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Notes and hypotheses from three examples of households in Arusha, Tanzania

This paper is the first in a monograph series, of three typical Tanzanian homes in Arusha (situated in the north of the country). The study consisted of a peek into the domestic life of three individuals of different profiles (A, B and C). By isolating and then re-linking these dwellings to the dynamics in the town, the aim is to put the issues existing between the individual and the macro-social into perspective. An analysis of each of these model profiles is then done such that the house reveals self-actualisation, especially in the observation of personal activities, dreams and ideals that emerged at the end of the discussions. Drawing from the reflections of habitation socio-anthropologists, the aim is to depart from a sedentary and one-way view of normal housing practices, and to consider all inhabitants as producers of highly diverse forms of one's own home.

In the observations recorded by a re-contextualisation of places and homes, an attempt is made to raise issues on a uniform platform, the localized capital and functional livable space that these houses represent. This is followed by the symbolic and identification expressions that support them. The final aim is to expose the major peculiarities and characteristics of each example and at the same time, to raise relevant questions that will be the subject of later developments.

Monograph 1 : House A.

1. Notes and observations

Profile

This three-part series on different domestic setups begins with the example of house 'A', situated in a central residential area in Arusha. A. is a young Tanzanian professional, single and about 30 years of age. He is originally from the southern part of Tanzania. He considers himself as a member of the country's middle-class. He holds a University degree and has a disposable income that he basically reserves for personal effects, learning a foreign language, trips within the country (to Dar es Salaam and his native region) and a professional exchange programme with Europe. He also finances the construction of a new house for his mother, which probably means that he supports relatives in the rural areas. Currently a rent-paying tenant, A. is passionate about the dream of building his own house in the suburbs of Arusha.

The house in its environment. Road access

The access to A.'s residential area is through a tarmac road leading to the Fire Station from the Clock Tower central roundabout, then into a rough road that is the entry into an estate surrounded by urban garden crops such as spinach and beans. Some old workers' houses from the colonial era are still in existence, one of which is A.'s. These houses are built lengthwise with three windows facing the outside, a white-washed surface and corrugated iron roofing. Despite the advanced dilapidation; the house is divided into three housing units—with three entrances—rented out to three different people. To gain access to A.'s doorway, one must go across the neighbouring house. The immediate neighbourhood has two semi-detached houses, sheltering other households as well as an outdoor kitchen for making *maandazi* (doughnuts).

The layout of the house

The rooms are laid out as follows: a small entry with an adjoining room on one side, and on the other, a former bathroom converted into a kitchen, next to which is the toilet. All the windows in the house are



are burglar-proofed with metal bars and each room has a door except for the space between the living room and bedroom. The electricity installation is old-fashioned and the supply irregular. There is no piped water inside the house, rather, the residents are supplied from a communal tap outside.

The entrance to A's house has pairs of shoes strewn across the floor. Only an old electricity meter, perpetually active, has a fixed position. The living room is arranged around an immense office desk on which there is a flat-screen computer (with a WiFi internet connection), a music stereo, headphones and several speakers. A television set, a DVD player and a refrigerator, all bought brand new, are placed in the two corners of the room which also has a sideboard (containing plates, a coffee service, several glasses and a flask), two identical low tables, an office chair and a sofa. The room is lit through a small lateral opening (shielded with a sheer curtain and with a view to the doorway) as well as by a light bulb, hanging from the ceiling. The floor is covered in a square-patterned linoleum while the walls are painted dark green. This darkens the entire room. The décor is

mainly on the walls by the desk. There is a poster of Bruce Lee, framed photographs of A., two 2008 calendars

and several greeting cards. Two lace doilies are placed on the sofa.

Separated from the living room by a net curtain, the bedroom is also well-furnished. It is better-lit than the living room as it has a large window, with a view to the outside. On one side of the room, there are two double mattresses on the floor, one atop the other while several clothes are spread out in disarray on a clothes hangar, a portable rail, several boxes and suitcases. A suit that has just been brought back from the



drycleaners is also hung there, still in its plastic bag. Additionally, there is a large portable mirror and several piles of newspapers and magazines placed at the foot of the bed.

The room that is now a kitchen has a window facing into the neighbouring

courtyard. Formerly a bathroom, it still has a shower area, directly built into the cement floor. This has been converted into a dish-washing area. As there is no longer running water in the house, A. chose to change the room allocated for the shower into a kitchen, and to shower in the toilet, using a bucket. The kitchen has a table on which is a two-plate gas stove, several buckets used as water reserves and plastic boxes to store perishable foodstuff. Several aluminum pots and plastic containers complete the tableau. The toilet is the Indian type—an enamel bidet sunk into the cement floor. Wet washing is hung from the door.

2. Living practices and strategies

Links to the town and its dynamics

A. goes to work on foot, Monday to Saturday, to his office situated at the other end of town, towards the parks. It takes him about 45 minutes to get there. Sometimes he takes a taxi to town when he is in a hurry. He generally avoids going out in the evening due to security concerns. He never has lunch at home during the week but instead eats at canteens in the town centre. He does his shopping at the central market of Arusha and in the small neighbourhood shops (*maduka*).

By living in this part of town situated at the border between the planned urban zone and the haphazardly populated industrial area (Unga Limited), A. benefits from several advantages—a retreat from the main road (Sokoine Road) and its activities while still being close to it; the tranquility and vegetation of the area,

that create a semi-village ambiance, a 15-minute walk from the Clock Tower; an excellent road and sewerage system all the way up to his house.

Décor as a projection of self

A.'s house is surprising in its highly contrasting nature, both time-worn and modern. The age of the building is in complete opposition to the latest electronic equipment, comfortable furniture and bits of bric-a-brac; which give the whole house a sense of modernity. The abundance of possessions spread out within his home not only reflects his financial capacity, but also his ambition to progressively add to his belongings, which will furnish his future home. The accumulation of goods also seems to correspond to stages in the modernization of his lifestyle and home. This modernity is prominently displayed despite a restricted sanitation due to the lack of piped water and the general insalubrity of the building. The evident domestic planning seems to be the result of a compromise between functional areas and incongruous settings, such as the dishes in the shower.

The décor of A.'s house therefore has several functions corresponding to different residential behaviour. The objects are mainly utilitarian with a daily domestic function, oriented towards entertaining—A. affirms that he likes to receive friends at home and cook for meals them. The other function of the items is ornamental and testifies to A.'s desire to show what his life is like, doing so by displaying images of his personal success. As

whole, A.'s home is an indication of the preservation of intimacy reserved for personal activities with the added value of a workspace, virtual communication, reading, listening to music, acquisition of an impressive wardrobe etc. These elements of personal comfort translate to an aspiration to enjoy being at home in compensation for the time spent outside, either at work or in urban social settings.

The dream of a home

The personal space that A. attempts to preserve at his home summons up two other psychological aspects linked to memory and imagination. It is, on the one hand, a permanent reminder of his origins and on the other, dreams of his future home.

His recent visit to his family in the south of Tanzania after a four-year absence resulted in a series of

photographs of his 'native land' and his childhood haunts. He has saved these as his computer screen background, on the computer in his living room. The many pictures of his parents, relatives and the area in which he lived are a daily reminder of his roots and adorn his current life with a strong sense of identity. The photos from this visit also depict him in the company of his family. (A. at the

door of his grandparents' house; A. with his brother's animals; in the fields or at panoramic viewpoints...), like a researcher in his area of fieldwork. Apart from the nostalgic and certainly beneficial effect that such images offer in his expatriation state, these also seem to bear witness to life in the village such as he had experienced it and to show his visitors the most typical aspects. Other photographs, mainly of the infrastructure observed along the route to his native land from Arusha (bus stops, railway station, roadside scenes, regional specificities etc), add an analytical and observational dimension to this report, which seems to show the state he is in today.

Added to the thoughts and search for identity that A. undergoes by creating a heritage illustrated by his origins, there is an active reflection on the house of his dreams. The possibilities of building this house are perpetually



on mind. Constantly seeking plans and models of buildings, he has several photos of model houses downloaded from the Internet either by him or his relatives, and architectural drawings, which also scroll out on his computer and feed his fancy. He has some photos of the interior of new houses, which he got by paying guards working for wealthy homeowners in a residential area in Arusha. These houses have only recently been occupied.

Conclusion

The detailed description of the house, its interior and function gives an understanding of the residential behaviour of those who live in it. An observation of this first profile clarifies the practical habits



of A. and bears witness to the insufficiency of this single analysis based on consumption. By skimming through A.'s residence and its use, it is clear to what extent the use of the home is part of a productive and self-protective step towards self-actualisation based on a specific ambition: settling down through ownership.

Creativity strategies indicate a form of 'living' that draws its originality from links, equally with the outside world and from its personal resources. In a home that is not his own, caught between dreams of past experiences and the future,

A. unconsciously observes identification (re)construction challenges concerning the home and on the abounding localizations. Going by the acknowledgement that self-renewing spaces are not easy to access in contemporary Tanzania, isn't the dream of owning a house already a sign of maturity?

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