## 1.4 HYPOTHESIS

### ***Ubuntu is the philosophy upon which most rural societies are built on.***

Despite having left our Ikhaya for the city we continue to carry these principles.

Botho/ubuntu constitutes a worldview that focuses on the wellbeing of the community, whereas Western ideology – that has been producing much of our built environment – stresses the rights of the individual (Steyn 2012:119).

Due to most of the built environment being based on Western ideology we arrived in the city and the existing infrastructure did not fit or accommodate our way of life. The city did not accommodate our values of Ubuntu. The Ubuntu principles of: “respect for the sanctity of the human being and a human beings connectedness to other people as well as the natural environment and the spiritual realm.”

The dissertation investigates the possibility of the incorporation of Ubuntu principles into our built environment as a tool to address the urban issue found in the context of Mamelodi as many concepts relating to the use of space in the Nguni tribes are embodied in the concept of Ubuntu. Is it possible to use these principles in the built environment despite literature on architecture in the context of Ubuntu being very sparse?

The architectural question lies in finding a method of addressing everyday rituals that people carry out in in the urban context that can enhance and establish the sacred ritual in an architectural space through the principles of Ubuntu. Socio-cultural forces shape the built environment; our African cities need to be emancipated from the ideas that the western norms are superior, universal or the most appropriate, we need to be freed from our colonial pasts.

*The inhabitants of Mamelodi cannot be expected to occupy the city without severely compromising the fundamental concepts of Ubuntu.*





## 1.5 OBJECTIVES

Through this dissertation i aim to investigate the potential of architecture to react to and accommodate this shift in our perception of the urban context in accommodating multiculturalism and the other. The proposal aims to facilitate contemporary interpretations of traditional African values and aesthetics through the fusion of Ubuntu principles in a condition of modernity and progress. Through analysing ikhaya concepts and indlu realities the aim is to reincorporate the single mother into society.

As cultural practices are changing and traditional values do not remain static the design intention for this dissertation is to create a space that caters for the marginalized, those pushed to the fringes of society. A space where they can once again through the rites of passage steps of separation, transition and integration be reintroduced into the urban context. A space where they can feel like a part of this urban context on several different levels in the context of Mamelodi, serving as a catalyst for community identity development in the form of a space that is capable of re-appropriation and cross programming.

## 1.6 INTENTION

This Dissertation is an exploration of cultural catalytic spaces.

By this I mean I will be looking into an understanding of the possibility of the carrying out of Traditional ritual practices in the urban/Peri-urban context. A space that facilitates the carrying out of traditional ritual practices while enhancing the daily rituals of the inhabitants of Mamelodi.

Exploring the possibility of a merge between the daily rituals and traditional rituals of the African woman who leaves her homestead to live in the peri-urban township of Mamelodi.

Having left home certain traditional practices are no longer carried out due to space and also the flexibility of the new society she finds herself in. She has to work in order to sustain her family, this implies she commutes long hour's daily into the city in order to provide for her family.

Being in the city implies a separation from ancestors and kin. She lacks the support she would get if she were back home at the ikhaya. The city is harsh, it is no place for the weak pushed to the boundaries she finds herself.

The Women of Mamelodi would join Stokvels that serve as support structures for these women. These women are my clients I will be looking into their needs in empowering these women. Looking at her holistically as an individual down to the collective (The Stokvel) and then down to the community that she keeps intact.

I will be addressing the Stokvels needs and the greater community on four levels:

### **The 4 points are the guiding factor for what the program should be.**

The Aim and intention is to create an Urban Ikhaya for this woman, A nest. This is a place where she belongs in the urban context, where she can empower herself and others in Mamelodi. Where she can empower herself and take care of her household and her community.

By addressing her Traditional needs I will be incorporating the daily needs in order to empower these women in their existing context. It will be an exchange of some sort where the two will feed off each other in order for this scheme to be a success.

The center will primarily be for the women but men would be welcomed and are able to use certain parts of the facility but it will be predominantly aimed at the women and Female related traditional rituals.

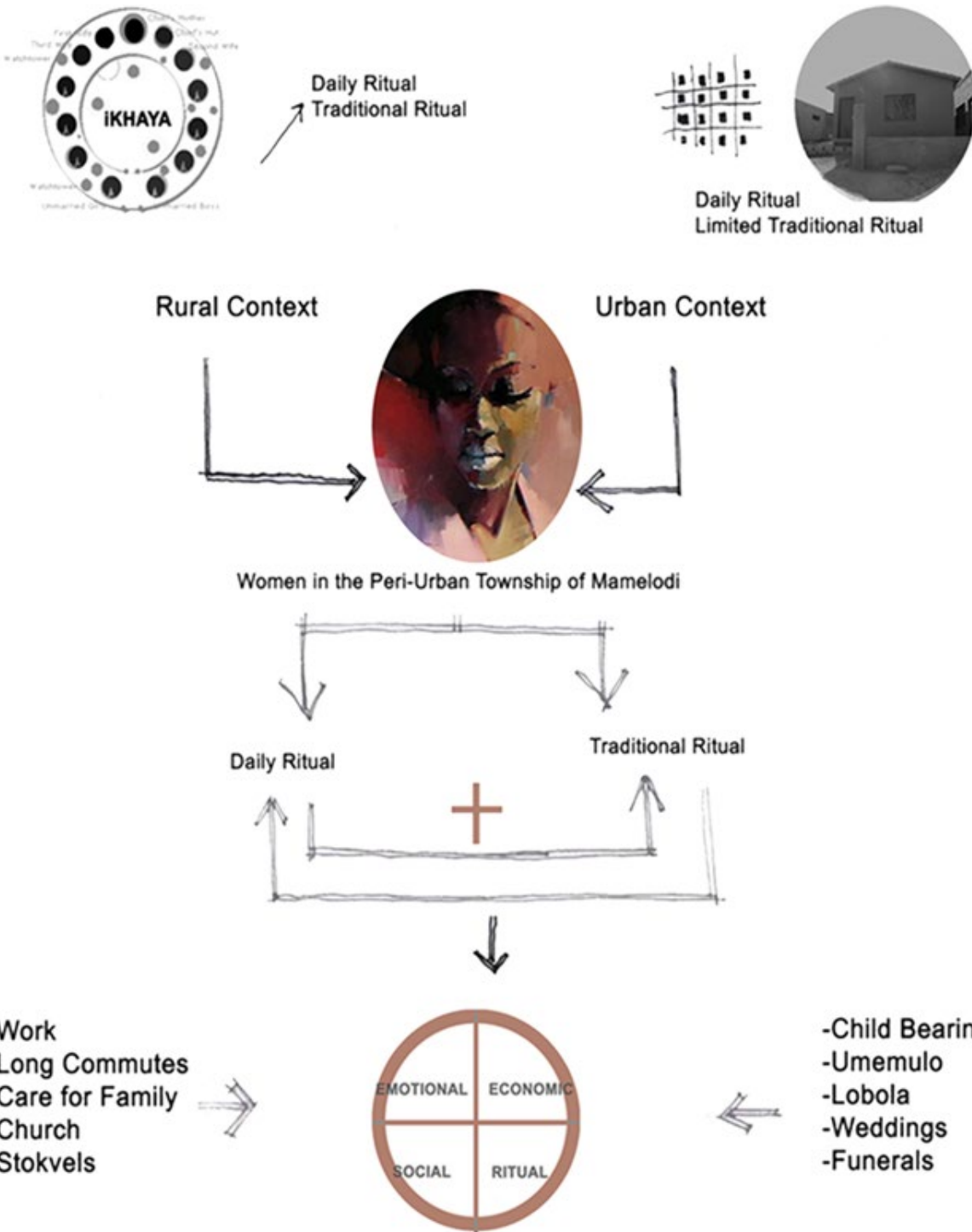


Fig. 1.3 Break down of intentions (Author 2016).

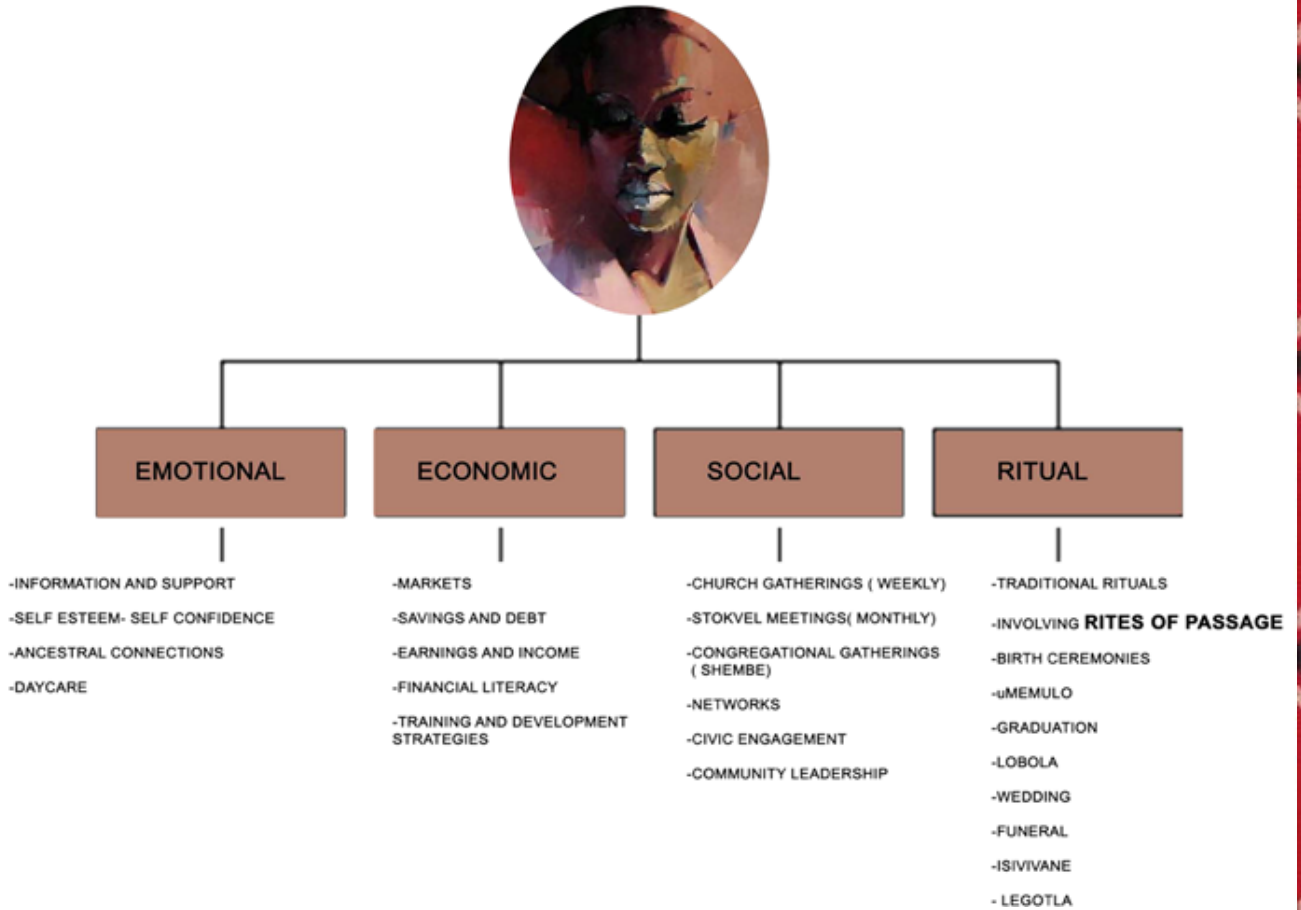


Fig. 1.4 Break down of spatial intentions ( Author 2016).



## 1.7 DELIMITATIONS

This Dissertation is an exploration of cultural catalytic spaces In Mamelodi. A study that addresses the loss of tradition that takes place through the rural-urban migration. The project looks at the needs of the Nguni tribes women of Mamelodi, comparing her needs to her lifestyle in her rural setting to her new urban setting. The project aims to meet her needs culturally despite the constraints of her new urban “western” lifestyle.

The project will limit the investigation to the rituals involving a rite of passage as the main focus in reincorporating the women of Mamelodi in the urban fabric. The investigation will scale down from the cultural precinct layout addressing the following:

**-ECONOMIC**

**-EMOTIONAL**

**-SOCIAL**

**-RITUAL**

Down to the specific design of the Ritual space stemming off the existing initiation school for girls.

## 1.8 METHODOLOGY

The project is rooted in the theoretical approach of understanding Van Gennep's- Rite of passage concepts and how they can be tied to architecture with the aims of empowering the women and the greater community as a whole.

The project will need to be an investigation and exploration of the cultural requirements, traditional values, aesthetics and the Ubuntu concepts of the Nguni tribes which will be the core of how the translation into architecture will be carried out.

Understanding the role architecture can play in the spatial requirements for the various rituals of the daily and celebrated and how the users of the space mediate between the two.

The First step in defining a transitional space between the everyday and the sacred, that has a new role and identity in the community of Mamelodi is through:

1. **RE-LINKING:** the gap that exists between the rural and urban.
2. **RE-CLAIMING:** this is the investigation of how the women of Mamelodi can reclaim public spaces in their community.
3. **THE "OTHER"** Investigating the possibility of ritual as a performance.  
Exposure of the Other



Fig. 1.5 Diagrams of Methodology (2016).



## 1.9 TERMINOLOGY

**Emancipation:** The act of setting free. Freeing from Legal, social or political restrictions. The Women of Mamelodi are in need of an emancipation from the social restrictions set up by the urban context. E-MAN-cipation: setting the women of Mamelodi free through a space they can call their own.

**Ikhaya:** Homestead also known as Umzi, a place of strongest connections to one's ancestors. A place of connectedness to those who have passed on.

A place that suggests connectedness and it is a place where such connections can be made concrete through rituals which allow communication with deceased family members. It is a place of graves and this makes it sacred, giving the place power over the living ( Watson 2007:67)

**Indlu:** The RDP dwelling in the urban context, which stands in contrast with the Ikhaya. The indlu originally suggests separation of families from their ancestral ties. They are seen as a divide between families and are generally seen as unsatisfactory.

**Nguni tribes:** The Tribes of the Nguni people are the Swazi, Northern Ndebele, Zulu, Xhosa and the Southern Ndebele people. There are different variations and the Cultural practices all differ but drawing on the similarities will inform the design.

**Re-link:** This is the exploration and investigation of bringing African traditional practices back into the city. An exploration of the possibility of the link that exists between the daily ritual and the traditional ritual in the urban setting.

**Re-claim:** The women of Mamelodi are pushed aside and the only public spaces they have to socialize and carry out civic engagement is on the streets and within their limited yard spaces. The women of Mamelodi are looking at how through architecture they can re-claim spaces dedicated to them.

**Rite of Passage:** A theory explored by Van Gennep which looks at the stages one undergoes as one moves from one state of being into the next. They are seen as Separation, Liminality and reincorporation. This theory is directly compared to the Journey of the Women of Mamelodi as they leave their Ikhaya to live and work in the city and are lost in Liminality and thus need to be reincorporated into the urban fabric.

**Stokvel:** This is one of the most prominent support structures found amongst the women of Mamelodi. It is a means for the women to support their families economically and it also serves as a support structure: socially for the women. They hold social gatherings once a month at rotating households where they share the collected funds and a meal.

**The other:** Stands in contrast to Western Philosophies and ideologies. A person or cultural that is foreign to you.

**Urban Nest:** This is an enclave for the urban woman in Mamelodi. A space where the principles of her iKHAYA can be expressed within the urban context. A space where the women of Mamelodi can practice and pass on their traditions although they find themselves in the urban context.

Fig. 1.6 Day of the Gods. Gauguin(1894).



## 1.9 Chapter 1 Synopsis

This chapter sets the scene for the project. It introduces the background of how The African woman finds herself in this urban context. Through this chapter General to Architectural questions are posed from an urban problem down to the very specific of what the project intends on tackling: Which is working with the LEKHULENI Initiation school for Girls.

From a broad scale down to the spaces of the 'Indlu' where this backyard is the only space set aside for women.

This chapter explains how and why women need to reclaim public space as a means to honor those that hold the urban fabric of Mamelodi together.

