

# MAMBO !

*The newsletter of the French Institute for Research in Africa*

Volume VII, n° 1; 2008

## *Practices and representations of 'home' in Arusha, Tanzania*

In suggesting an interactive dialogue on the notion of 'home' using a complex sample of interviewees, one must take a modern approach not only towards the practices but also on the relationships and representations that the groups and individuals have in their areas and amongst themselves. One must put into perspective the capacity of those involved for self-actualisation in the current Tanzanian society as autonomous persons, by clarifying in intimate circles what the frameworks of daily life are, the look of the familiar and finally, the expression of a feeling of belonging regarding one's home.

The study kicks off with an acknowledgement of the growing economic migration of Tanzanians from the countryside and its peripheries towards the active centres of the country. This migration increases opportunities to acquire different 'homes' throughout one's life. Taking into account this longstanding sociological reality, this paper will focus on the paths and stories that link the individuals to these different areas of life by distributing research between the native region where one's family home is located, one's current residence where economic activities are carried out—be they professional or subsistence—and finally, the

individual project of settling, achieved by building (or the dream of) one's own home.

Henceforth, this work consists of re-forging the tri-dimensional links existing between these different areas of one's roots by observing the setting up networks at a practical and a discursive level. This, for example, involves visits to the country, the circulation of goods and persons between these different places, or the originality of constructions.

It further involves discourse, memory and imagination that these familiar areas sustain and manage. One would question the lodging as well as the house itself, and on a larger scale, since it is often considered as taken for granted (everyone comes from somewhere), the belonging to a territory that likely cedes to objective or subjective demands according to different evaluation registers (local area, village, national, transnational, state, global etc) and consequently bring clarity to the symbolic value that adorns the 'home'.

Fieldwork takes place within the urban and cosmopolitan context of Arusha, the fourth major town in Tanzania. Arusha



*A view of Mount Meru - Arusha*

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is situated in the north of the country at the crossroads of the neighbouring Kenya, the agricultural region of Kilimanjaro and the national parks. The actors are from diverse social and economic backgrounds: tenants, landlords or businessmen, persons of independent means, technicians, architects or teachers... The survey pays close attention to construction projects be they real or in one's dreams; projects directed towards the 'country' or elsewhere. This is because for the individual, whereas construction is mainly a means of saving the wealth of several social obligations, it also solidifies a desire for self-actualisation, whose motives are of concern in this study.

Following is a summary of the questions posed during the reasoning in terms of the discipline, from classical anthropology to the exploration of a new object of study.

### *Lack of visibility on the daily domestic realities in African studies*

Beyond studies close to the feminist current that testifies from the 1960's of sensitivity, to the observation of certain details of daily life in the family and domestic context (especially from life accounts, personal diaries or participant observation), very rarely are ordinary, banal and routine aspects of day-to-day living the object of a true anthropological problematic. Instead of this, one traditionally

notices a trend towards a study of the realities of home from the angle of ceremonial manifestations (initiation and funeral rites, etc). The research carried out here on forms and representations of home thus reiterates the problem of integrating a critical observation of daily life and of its practices within different types of given habitats in this work. Going through social and functional organisation of the home also works to replace the



'Home', in the village

resident speaker at the heart of his domestic realities. By so doing, the antagonisms that can exist within one's speech on 'home' are emphasized according to the objective point of view and the subjective one.

The ambivalence of the abstract/concrete challenge leads us to further question such as phenomena of territorialisation and withdrawal (and the reasons that characterise it), integration into modernity within personal circles, relationships between the house and its immediate surroundings (opened or closed to proximity relationships, the entrenchment of residences with economic security policies) and the

existence of new communities in town. Such a magnitude of challenges is likely to bring a clarification on the ethic of the *familiar* (as opposed to *foreign*) from the interviewees.

### *Interdisciplinarity*

In order to level the pinpointed shortfalls of the discipline and with the aim of expanding reflection on the diverse scientific approaches, the research draws from other social sciences. This involves, for example, urban sociology with studies carried out in the major towns of Central and West Africa on the notion of residence, and on works carried out in Europe on the houses of immigrants and their own plans of construction in their home country. Other

sources of inspiration are architecture with the social mission that ideally comes along with it, a total reform of domestic life and its social relations. Of interest are the loans of style and material that enter into the stakes of construction and the evident originalities of one's home, as well as conservation policies of private ownership carried out by the current Tanzanian government. Several discussions have been held on this topic concerning the judgement on colonial- and modernist-inspired houses, many of which still exist in some areas of Arusha. Finally, social geography helps us in creating a framework to consider anthropologic issues which are often termed as "unrestricted and

unlimited humanism”, notably due to the revisited concepts of territory, space and roots. To round up, this work consists of a consideration of the semantic dimension that emanates from speech, such as the representations of ‘home’ and familial ideologies as reported into the language and through types of ‘familiarities’.

To this end, the focus is on *constructed* territories, that is, those that have been conceptualised in the individual’s mind according to the social sphere and their representations of reality. Note that the objective is to thus maintain a flexible understanding of the territory, in opposition with the founding myth of the settled way of life which sanctions a breaking off between the town and rural area, often displayed as two mutually exclusive places. Considered here beyond its own walls, ‘home’ is thus an object of study that sits squarely at the crossroads of several social dynamics.

### *Restoration of the actor*

In the final analysis, dreams are accorded a major role just as the imagination of ‘home’, which contrary to the acquisition of ownership earlier alluded to, are within reach for everyone. Through dreams, one sees a future home accompanied with the inevitable (dis)illusions, as well as the expression of mainly nostalgic memories of home (native country, for example).

In summary, the study as a whole favours the restoration of the actors and their restitution as thinking subjects in modern Tanzanian society. This explains

why the research chose to expand its reflection on the introspective issue of the group’s vulnerability, and of the individual (with regard to the surrounding social context). For example, interviewees were questioned on their feelings towards the quality of life at home. They were also asked what would be likely to give them a sense of security and well-being, and finally, what would appear to be the main obstacles to these freedoms.

This reasoning participates in



Second home

the problematic of exploration of the study object while bringing to mind a critical dimension on the emergence of new forms of autonomy. The interest is not so much the interviewee himself but the way out which he seeks or invents with a view to protect himself from the several forms of oppression present within society. The final objective of this questioning is to put into perspective the field of action of the individual with regard to his personal aspirations and his possibilities of achieving them.

### *Multi-situated studies with several voices*

In conclusion, we come face-to-face with a complex study object from the point of view of several

levels of analysis. This work aims at clarifying previous and varied personal experiences (city dwellers, rural folk, the illiterate...) as well as specific motivation replaced in the politico-economic context of contemporary Tanzania. To compare the ‘original home’ with the ‘reconstituted home’ allows one to put into perspective the links that have been deliberately maintained between these different areas. It also displays the networks that are created, broken down, and those that are carried on around ‘home’. It is hence the time to renew links with regions that are generally considered far off, isolated or autonomous, and to question the challenges that exist in Tanzania today between the centres and the peripheries.

Different profiles, different voices, different places, different points of view ... the work of this thesis aims at creating an alternative questioning around ‘home’. The objective is to have recourse to several levels of analysis by reconciling the observation of practical domains of daily life with the study of feeling, speech and imagination that are expressed in present-day Tanzania.

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The author is an IFRA grantholder and PhD candidate at Ehes, Paris. This article is based on her thesis in social anthropology, which focuses on the representations and practices of *home* and on family space. Mathilde's studies are under the supervision of Prof. Jean Copans, and she is currently on field research in Tanzania.  
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