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CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS

CHAPTER 04



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“South Africa’s townships have often been referred to as the place where the heart of the nation beats. They inspire nostalgia in anyone who has ever lived or continues to live in such an area; a feeling of belonging; a sense of pride. Be it Alexandra, Soweto, Seshego, Mamelodi, Motherwell, Mdantsane, Umlazi, KwaMashu, Khayelitsha, or Gugulethu, the township for many South Africans will always be where the heart is.” (MTONGANA 2008.)

Mamelodi, situated on the north eastern outskirts of Pretoria, is a former black township with a population of about one million people. (MAMELODI TRUST. 2010.)

4.1 THE HISTORY OF MAMELODI

The present town of Mamelodi lies at the base and on the lower slopes of the Magaliesberg Mountains, on what was once a farm known as Vlakfontein. (WALKER & VAN DER WAAL 1991: 2) Mamelodi was founded on the 30th of October 1945 when the Pretoria City Council acquired the land for use as a black residential area. The name Mamelodi meaning “Place of Joy” in Tswana, (WALKER & VAN DER WAAL 1991: 3-4) was given to the area as a recognition of the permanence of the settlement, which was originally intended to be more for migratory labour. The township became the place into which people from the areas of

Lady Selbourne, Eastwood and Riverside were resettled during the forced removals of the Apartheid era.

Mamelodi was planned and laid out by the town planning section of the Pretoria City Council. It soon became apparent that Mamelodi needed a different layout to the other townships in the area, due to the terrain on which it lies. Principles involving contour layouts, the avoidance of sharp junctions and provisions for open recreational spaces were followed, with very limited success, and sites were set aside for churches, traders, educational purposes and other facilities. What is a notable feature of the Mamelodi landscape and planning is the extreme density of the housing, which influences the social life and environment of the residents. Over the years housing in the area has densified even further than was anticipated or planned. This due



44. Mamelodi Stories - Informal settlement

to the additions of informal extensions to existing homes, in order to alleviate housing shortages. (WALKER & VAN DER WAAL 1991: 8)

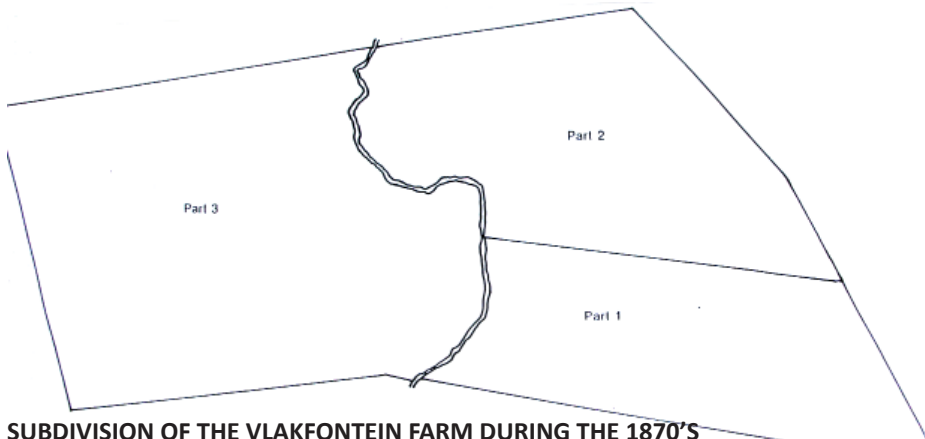
“It is not unusual for stands to house twenty or more, in formal and informal dwellings on one stand.” (WALKER & VAN DER WAAL 1991: 9)

The town spreads along the valley floor, with its main axis moving west to east. The northern and eastern edges of Mamelodi are bordered by the lower slopes of the Magaliesberg Mountains, while its southern and western borders are defined by the railway line that used to be known as the Delagoa Bay line and areas set aside for cemeteries, respectively. (WALKER & VAN DER WAAL 1991: 2) In effect this limited the access ways into and out of the area and allowed the government strategic advantage if riot or uprising occurred against the regime. Only two access routes into Mamelodi were provided for. The first by rail and the two train stations, Deneboom and Eerste Fabriek and the second through Mamelodi’s main road Tsamaya Ave, which follows the basic West-East axis.

The basic fabric of Mamelodi is further



45. Mamelodi Stories - Informal Settlement with the Magaliesberg Foothills in the Background

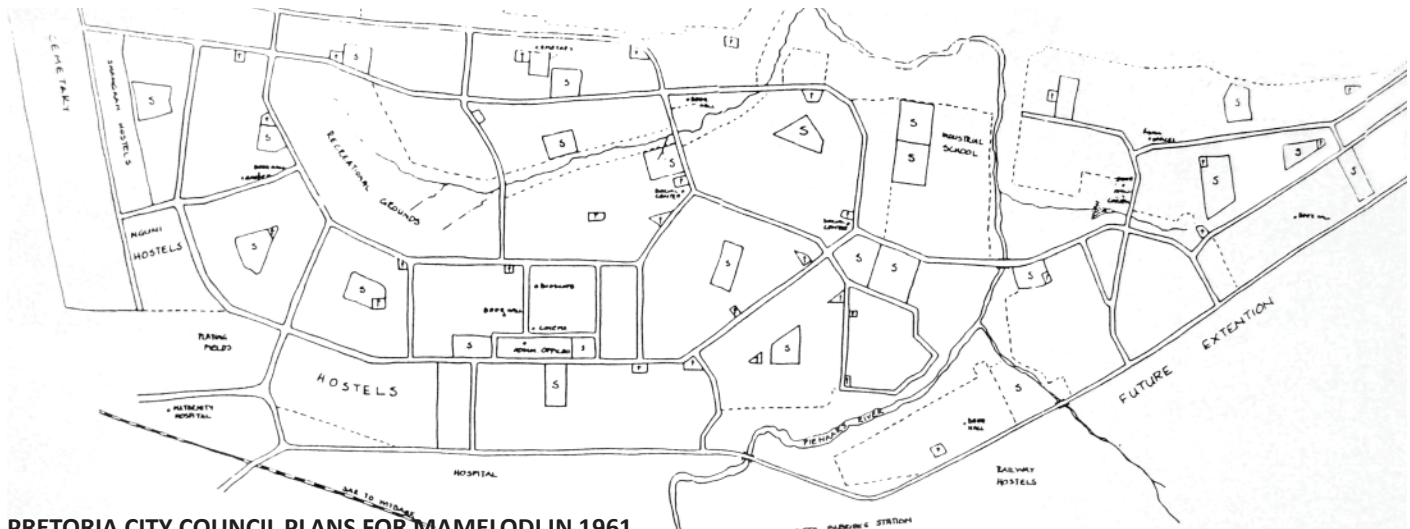


SUBDIVISION OF THE VLAKFONTEIN FARM DURING THE 1870'S

46. 1870 Area Map of Vlakfontein Farm

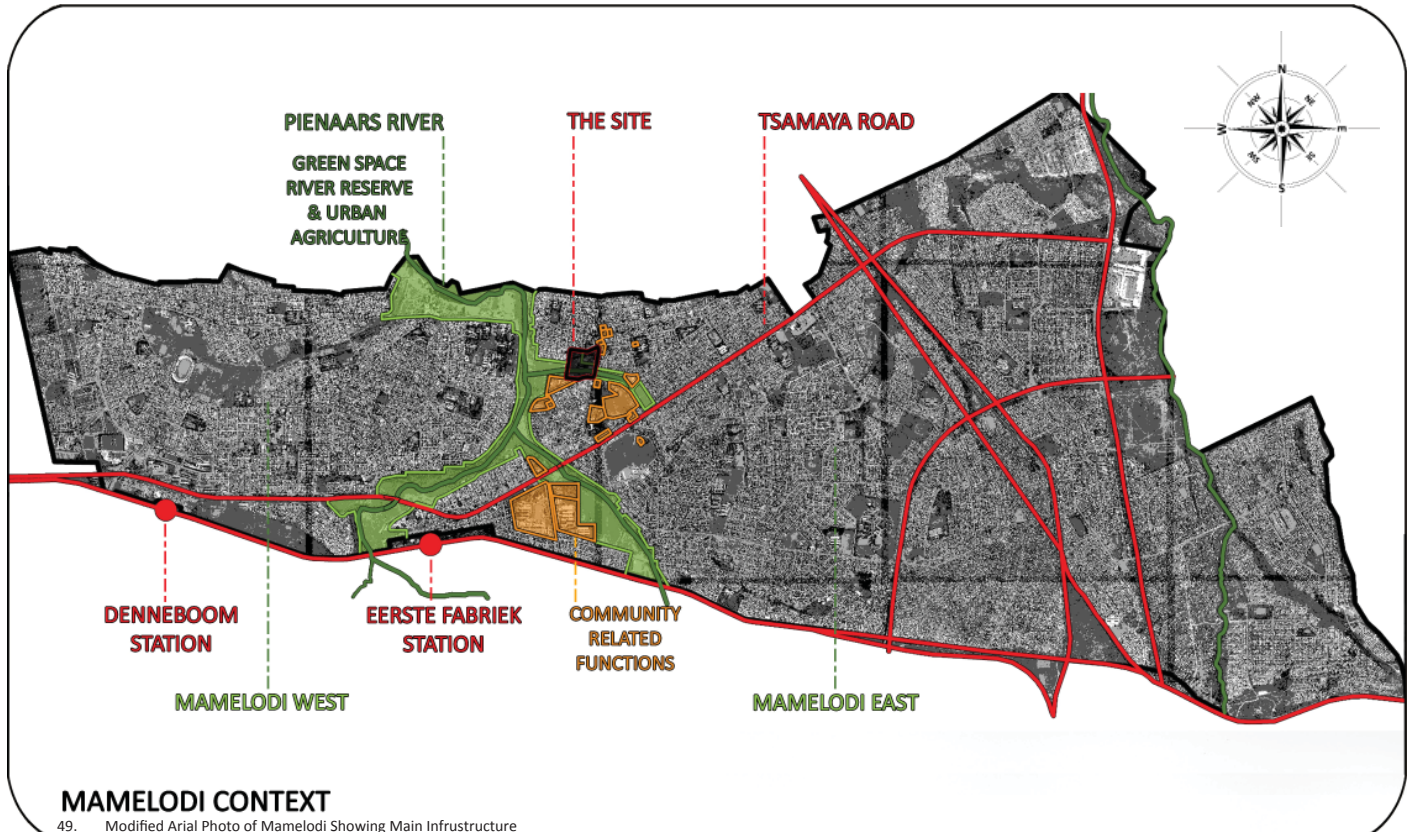


47. Mamelodi East Street Scene



PRETORIA CITY COUNCIL PLANS FOR MAMELODI IN 1961

48. 1961 Plans for Mamelodi



MAMELODI CONTEXT

49. Modified Aerial Photo of Mamelodi Showing Main Infrastructure



50. Mamelodi Stories - Portrait with Patterned Brickwork in Background

divided into East and West by the Pienaar's River. Its flood plains and banks create a large central green space which divides Mamelodi into the older West and relatively newer East. The Apartheid government made no provision for fresh water or sanitation in the townships, (MAMELODI TRUST. 2010.) leading to the Pienaar's river becoming the main source of water in the area for many years. The river is seldom crossed, with Tsamaya Ave forming the main gateway between the two halves. Although the area has an abundance of open green spaces they are not used to their full potential, and have often become neglected and dangerous. (WALKER, J. & VAN DER WAAL, G. 1991: 18)

"What were open spaces and parks with amusement areas have long ago become overgrown and even dangerous to use owing to muggings." (WALKER & VAN DER WAAL 1991: 18)

4.2 THE BUILDING OF MAMELODI

Early low cost housing built by the Pretoria City Council were of brick and local training initiatives and employment was sought in order to save on the eventual cost of the building works. (WALKER & VAN DER WAAL 1991: 11)

"There are suggestions of training activities still discernable in the building methods used in erecting the houses. For instance it is possible to discern different building methods used in laying bricks and in some cases an attempt has been made to make a pattern, alternating blue and red bricks, long and short." (WALKER & VAN DER WAAL 1991: 11)

When one travels through Mamelodi today one can see multiple attempts at personalisation and inventiveness in the brick structures and their fences. Bricks turned on edge, patterning, alternating of materials and orientation of bricks are all used in various ways. The result is a diverse, complex and local brick tectonic for the area. Yet brick is not the only material sown into the Mamelodi fabric.

What began as the building of temporary shelters, which would eventually develop into permanent homes, became the booming Zozo or prefabricated shack business of today. (MAMELODI TRUST. 2010.) Informal settlements have grown as the housing capacity of Mamelodi struggled to keep up with the growth and influx of residents. As more people move from the rural areas to the cities, these informal settlements are growing month by month. (MAMELODI TRUST.



51. Mamelodi West Street Scene

2010.) The post 1994 Government's answer has been to build massive low cost housing projects in the Eastern most regions of Mamelodi, up onto the foot hills of the mountains.

All of this has led to a more permanent and affluent section in the western areas of Mamelodi, where newer building works and renovations transform township houses into 'Tuscan villas', slowly merging into older brick low cost housing, then informal settlement before finally reaching the eastern most regions and the new matchboxes littering the landscape. Mamelodi's



52. Mamelodi Stories - Children Playing with a Shopping Trolley



53. Mamelodi Stories - Child's Portrait



54. Mamelodi West Informal Trading

built fabric is both diverse and very area-specific within itself. Looking at the types of buildings that line the roads, it is possible to tell what region of Mamelodi you are in, and by that principle so is each individual areas identity and expression established.

4.3 MAMELODI TODAY

Lauren Shapiro, a media and research consultant, while presenting her research findings at the FutureFact conference held in Johannesburg in July 2008, said

“While the suburbs may have the same advantages and may be more convenient, they lack the emotional connection, the conviviality, the sense of community and the vibe of the townships - this cannot be replaced,” (MTONGANA 2008.)

Mamelodi embodies a sense of vibrancy and depth often lost within other South African residential and suburban areas. It has such a depth and richness to its social context and built environment that can often be lost on the casual observer. Plunging into the unknown and walking down one of the side streets, although intimidating to an outsider, can also be very revealing. Houses, with strict hierarchies of private and public space, line dirt roads. The street is a play ground, as the car

has very little dominance over the Mamelodi landscape, with most of the residents walking to where they need to be. Non-existent pavements meld into the roads themselves which are defined by the low residential fences. Small and often unplanted gardens make way to stoeps where people sit and relax, behind which front doors can be found. These areas are full of activity with children running ahead to warn of strange umlungus walking down their roads. Neighbourhoods feel alive. As Ndumiso Ngcobo author of *Some of My Best Friends are White*, says:

“Drive down any street and kids are running around, neighbours are having animated conversations over the fence, men are sitting outside and enjoying cold ones amid lots of chitchat and laughter. Its kaside fabulous, brother!” (MTONGANA 2008.)

Yet Mamelodi is also the place where recent running gun battles, violent service protests and a skyrocketing crime rate have rocked its community and put new fear of the area into outsiders. On the 9th of March this year the Sunday Times reported:

“Protesters fired live ammunition at firemen, pelted police with stones and barricaded roads in Mamelodi East, the city of Tshwane said today.” (SAPA. 2010)

Mamelodi has become a place of culture and community, yet also a place of fear and poor services. A Hospice Facility while helping to alleviate some of the service problems within the area, will also need to engage with Mamelodi’s amazing street culture and community bonds, while dealing with a context of fear and violence. ■

55. Modified Mamelodi Ward Maps Highlighting Existing Services

