Urbanists who have encountered the area of the city centre roughly bounded by Van Weilligh, Pritchard, Troye and Bree Streets have coined various names for it: The Ethiopian Quarter, Little Ethiopia and Little Addis references 'otherness' and emphasises the association of the area with an 'away' place - an exoticising of our city. But no formal planning framework addresses this area's land use as distinctive in the central business district. In fact municipal officials speak informally of the area as the CHAOS PRECINCT.

The traders in the area call it by the hallmark road - Jeppe. It is significant that a movement route is the selected label for this part of town, for its energy and life force is about converting motorists and pedestrians into shoppers. The 'Jeppe' trading quarter has no fixed boundaries, neither physical nor figurative. It is a place where public and private space is ill defined and the transitions between these are opaque. It is a loud, brash, booming consumer frenzy - an area where the worst of late capitalist, global consumerism combines with the best of migrant entrepreneurialism. And it operates in ways that defy conventional divisions of formality and informality, of retail and wholesale, of the functions and tasks that support retail hubs, of land use and of the division between public and private space. Each of these elements is blurred in Jeppe. The result is a very distinctive
urban form and functionality.

In the early 2000s, the gap for retail in the inner city was captured and in the last 5 years this use has intensified at an extraordinary pace. New shops open daily as retail rapidly appropriates more vertical and street level space. The insatiable consumer hunger of sub-Saharan Africa is now being catered to by hundreds of traders located with enormous precision in the heart of this global transportation hub in Johannesburg's city centre. The area is a shopping receptacle for a great movement of local commuters and cross border shoppers being vomited out and re-ingested into Noord Street taxis and Park Station trains, the Faraday taxi rank and several informal bus and taxi ranks on Jeppe and Delvers Streets. Jeppe captures the footfall of people using taxis and trains from surrounding townships, and from rural South Africa, as well as from Zimbabwe, Zambia, Angola, DRC, Mozambique and beyond.

Not only does Jeppe invite foreign shoppers, but it a hub of almost exclusively Ethiopian traders occupying compact, pocket-sized shops.

It is unsurprising that retail captures the attention of new migrants to Johannesburg. The barriers to entry are low and the prospects seem good. As Solomon, a trader operating from a shop the size of a doorway said,

"In my country, it is hard to sell anything. I have to work very hard to get someone to buy any goods, but in South Africa, if I put a toothbrush on the pavement, someone will buy it."

Jeppe succeeds in a context where there is an undersupply of retail in Africa. Statistics indicate that the ratio of retail space in Africa is 0.01m2 per person, compared with 2.9m2 in the US, 0.5m2 in Latin America, 0.4m2 in Europe and 0.2m2 in Asia. Added to this is the pent up demand for shopping space in post apartheid Johannesburg, in surrounding townships, in rural areas and in SADC countries (Chung, CJ; Inaba, J; Koolhaas, R; Leong ST, 2001 : 53).
High-rise buildings in Jeppe bear the labels Johannesburg Wholesale 1 and 2, and Majesty, and are interspersed with names like Abyssinia, Joburg Mall, and Nadibas. They sport signage that beckons consumers to enter compact buildings that have "more than 69 shops" to buy, belts, shoes, gold, silver, cosmetics, curtains, clothing.

The retail typology here is neither conventional street level inner city shopping, nor is it shopping mall. Rather it is a hybrid typology that combines the elements of each of these retail types.

Conventional inner city retail trade focuses retail activity on the ground floor, and shops face outwards onto the street. In this typology the upper floors are generally reserved for commercial or residential use; parking occurs in the basements. And road reserves are dedicated to walking: goods are transported by delivery vehicles.

Continued on Panel 2.

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