

Article

Meanings of Self-Building: Incrementality, Emplacement, and Erasure in Dar es Salaam’s Traditional Swahili Neighborhoods

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Abstract

Self-building is the prevalent mode of urban production in rapidly urbanizing African cities. National and international policy frameworks, as well as popular discourse, still portray self-building as an informal and temporary fix for insufficient state investment—as the exception, rather than the rule. Meanwhile, emerging literature about the Global South draws from an analysis of processes, practices, spatialities, and lived experiences of urbanization and dwelling. This literature seeks to unveil how ordinary processes such as self-building unfold in different localities and realities, challenging the reluctance of government and private actors in recognizing self-building as a long-term mode of urban production. This article contributes to this literature through an ethnographic analysis of the oldest and most common modality of self-built houses in Tanzania—the Swahili house—and its unfolding in two traditional, centrally-located neighborhoods of Dar es Salaam. It emphasizes the home and dwelling aspirations, practices, and trajectories of a predominantly low-income population settling in the city. Based on the analysis, this article proposes that the self-building of Swahili houses and neighborhoods in Dar es Salaam represents a form of popular urbanization, characterized by long temporalities that simultaneously facilitate and are facilitated by affordable and incremental forms and processes of home building through residents’ appropriation of their own territories. However, in the city’s increasingly contested inner-city territories, top-down policy responses and large-scale, infrastructure-led urban development generate tensions and make such a popular form of self-building vulnerable to erasure and un-homing.

Keywords

African cities; emplacement; housing transformation; incrementality; neighborhood transformation; self-building; Swahili house

Issue

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1. Introduction

The original Swahili houses were built with mud and pole construction in East Africa’s coastal towns. Around the 13th century, stone construction emerged (Steyn, 2002), with a distinctive courtyard that determined the house’s inward-looking, self-contained complex (Ghaidan, 1976, as cited in Steyn, 2002). In Dar es Salaam, a contemporary version of the Swahili house was built around the areas today known as Kariakoo, Ilala, and Magomeni to house the native African population (Nguluma, 2003) during the colonial occupation (Figure 1). The planning

schemes of the German and British colonial authorities enforced segregation (Armstrong, 1987), prohibiting African nationals from owning land in urban areas. Only waged workers could reside in the city (Kironde, 1992). In the post-independence period, in the late 1960s and 1970s, the Tanzanian housing company, the National Housing Corporation (NHC), expanded the construction of Swahili house in Dar es Salaam’s urban districts (Figure 1) through tenant purchase schemes associated with “slum clearance” programs (Nguluma, 2003). Small builders and individuals reproduced the design throughout the city’s expanding neighborhoods. NHC’s direct

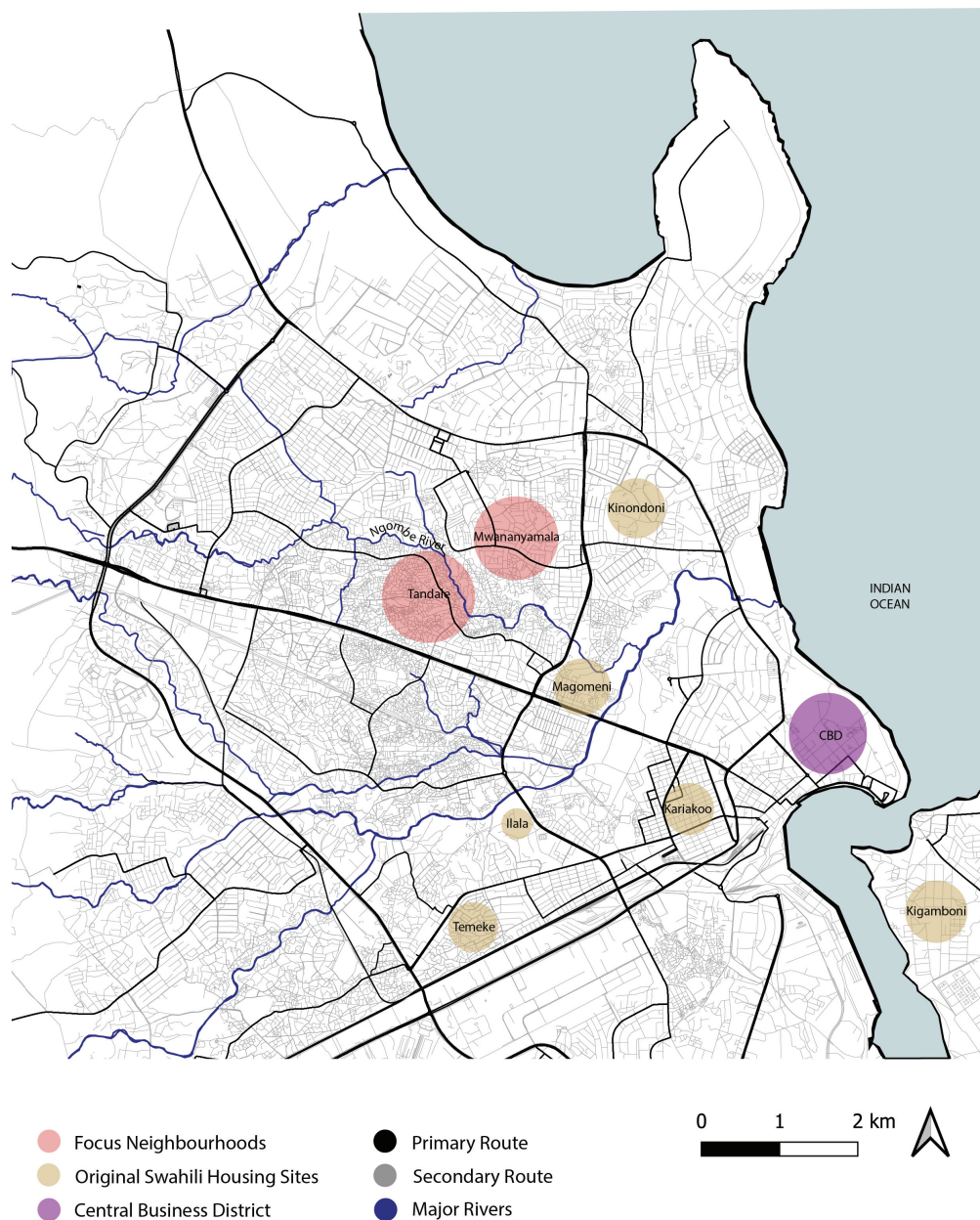


Figure 1. Dar es Salaam’s urban area and location of case study areas. Source: Courtesy of Lerys Hendricks.

participation in housing low-income dwellers came to a halt by the early 1980s due to the interruption of state subsidies (Kironde, 1992). Today, most of the NHC’s housing production is for the for-profit market (Izar & Limbumba, 2021).

Simplicity, flexibility, and affordability help explain the Swahili house’s popularity (Sheuya, 2007). Residents alone, or with a local mason, could erect its simple structure without a plan. Typically, a few rooms were built as start-up units for the homeowners. Over time, other rooms were added for the family and/or to be rented out. The rental revenue financed the construction of new rooms and housing maintenance (Sheuya, 2007). Also, a rented room in a Swahili house represented the most affordable option for low-income tenants, often newly arrived in Dar es Salaam (Campbell, 2014).

A typical Swahili house consists of a rectangular structure with a middle corridor dividing two rows of identical rooms (Figure 2). A veranda marks the entrance, enabling a transition between the street and the interior. The central corridor connects the public outdoor space of the street with the semi-private outdoor space of the courtyard. Cooking and washing activities are placed in the courtyard, where the bathroom is also located. Inside, thermal comfort is achieved through cross ventilation along the central corridor and high open ceiling, with no separation between the front veranda and the street. Commonly, the veranda is used for commercial activities during the day and family gatherings in the evening (Figure 3). Depending on the volume of pedestrian traffic, commercial activities extend into the street in the morning. In the evening, commercial items are stored back in

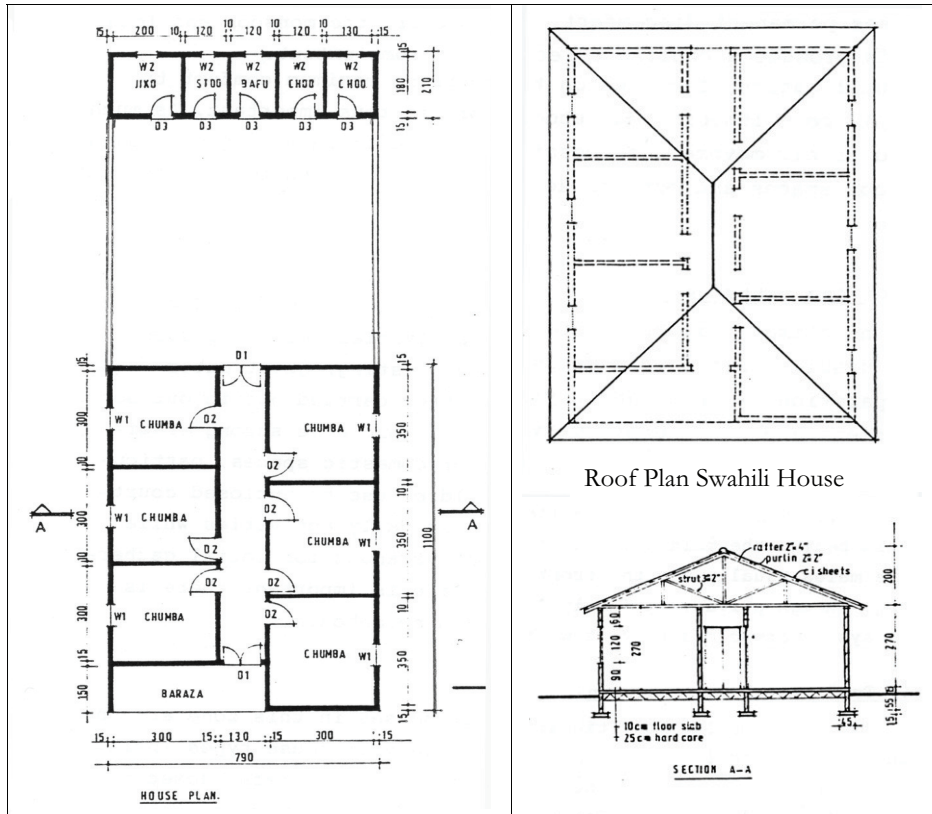


Figure 2. A plan of the modern Swahili house. Source: Nnkya (1984, p. 79).

the veranda. The courtyard, meanwhile, offers enclosure and privacy; it is where everyday activities such as laundering, cooking, resting, and playing take place (Figure 4).

More than a temporary fix for insufficient state investment in housing and infrastructure, self-building constitutes a mode of urban production (Holston, 2009), mostly, but not exclusively, in the Global South. Through self-building, urban dwellers can attain homeownership at reduced costs, investing time and energy in the building of their own home in various ways (Benson & Hamiduddin, 2017) while producing vernacular architecture (Nguluma, 2003; Steyn, 2002) with spatial and material qualities that reflect their traditions and culture

(Bredenoord & van Lindert, 2014). Self-building engages urban dwellers “in a strategy through which urban territories are produced, transformed and appropriated by the people” (Streule et al., 2020, p. 1). These territories are always in the making, as “people inhabit spaces that are clearly precarious and unfinished, but with the expectation, frequently realized, that the spaces will improve and one day look like wealthier parts of the city” (Caldeira, 2017, p. 5). In the African context, self-built housing is prevalent (Groenewald et al., 2013) and unfolds primarily on unsurveyed land through processes of settlement planning and development that residents and/or local organizations run, outside of state



Figure 3. The simple layout and flexible structure of a Swahili house: The courtyard (left) and a front veranda (right), still unfinished, with a fruit stall. Source: Courtesy of Beatrice Mahagama and Leticia George.



Figure 4. Core elements of the Swahili house: The central corridor provides structure, connectivity, and thermal comfort; the courtyard offers privacy in an open space, in contrast to the public front veranda. Source: Courtesy of Beatrice Mahagama and Leticia George.

support and/or without access to financial capital (Sanga & Lucian, 2016).

In Dar es Salaam, Tanzania’s economic capital and one of the world’s fastest-growing cities, about 90% of the housing stock is self-built (Ministry of Lands, Housing and Human Settlements Development, 2018), in various ways. The centrally-located neighborhoods of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s—where the near entirety of the housing stock consists of self-built Swahili houses (Nguluma, 2003)—are denser, more compact, and with a population whose per capita income is, on average, lower than those who live in the more peripheral and sprawling neighborhoods that have emerged since the late 2000s. However, these newer suburban developments have informed the recent analyses of urbanization in the city. These analyses have associated self-built housing with the pursuit of a homeownership dream on more affordable, peripheral land (Andreasen et al., 2017) and the rise of a Tanzanian middle-class settling into post-colonial suburbs that function as a bridge between urban and rural landscapes (Mercer, 2017). Less explored in this emerging literature are the ongoing transformations in more consolidated, centrally located self-built houses in neighborhoods inhabited predominantly by low-wage workers and daily laborers.

As a contribution to the debate about housing, urbanization, and self-building in African cities, this article investigates the oldest and most common modality of self-built houses in Tanzania, the Swahili house. It employs an ethnographic analysis, grounded in two traditional, centrally located neighborhoods of Dar es Salaam’s Kinondoni District, Mwananyamala and Tandale. This article belongs to a broader research project that I conducted during a postdoctoral fellowship at the Institute of Human Settlements Studies at Ardhi University (2018–2020) and as coordinator of the Dar es Salaam City Laboratory (2020–2021), an action research platform at the Institute

of Human Settlements Studies. The research investigated how contemporary forms of housing production unfold in different territories, including self-built neighborhoods of Dar es Salaam. The investigation sought to emphasize the ordinary, everyday production and transformation of predominantly low-income areas (Karaman et al., 2020) and to “privilege the voices of those living in the urban peripheries in shaping conceptualizations” (Meth et al., 2021, p. 2).

The centrality of Mwananyamala and Tandale, as well as its compact urban form and close social fabric, are of special significance to local residents. These are primarily low-income dwellers who rely on their proximity to central businesses and services for their livelihood while benefiting from strong social ties (Izar & Limbumba, 2021). Currently, these neighborhoods are also experiencing rapid transformation, with numerous urban projects, led and funded by a variety of state and non-state actors including the national government, the Kinondoni District authorities, and the World Bank. Projects include the construction of a bus rapid transit corridor, large-scale residential and commercial property developments, and, under the Dar es Salaam Metropolitan Development Project, roadwork expansion and a flood prevention infrastructure project that directly affects the Tandale community. While most residents feel that their neighborhood is improving, particularly regarding drainage and sanitation, some households, especially tenants, fear that the new developments will eventually price them out of their houses and the neighborhood. Based on this understanding, two research questions underpin this study. First, how has (Swahili) self-built housing unfolded in the neighborhoods of Mwananyamala and Tandale over time? Second, to what extent do local residents’ feelings of homeownership and neighborhood appropriation relate to housing and neighborhood self-building?

Semi-structured interview data with residents and builders of Swahili houses in Mwananyamala and Tandale, alongside in-depth field observations of housing and neighborhood transformation, inform this study. Analysis of policy documents supports the investigation. Field observation happened through two- to four-hour monthly visits between May 2019 and February 2020, involving a small research team and the support of a local guide. Informal conversations between residents and Swahili-speaking research team members facilitated a preliminary, collective understanding of urban transformation in Mwananyamala and Tandale. Between October and November 2020, eight semi-structured interviews were conducted with builders and residents of Swahili houses, four in each neighborhood. The limited number of interviews was due to the restrictions imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic and sought to protect both the local community's and researchers' health. Interviewee selection relied, initially, on existing contacts between researchers and the local residents, and subsequently, on the suggestions of the interviewees, according to the snowball sampling technique. Two research assistants conducted the interviews in Swahili, following a previously prepared questionnaire. Residents were asked about the process of home building that they or their predecessors were involved in, the strategies for maintaining and expanding their home, their perceptions about life in their neighborhood, the ongoing transformations, and the future. The interviews were conducted in open spaces to guarantee fresh air and ventilation and lasted about 30 minutes. All participants wore face masks. The names of the interviewees were changed to protect their identities.

The remainder of the article is organized into four sections. Next, Section 2 reviews the literature on: (a) the relationship between urban policy and political and economic reform as it relates to the expansion of self-building in Tanzania; (b) the meanings of homeownership, internationally and in Tanzania; and (c) emerging literature on urbanization and dwelling as lived everyday experiences. Section 3 describes how the self-building of Swahili houses unfolds in Mwananyamala and Tandale, while Section 4 presents the residents' perceptions and aspirations about their homes and neighborhoods—feelings of emplacement and erasure, related to notions of appropriation (Streule et al., 2020) and un-homing (Huchzermeyer, 2021). Section 5 summarizes the study's main findings, limitations, and questions for further research.

2. Housing and Neighborhood Self-Building in Dar es Salaam: Homeownership, Affordability, Local Traditions, and Customary Practices

2.1. Policy (Ir)Rationalities

A discussion about self-built housing in Tanzania concerns adequate living, particularly for low-income pop-

ulations. Access to adequate and affordable housing is considered fundamental to the social and economic well-being of all Tanzanians, and the country's stability (Ministry of Lands, Housing and Human Settlements Development, 2018). However, there have been few opportunities for ordinary Tanzanians to access adequate, ready-made housing, or even self-build their homes in urban neighborhoods (Kyessi & Furaha, 2010). Presently, Tanzania has an estimated urban housing backlog of 1.2 million dwelling units, and around 400,000 of that deficit in Dar es Salaam. Individuals are responsible for 98% of the housing developments nationwide and 70% of the urban footprint corresponds to informal settlements (Ministry of Lands, Housing and Human Settlements Development, 2018).

The Arusha Declaration (1967) established in Tanzania a socialist system of self-reliance (*Ujamaa*). Land was declared without economic value and kept under state ownership, while the central government was made responsible for providing serviced plots for citizens to build their homes (Nnkya, 2021). However, Tanzania's socialism was short-lived. During the transition to a market-based economy in the 1980s, land was kept under state ownership for the benefit of all Tanzanians. However, an overly centralized, excessively bureaucratic land management system (Kironde, 1992) did not address the popular demand for land. For example, between 1978 and 1992, only 7% of the approximately 262,000 applications for urban plots were allotted (Kombe, 1994). Nonetheless, the national response to informality shifted from eradication in the 1970s to recognition, according to the National Land Policy and Land Act of 1999 (Kyessi & Furaha, 2010). Article 24 of the Constitution recognizes the right of Tanzanians to own and protect their property, giving the grounds for the regularization of informal settlements (Nnkya, 2021).

In the 1990s, comprehensive upgrading programs that combined land tenure with "aided self-built" housing and urban infrastructure were piloted in selected areas with positive results, but these programs were never implemented at larger scales (Kombe et al., 2021). Instead, during the transition to a market-based economy (1980s–1990s), and in the context of a national debt crisis, priority was given to the regularization of tenure through land titling so that propertied urban dwellers could use their homes as collateral for financing to improve their homes, neighborhoods, and livelihoods further (Campbell, 2013). Today, this market-enabling approach (Kironde, 2016) persists despite a new scenario of macro-economic growth (Izar & Limbumba, 2021), as represented by a steady GDP increase since the 2000s (World Bank, 2019). This has favored the concentration of public investment in urban projects considered strategic for economic growth, such as road infrastructure and sanitation, which also increases property values in the process (Izar & Limbumba, 2021).

Therefore, a tension exists between the reality on the ground, where housing and neighborhood self-building

has multiple meanings, and the groundless approach (Huchzermeyer, 2021) of national and local policy agendas. For example, the Dar es Salaam City Master Plan, 2016–2036 (Ministry of Lands, Housing and Human Settlements Development, 2016) proposes the consolidation of self-built communities and the preservation of their social fabric. However, it does not articulate how tacit knowledge and the cultural, spatial, and ecological legacies of self-building can be considered.

2.2. Meanings of Home and Homeownership

The association between homeownership aspirations, displacement, and “tensions brought about by powerful actors whose interests are poorly mediated through contemporary governance” (Huchzermeyer, 2021, p. 193) is not uncommon in analyses of self-built housing, particularly in the African context. As a response to the disjuncture (Croese et al., 2016) represented by profit-seeking actions of powerful state and private actors on the one hand, and the needs, demands, and repertoires (Rubin, 2021) of local communities, on the other hand, critical housing studies have focused on home building and dwelling as lived experience. While the notion of home in these analyses is “complex and multi-scaled, directly tied to human well-being” (Huchzermeyer, 2021, p. 193), a crucial concern is with the loss of home for a variety of factors that can ultimately lead to conditions of “un-homing.”

Earlier literature on the meanings of home in the context of contemporary British culture stressed a relationship between homeownership and a sense of “ontological security” that residents can attain, expressed through feelings of pride, a sense of relaxation at home, and satisfaction (Saunders, 1989). Home and homeownership constituted “micro-level forms of housing consumption” (Gurney, 1995, p. 45). These supported the expansion of a “homeownership society” and a regime of private property, but not of democratic values (Forrest, 1983). As homeownership became increasingly central in the context of Western societies, analyses of home became more critical and aware of tensions between real experiences and expectations related to home (Moore, 2000).

In Tanzania, homeownership aspirations have been related to feelings of social and economic stability (Limbumba, 2010), and serve as “a source of pride and prestige” (Andreasen et al., 2020, p. 96) for those who consider it as becoming part of modern Tanzanian society (Nguluma, 2003). According to Mercer (2017, p. 13), houses and land “are not simply financial investments, but are imbued with social meaning in relation to identity and belonging...You are not a person until you build a home.” It has been argued that homeownership aspirations have recently led renters to move to Dar es Salaam’s sprawling peripheries to become owners of self-built homes (Andreasen et al., 2017), driven by a demand for affordable housing, as well as by a desire for semi-rural living, connected to the city’s urban economy

but detached from its busyness (Mercer, 2017). Campbell (2014) presents a more critical argument towards “the centrality of homeownership” in Tanzania’s policy framework, placing it in parallel to the “neglect of private rental housing, both in policy and in practice” (Campbell, 2014, p. 268). In her view, homeownership represents not an aspiration but a strategy that low-income urban dwellers take to “navigate the threat of exclusion” in the city (Campbell, 2014, p. 268).

2.3. Self-Built Housing and Local Knowledge

Tanzanian urban studies have highlighted the roles, logics, and strategies of local actors (i.e., residents and neighborhood-level authorities) in the operation of informal systems of housing and land development. Nguluma (2003) described how housing adaptation (through self-building) addresses social needs, such as extra rooms to accommodate family members in a dynamic way, even in situations of limited resources (Sheuya, 2007). Kombe and Kreibich (2001, p. 1) highlighted the fundamental role that community-based organizations and local-level authorities (sub-ward leaders) play in “authenticating and registering land rights, arbitrating land disputes, checking land-use development and spatial orderliness and providing basic services,” in Dar es Salaam’s self-built neighborhoods. These studies offered empirical evidence of the operations of local level informal subsystems, arguing for the need to recognize and validate them, so as to complement the insufficient formal system (Kombe & Kreibich, 2001). However, despite widespread recognition of the legitimacy of informally developed private property, the “government’s reluctance to involve residents as active players reinforces top-down decision making” (Ndezi, 2009, p. 85).

Literature focusing on everyday urbanism (McFarlane & Silver, 2017) addresses “the prevalence of ordinary urbanization processes in relatively poor neighborhoods where local people are the primary agents of urbanism” (Karaman et al., 2020, p. 1126), despite the government’s reluctance to partner with local communities. Streule et al. (2020, p. 2) put forward the notion of popular urbanization in reference to “a wide range of actors producing urban space mostly without evident leadership or overarching ideology, but with a shared interest in producing urban space for themselves as well as their community.” As a term, popular urbanization seeks to validate “spatial practices of people [who] generate not only material outcomes but also deep local knowledge...which have the potential to question hegemonic visions and strategies of the production of urban space” (Streule et al., 2020, p. 2).

Such framing in the analysis of urbanization in Tanzania is still uncommon. While understandings about the practices and knowledge of local residents acting without evident leadership are lacking, there is agreement that more varied and complex understandings can emerge from in-depth observations of everyday

urbanization processes (Kombe et al., 2021). These understandings may be able to inform conceptualizations of housing and neighborhood self-building as reflecting residents’ interests and aspirations, beyond housing tenure and financial security (Campbell, 2014; Limbumba, 2010).

3. Self-Building and Swahili Houses in Mwananyamala and Tandale

Mwananyamala and Tandale are traditional, predominantly low-income neighborhoods adjacent to downtown Dar es Salaam, originally built in the 1960s and 1970s. Residents from both areas benefit from their central location, proximity to jobs downtown, and easy access to large open markets where fruits, vegetables, and household goods are easily accessible and afford-

able (Izar & Limbumba, 2021). Swahili houses constitute nearly all self-built homes. In 2018, Mwananyamala’s population was 67,755 inhabitants and Tandale’s 73,412 inhabitants (Kinondoni Municipal Council, 2018).

Historically, these neighborhoods have expanded through an informal system of commercialization of land and property, although with variations. As a neighborhood that the central government planned in the 1960s, Mwananyamala has an orthogonal street network and a number of social facilities such as schools, hospitals, and police stations. Both NHC-developed and self-built Swahili housing is distributed alongside commercial and residential buildings in a grid-like pattern and separated by setbacks. In Tandale, land was allocated informally and houses were built close together in a more compact form. The proximity to the river Ng’ombe created an organic pattern, without a clear grid (Figure 5).



Figure 5. Urban form and built-up areas of Mwananyamala (top) and Tandale (bottom). Source: Courtesy of Lerys Hendricks.

Both areas are subjected to seasonal flooding, given the absence of drainage infrastructure. However, Tandale’s residents living by the Ng’ombe River experience the most flood-related housing damage.

Flexibility is a key feature of Swahili houses and neighborhood spaces, expressed by rapid transition from single to multifamily housing and from strictly residential to mixed commercial and residential use. The cyclical expansion and contraction of social and commercial activities occurs in and out of the street, from morning to evening, in a sea tide-like motion (Figures 6 and 7).

In Mwananyamala and Tandale, community-driven housing and neighborhood change do not seem chaotic or unpredictable but rather cyclical—able to accommodate small variations of use, function, and spatial organization, without clear-cut boundaries. In fact, housing flexibility there translates into highly localized, cyclical processes of functional and spatial transformation, with nuances. In Mwananyamala, most Swahili houses were adapted to accommodate small family-owned shops onto permanently converted verandas that transition

the residential use in the interior and the courtyard. Daily variations in Mwananyamala occur mostly at the street level, according to changing flows of vehicular and pedestrian traffic. In the evenings, residents gather around the local food shops and open spaces for physical exercise, games, and play (Figure 8, horizontal lineup). In Tandale, daily changes happen at the household level. The verandas function as commercial stalls, mostly for food, in the morning and early evening, and as family space in the afternoon and night. These shifting functions also expand into the street, with more intense commercial activities in the morning and social gatherings in the evening (Figure 8, vertical lineup).

These daily cyclical changes happen against the backdrop of more permanent housing transformations, as well as ruptures and even erasures of the self-built fabric of both neighborhoods. In Mwananyamala, some renovations have maintained the spatiality and multifunctionality of the Swahili house. There is also an influx of an economically well-off population moving into new homes built after the demolition of old Swahili houses (Figure 9).



Figure 6. Trees and tree shades generate congregation; front verandas have shifting functions and boundaries. Source: Courtesy of Beatrice Mahagama and Leticia George.



Figure 7. Distinct spatial qualities of Swahili houses: A row of houses in Mwananyamala (left) and a courtyard in Tandale (right). Source: Courtesy of Beatrice Mahagama and Leticia George.

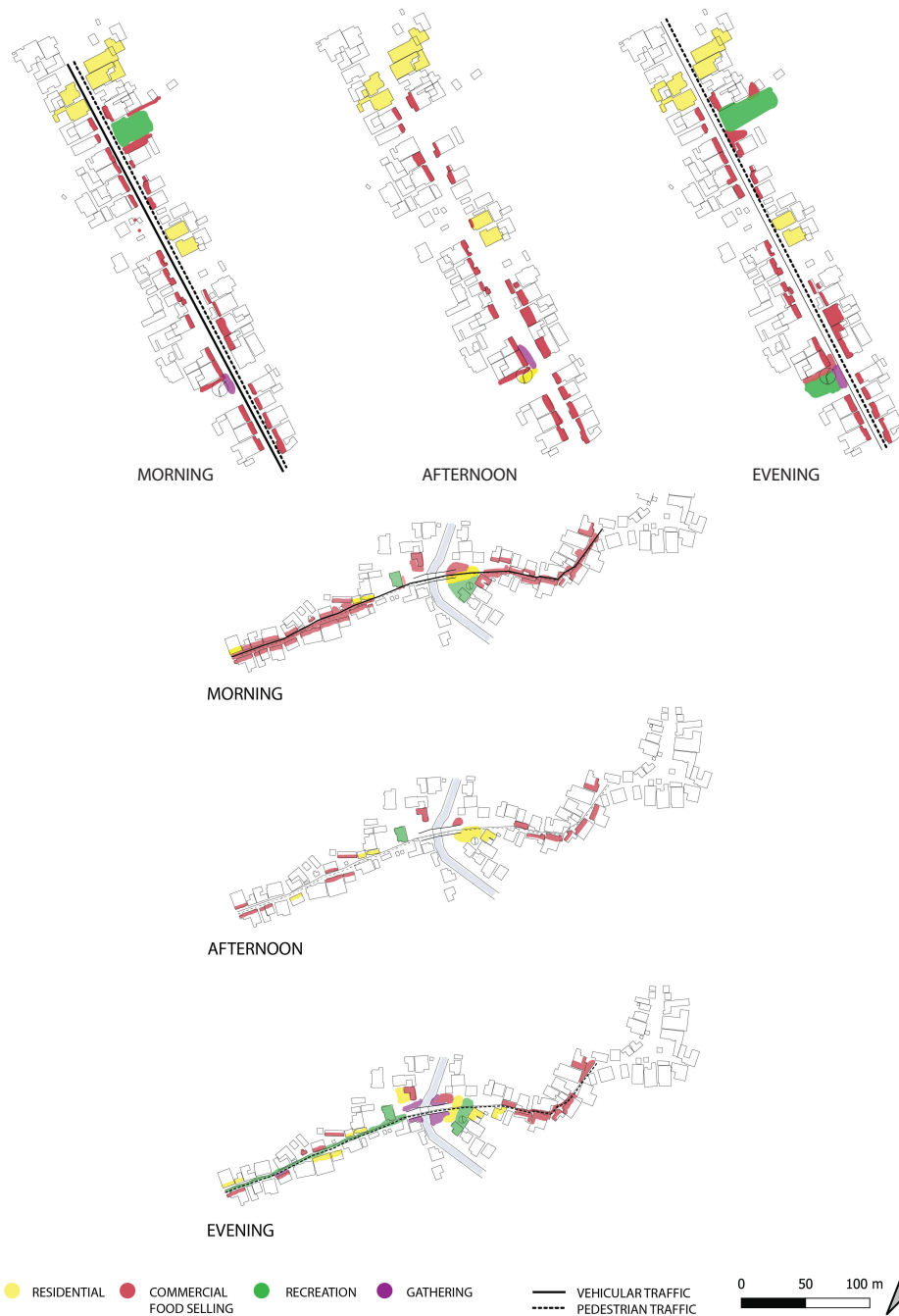


Figure 8. Daily functions, activities, and changes at a typical street in Mwananyamala (horizontal lineup) and Tandale (vertical lineup). Source: Courtesy of Lerys Hendricks.

These single-family homes are a different housing typology, detached from the neighboring houses and separated from the street by high walls. The long-time residents, while appreciating their lifestyle, also admire the new houses. During an interview, a resident of Mwananyamala shared that “when they get a chance, they will do everything in their power to make their house look modern and nice.”

In Tandale, the commercial use of the Swahili homes is more intense. There is a greater presence of street vendors, due to the proximity to the open market. Housing

maintenance is less in comparison to Mwananyamala. Close to the Ng’ombe River, the layout and condition of the Swahili homes were once unique. Houses were more spread out; the verandas overlooked the riverbank and natural open spaces. However, this area is currently experiencing abrupt change (Figures 10, 11, and 12). Houses are damaged by the occurrence of seasonal floods, which have been increasing in intensity as urbanization has become more widespread. The channeling of the river through the World Bank-funded Dar es Salaam Metropolitan Development Project represents a



Figure 9. Renovation (left) and conversion of a Swahili house into higher-income, single-family homes (right).



Figure 10. Damaged Swahili houses in Tandale by Ng'ombe River. Source: Courtesy of Beatrice Mahagama and Leticia George.



Figure 11. The former sandbank.



Figure 12. Large-scale infrastructure work at the Ng'ombe River. Source: Courtesy of Beatrice Mahagama and Leticia George.

type of transformation that the residents are not used to. Given the absence of community consultations, except to obtain consent to relocation, residents have limited input on what the projects will look like.

4. Residents' and Builders' Experience With Self-Building

Interview data corroborates the importance of land affordability and government tolerance of informal occupation for incremental housing construction, as Sanga and Lucian (2016) and Sheuya (2007) previously indicated. The residents of Mwananyamala and Tandale who have built their homes, or moved into houses that their parents built, demonstrate a strong feeling of belonging to the territory, described as a feeling of emplacement. Invariably, they express a desire to stay in their neighborhoods in the long term, close to their roots. Such a feeling of emplacement goes beyond discontent with, for example, poor drainage infrastructure. Similarly, residents express their desire to stay in their neighborhood, despite discontent with a lack of state support for addressing neighborhood problems like flood damage. In fact, not even the expectation of economic gain, through a possible increase in the price of their houses and the possibility to commercialize them, affects their sense of belonging to their neighborhood and desire to remain there.

The next subsections describe residents' perceptions towards homebuilding, homeownership, and their lives in Mwananyamala and Tandale. The analysis uses interview quotes to validate residents' "deep local knowledge" (Streule et al., 2020) about the production of their homes, neighborhoods, and livelihoods. Residents' repertoire of action (Rubin, 2021) simultaneously draws from and reinforces incrementality and affordability, contributing to feelings of appropriation and emplacement, as Streule et al. (2020) and Caldeira (2017) have also observed.

The interviews also highlight the tensions caused by the reluctance of district and national government actors to involve local residents in decisions about large-scale road and flood prevention infrastructure projects. These projects are crossing through the neighborhood and threatening to erase the incrementally built, popular, urban, and social fabrics.

4.1. Incrementality and Emplacement

Agnes lives at a house in Mwananyamala that her husband inherited from his parents, on a plot allocated by the government. As it was customary, Agnes' in-laws hired a local mason to build a small house, enough for the family to live in. Then, they built mud-and-pole shelters outside to be rented out. With the rental income, they gradually substituted the mud-and-pole rooms with brick-and-mortar ones. They also expanded their own house. Agnes is now a widow. Her husband was an only child, so she inherited the entire house, which she now shares with one of her own children and that child's family. She also has nine tenants. Agnes considers that her house "has a lot of meaning because this is where I have lived together with my family, without paying rent." While she would like for some improvements to happen, for example for roads to be repaved and drainage infrastructure to be developed, she has no plans to move out of the neighborhood.

Stella was born in Mwananyamala, in the house that she shares today with other family members as well as tenants. Her parents built the house incrementally in the late 1960s:

My father was a trader, he bought foods and crops from the market and sold them to people in his small shop. Mama was a housewife. She also made rice cakes and sold them at the veranda...we still use the veranda for commercial activities. Our mother made rice cakes and so do we.

The money that her parents saved from their work paid for house construction, “first a house made of mud-and-pole, and then we built it in brick. My father did not know how to do construction, so he contracted a mason.” When asked about housing maintenance, Stella explained: “We use the rent we collect so the house takes care of itself,” a strong reference to the self-sustaining system that the Swahili houses provide (Sheuya, 2007), particularly to their owners. When further asked about the meaning of her house to her, she replied that “this house, apart from providing shelter for me and my family, also gives me some respect as an owner.” Likewise, Stella does not want to move out of the neighborhood. Rather, she would like to “renovate my house, to make it modern. If I get the money, this is what I want to do, to make my house modern, fully renovated.”

A resident of Tandale, Samia remembers how her parents built a mud shelter for them to live in. Then, as the structure started to fall apart, they contracted a mason to build a house. Samia values her house for the memories that she has, growing up there with her family, and for the security that ownership represents to her, as she does not have to pay for rent. She feels that her house is a family asset, not to be sold out but rather to be passed on to her children, nieces, and nephews: “What we inherit, we don’t sell, that brings us problems,” she explained during an interview.

Omari built his Swahili house in Tandale over the course of a decade. In 1975, he bought a plot close to the Ng’ombe River, moving out of the Magomeni neighborhood. Omari found Tandale to be quiet and the land cheap. He paid 200 Tanzanian shillings (TSH) for his plot in 1975, the equivalent to 65,850 TSH in 2021, or 28.6 US dollars. It took him a year of savings to buy the plot, and another year to build the first room. He used his own savings, as he did not have any support from the government or non-governmental institutions, and built the home himself. Once complete, there were six families and a total of 23 people living at Omari’s house. The rental income supported his family and allowed for the incremental housing development to continue. Lately, seasonal flooding and flood damage have destroyed part of Omari’s house, leading to the loss of renters and rental income, and compromising his livelihood. A senior and unemployed, Omari now relies on support from his children who grew up in Tandale and today live in other neighborhoods in Dar es Salaam.

Alphonse moved into Tandale as a tenant, renting a room in a Swahili house. After a few years, his landlord’s brother sold him a piece of land where he built his house:

I started with two bedrooms, which my wife and five children used. Then I added a third one, which is a shop now, and then later I continued with the area in front of the house. I was building very slowly, depending on [the business at] my shop. When I got a little extra money, I would buy two bags of cement and blocks, and call the mason.

Similar to his neighbors, Alphonse values owning his house:

It is very important to me because, first of all, I get to be trusted by society. [People see] that this person has his own home, that anytime you can reach him, and even if you can’t reach him, you can find someone who can help you reach him [because he has a fixed address]. So, to have a house that people know about, honestly, is something that makes you feel respected and trusted by many.

Moreover, he does not plan to move out of Tandale, even though he is affected by seasonal flooding: “We have a lot of problems with flooding, but I don’t plan on leaving Tandale. I feel like it will be so hard for me to go start a life somewhere else.”

4.2. On Emplacement and Erasure

Affordable land access, simplicity in the design, and flexibility in uses and functions have enabled building incrementally in Mwananyamala and Tandale, corroborating Sheuya (2007), who found that in the self-building of Swahili houses land counts for 30% of the overall cost and construction for the remaining 70%. Without any system of credit, incremental building is often the only way to afford home construction. According to Sanga and Lucian (2016), the longer the construction period, the less capital per year is spent on housing building and the larger a house, when finally completed, becomes.

In addition to the cost factor, the varied social processes that happen during incremental home building create specific materialities and spatialities, while also contributing to the feeling of emplacement that residents of Mwananyamala and Tandale express. In fact, emplacement in Mwananyamala and Tandale is rooted in the complex process of housing and neighborhood self-building, as illustrated by a comment from one of Alphonse’s children:

[After the end of Socialism] a lot of people from the countryside moved to Dar es Salaam to look for work and a place to live, so most of these Swahili houses became rentals—most of them have six bedrooms, no showers inside, no sitting rooms, no kitchen, just rooms, a corridor, and a backyard [where families spend time together]—that’s how people live, this is the real Swahili culture. Another good thing about the Swahili houses is that, even though sometimes there are six different families, they all live as one family. They share everything: food, fruits, and every family will pay house rent. Sometimes when one room has a TV all people in the house will come to your room to watch movies. This will also make it easier for you to receive care when you’re sick, or having a problem, they will assist you and take you to the hospital. This

is the real Swahili life and I feel that I am special in this community.

Caldeira (2017) also argues that through the incremental construction of self-built houses, residents feel connected to their homes and neighborhoods—never fully finished, but always improving. However, in contested self-built territories, emplacement alone may not prevent the erasure of incrementally self-built structures and spaces, especially when top-down policy and development decisions are set in place. This can be observed in Tandale, with the development of the Dar es Salaam Metropolitan Development Project. The channeling of Ng'ombe River and construction of vehicular infrastructure represents a permanent, large-scale change that breaks away from the subtle, incremental logic of self-building, erasing existing and future cyclical transformations and spatialities.

Presently, there is no evidence that such erasures will lead to community displacement. However, it is evident that the mode of production represented by these large-scale developments differs from the incrementality of self-building that has, until recently, enabled the permanence of low-income residents. Omari expressed similar views during the interview. He believes that the flood prevention infrastructure will help improve the neighborhood. However, he is skeptical of whether he and his neighbors will benefit from such improvements. In fact, he believes that these transformations will drive property values up and possibly cause their displacement. Thus, Omari already foresees being un-homed.

4.3. Validation of Tacit Knowledge

Despite his willingness to stay in Tandale, during the interview, Alphonse also expressed frustration with policymakers, developers, and researchers regarding the little public attention that is given to the living conditions that he, his family, and his community experience every day. He feels that neither their lived experiences nor their tacit knowledge is validated. Moreover, he feels that there is no connection between the community and the governmental and development agencies that control the nature, scale, and timing of development projects going on in his neighborhood. Finally, he feels that developments will benefit the neighborhood, but not himself, his family, or his neighbors.

Alphonse's reference was specific to the way in which flooding has affected the neighborhood lately, and how the managers of the flood prevention project did little to interact with the community during the design stage when their experiences of small-scale drainage infrastructure could have informed the intervention:

I wish that professionals in this country would do their job and stop playing politics. This neighborhood, for example, needs a lot of development and less political disputes. Even you, as researchers, you come and

collect information but what will happen after that? How are we going to receive your feedback, or learn about how you will advise the government about this neighborhood? I think that the problem is that whatever research is done, and suggestions are given, the authorities just throw them inside their cabinets, that's the problem. You [as researchers] should raise your voices, tell some media company. If you just write this on [academic] papers, it won't be helpful.

Alphonse's call is for validation by outside actors of the community's tacit knowledge and experiences, in a way to overcome government's reluctance (Ndezi, 2009). His call is a reminder that research on everyday housing and neighborhood self-building must move beyond thick description and extract, from empirically grounded analysis, "realistically implementable principles that can inform more responsive [policy] approaches" (Huchzermeyer, 2021, p. 204).

5. Conclusions

This study is part of a larger research project on everyday housing and neighborhood self-building and transformation in Dar es Salaam, whose goal is to picture the city as a patchwork (Caldeira, 2017) of neighborhoods self-built by individuals "interested in producing urban spaces for themselves and their communities...generating not only material outcomes but also deep knowledge" (Streule et al., 2020, p. 2). This investigation also aims to challenge the reluctance of top-down policymakers to consider local knowledge and to inform more responsive approaches, in response to Alphonse's call.

This article seeks to contribute to an emerging literature on ordinary urban production and self-building in the Global South. The analysis of the Swahili house and its unfolding in Mwananyamala and Tandale emphasized the homeownership aspirations, practices, and trajectories of a predominantly low-income population as they "make their lives in the city" (McFarlane & Silver, 2017, p. 458). Based on the investigation, the article proposes that the self-building of Swahili homes and neighborhoods in Dar es Salaam represents a form of popular urbanization (Streule et al., 2020) that enables residents to produce and appropriate their territories through highly localized, cyclical processes of functional and spatial transformation.

Self-building starts from the house, from the aspiration of home and dwelling (Andreasen et al., 2017), and spills over the neighborhood through cyclical everyday activities and social and spatial organizations. As the quotes from the interviews described, being at home creates feelings of ontological security (Saunders, 1989), even as there is no single definition for home (Moore, 2000). Instead, a long temporality, often over a decade, for housing unit development to be fully built through a step-by-step process, supported by neighborhood activities that guarantee a livelihood, sets the stage for

affordable and incremental forms and processes of home building, as Caldeira (2017) proposes. The numerous cycles of housing construction, room-by-room, happen according to family savings (Sanga & Lucian, 2016), enabling the emplacement of low-income dwellers. The affordability of un-serviced land and construction materials bought in small quantities and the possibility of building incrementally—according to design and construction choices, family arrangements, and institutional responses—simultaneously make possible and constitute the self-building of Swahili houses and neighborhood spaces in areas such as Mwananyamala and Tandale.

Homeownership through self-building adds security, through tenure, for the local residents: They appreciate the stability of having a shelter, particularly during times of hardship. Affordability is a key aspiration associated with homeownership (Andreasen et al., 2017) for the residents of Swahili houses in Mwananyamala and Tandale. However, these residents are not searching for more peripheral forms of housing in the pursuit of affordability; rather, they aspire to continued emplacement in their central, self-built neighborhoods. Homeownership is also valued as a symbol of social worth, as Nguluma (2003) described, but not associated, in this context, with economic wealth as Mercer (2017) suggested in the context of the more recent and peripheral self-built neighborhoods of Dar es Salaam.

Experiences with self-building and homeownership instill in the residents a sense of belonging and emplacement, as the interview quotes and spatial analysis of everyday lives illustrated. However, groundless and fast-paced, state-led infrastructure projects can quickly change self-built landscapes, leading to the erasure of subtle spatial and social structures. These fast-paced processes abruptly change spaces that were gradually self-built, first, by keeping local residents uninformed about upcoming projects and therefore excluded from negotiation, and, second, by causing feelings of being unhomed (Huchzermeyer, 2021), either symbolically or literally, through displacement from homes and social and economic activities.

By examining the unfolding of self-built Swahili houses in Mwananyamala and inquiring about residents' perceptions of emplacement and appropriation through field visits and interviews, this study represents a unique contribution of residents' lived experiences and deep knowledge of everyday urban production in Dar es Salaam. The limited number of interviews and the reliance on contacts that the research team already had in the neighborhood might represent a limitation to the study's findings. However, data from 18 months of field visits allows for triangulation and for increasing the validity of the research findings and analysis.

Studies of everyday urbanization, dwelling, and self-building shift the focus away from community and state partnerships and towards community-based initiatives and practices (Meth et al., 2021). This knowledge

is relevant and important to challenge the persisting top-down policy approaches that dismiss local knowledge and threaten communities with erasure and situations of un-homing. Future research in Dar es Salaam should continue to look comparatively at the unfolding of self-building in other centrally located neighborhoods similar to Mwananyamala and Tandale, as well as the more recent, peripheral developments.

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Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

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