48. Migrant homemaking in Sub-Saharan Africa: from self-help housing to conspicuous construction
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INTRODUCTION

During our last stay in the rural community of Fransfontein, Namibia, in 2016, my family and I were living in the "village house" of a successful migrant couple.[1] After years of working abroad, the couple had recently returned to Namibia and was now living in an urban middle-class neighborhood in the capital. During their absence, they had supervised the building of a rural house for vacations. The couple's spacious and – for village standards – luxurious rural home had been built next to that of the husband's father, one of the simple structures the apartheid government had erected for state employees in the "homelands" during the 1980s. On the other side of the father's house was a house built of cow dung and with a tin roof, owned by one of the migrant's brothers and his wife who were permanently living in the village. A little further away, another brother – also a successful migrant – was busy building his own "village home." And a sister, also a migrant and employed as a nurse in urban Namibia, had almost finished her rural house. During the absences of the three migrating siblings, the non-migrant brother and his family were taking care of each of these family houses.

Although I was not aware of it at the time, the housing and migration history of this particular Namibian family condenses some of the long-term dynamics of housebuilding and homemaking in Sub-Saharan Africa. Housing provided by the state, very often of low quality, has been a defining feature of the Southern African landscape since colonial and apartheid times. In the 1980s, the father of the family was eligible for state housing because he worked as a teacher. Yet only a few were employed by the state and qualified for state housing, and many, like our host's less affluent brother, had to build so-called "self-help houses" with local materials. More recently, emerging middle classes, like our host's sister, have introduced a new type of housing in rural areas, influenced by global consumption aesthetics. Additionally, the housebuilding practices of transnational migrants, like the migrant couple that so generously let us stay in their Fransfontein house, have further transformed practices of housebuilding and homemaking in Namibia and beyond.

Massive displacements, forced labor migration, and large-scale resettlements ordered by colonial and even some postcolonial states, but also internal and transnational migration, have stimulated specific forms of homemaking in urban and rural regions throughout Sub-Saharan Africa. The various historical trajectories, complex current expressions, and multiple future possibilities of migrant homemaking in this wide region are much too diverse to summarize in an overview. This contribution thus provides insight only into some clusters of knowledge on migrant homemaking in Sub-Saharan Africa,[2] drawing on examples from individual locations in Southern and West Africa.

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How to conceptualize house, home, and homemaking has been extensively debated (e.g. Bahun and Petrić 2018; Boccagni 2020; Boccagni and Pérez-Murcia 2021; Brun and Fábos 2015; Ralph and Staeheli 2011; see also Jacobs, Chapter 4, and Mathews, Chapter 10, this volume). The house is a physical structure that can be approached through at least three different dimensions: a spatial, temporal, and social dimension (see also Bahun and Petrić 2018: 1–2; Boccagni and Pérez-Murcia 2021: 48; Hammar 2021: 5–6). A house is built in a specific locality and always has a spatial dimension. The permanence of the material structure creates stability and continuity across generations (Lévi-Strauss 1987). In this way, the spatial dimension is interwoven with the temporal dimension. Houses evolve over time (Bahun and Petrić 2018: 1). Building a house and dwelling in a house are both unfolding acts of emplacement and homemaking. Brun and Fábos (2015) have developed a framework to analyze "home" and homemaking. They distinguish three dimensions of "home" that must be considered when analyzing housebuilding as homemaking: the everyday practices of homemaking – what they call "home"; the ideas, feelings, and values invested – "Home"; and the broader political, historical, and institutional contexts – "HOME." My brief vignette about our migrant hosts with which I opened this chapter shows that all three dimensions are interwoven in Namibian migratory housebuilding. Finally, building and dwelling are impossible without social interaction. The third, social dimension thus captures the interactive and symbolic aspects of houses. Housebuilding is embedded into life-cycle rituals like weddings and funerals, very often marking the transition from one life stage into the next (Van der Geest 1998). Connected to this dynamic are all other social categories, most importantly gender, kinship, social class, and age (Carsten and Hugh-Jones 1995). The boundary making inherent in these categories is translated but also contested in houses and communities (Bahun and Petrić 2018). Houses thus symbolically represent social groups and worldviews (Carsten and Hugh-Jones 1995). Consequently, they are also embedded into wider economic and political structures.

Against this more general conceptualization of house and home, it seems noteworthy that anthropological approaches have shifted from a focus on dwelling and living in a house towards a focus on building. Seeing houses as stable institutions, providing for a close reading of social structures and kin relations (Bourdieu 1970; Lévi-Strauss 1987), has been extended and even replaced by approaches that emphasize building, thus projects – possibly never completed – of social becoming through house construction (Pauli and Bedorf 2018; Sandoval-Cervantes 2017). This shift is evident in recent anthropological research on homemaking and housebuilding in Sub-Saharan Africa (Archambault 2018; Freeman 2013; Melly 2010; Nielsen 2011; Sumich and Nielsen 2020). It also resonates with work on global migrant housebuilding that indicates that not all building might become dwelling and not every house will become a home. In this line, Paolo Boccagni (2020: 259) emphasizes the need to investigate the potential transition from house to home.

In the first section, I build on these insights and briefly introduce some earlier engagements with housebuilding and homemaking in colonial African contexts, leading to various forms of self-help housing and the appropriation of colonial urban planning and state housing. While self-help and state housing are associated with the marginalized urban poor, the subsequent section concentrates on often conspicuous house constructions by regional elites and, increasingly, by the so-called emergent African middle classes. A third section describes transnational migrants and their homemaking practices. Here, spatial, temporal, and social dimensions of housebuilding and homemaking are analyzed. Yet these three phenomena – self-help housing, elite/middle-class housing, and transnational home constructions – are not separate phenom-

ena. The opening vignette from Namibia demonstrates that they can be entangled in complex ways. Housebuilding practices of transnational migrants are often embedded in other forms of mobility. Housebuilding and homemaking in so-called "stretched families" (Porter et al. 2018) – translocally dispersed kin groups – might include different forms of house construction and homemaking in multiple locations. The implications of this observation are scrutinized in the final part of the chapter.

STATE AND SELF-HELP HOUSING AND THE RURAL–URBAN NEXUS

The structural violence of European colonialism framed housebuilding and homemaking throughout Africa. The colonial project of "civilizing" the indigenous population also worked through a fundamental redefinition of community, family, kinship, and household (Comaroff and Comaroff 1986; Hansen 1992). The replacement of circular forms, as used for example in homesteads, with square structures has been noted for different African regions (e.g. Comaroff and Comaroff 1992; Melly 2010: 44–45). Jean and John L. Comaroff describe the European missionaries' contempt for indigenous settlements, which seemed to them like a "bewildering maze": "They were determined to rationalize the undifferentiated chaos of 'native' society by laying upon it the rectangular grid of civilization" (Comaroff and Comaroff 1986, 1992: 52, 53). The rectangular grid of the colonial state became a central feature of many African towns and cities (Morton 2019: 75–76). However, the European authority and control suggested by the grid was only partial in nature and highly contested. The colonial state, as John Comaroff (1998: 341) states, was "an aspiration, a work-in-progress, and intention, a phantasm-to-be-made-real. Rarely was it ever a fully actualized accomplishment." Parallel to the establishment of urban grids, self-help housing in informal settlements emerged in African cities and towns (Diouf and Fredericks 2014; Gastrow 2017; Makhulu 2015; Myers 1997).

The spread of self-help housing was stimulated by substantial increases in rural–urban migration (Geschiere and Gugler 1998; Morton 2019: 15). Throughout Sub-Saharan Africa, a specific mobility pattern appeared that connected the rural and the urban: while setting up new homes in urban areas, labor migrants continued to feel and be attached to their rural places of origin, often perceived as "homelands" (Murray 1981; Page et al. 2010; Pellow 2011; Plotnicov 1970; Van der Geest 1998). Many migrants returned regularly to their rural homes to marry, invest in livestock, build a house, retire, and, eventually, get buried (Cohen and Odhiambo 1992; Ferguson 1999; Gulbrandsen 1986; Lentz 1994). "Stretched," or what Cati Coe (2014) calls "scattered," families became common, with cooperating kin living dispersed over several households in different rural and urban localities. Until today, this specific form of rural–urban connection continues to be a defining feature of migration in Sub-Saharan Africa (e.g. Alber 2018; Bank 2015; Bank et al. 2020; Englund 2002; Ferguson 1999; Greiner 2011; Njwambe et al. 2019; Nord and Byerley 2020; Pauli 2020; Pellow 2011; Potts 2010; Schnegg et al. 2013).

In the city, many migrants built self-help houses in informal settlements. These houses were also a political act, "a break with expectations that Africans should be satisfied with perpetual impermanence" (Morton 2019: 9). Despite racist political structures, migrants insisted on their right to build and dwell. In her work on informal settlements on the outskirts of Cape Town in the 1970s and 1980s, Makhulu (2015: 60) describes these practices of housebuilding as "activ-

ism by other means." The political dimension of homemaking also included the appropriation and remaking of state housing (Lee 2005).

In Southern Africa, the gendered dimension of these dynamics has been a particular focus of research. Examining how urban planning during apartheid framed female migrants' homemaking practices in the South African township of Gugulethu, Lee (2005) highlights the pivotal role of female migrants in shaping urban state housing during apartheid (see also Ginsburg 1996; James 1999; Moguerane 2018). During the early 1970s, women who had migrated from rural areas of the Eastern Cape were allocated small, government-built houses in Gugulethu. These "matchbox" houses were made of concrete slabs and brick, with 40 square meters of space divided into four rooms. When the women moved in, "these matchbox houses were seen as 'shells,' not complete houses in themselves, and certain upgrades were fundamental to basic living" (Lee 2005: 619). To live there, the women first had to put in doors and window frames and plaster the walls. Lee describes how during different stages of homemaking the women went from basic improvements over extensions of living space to investment into the value of the houses. During the height of coercive state legislation, the women struggled with the insecurity of their tenure and an enduring fear of eviction. Only in the waning years of apartheid did the women increasingly expand their dwellings, attesting to a "a growing affirmation of their rootedness in the city" (Lee 2005: 611).

The women in Gugulethu aimed to achieve not only rootedness but also respectability through their homemaking practices. Ross (2005) observes a similar approach to homemaking in her research on post-apartheid urban resettlement. The residents of an unplanned and illegal shack settlement in Cape Town were resettled into a newly built "model community." People felt that this move offered them the "possibility of becoming *ordentlike mense* (decent people)" (Ross 2005: 639). Ross' work showcases how belonging to a place through housing and homemaking is fused with ideas of moral personhood and practices of citizenship (Hammar 2017, 2021; Makhulu 2015; Moguerane 2018; Smith 2019).

The connection between the rural and the urban also becomes visible in house design. Design elements of (sub)urban houses have, for example, been transferred to the rural areas (Bank 2015; Thomas 1998). Leslie Bank describes how the housing aspirations of informal settlement residents in Cape Town are today being projected into their rural homestead. The rural area is being "transformed by the expectations of modernity cultivated in the city" (Bank 2015: 1069). The "displaced urbanism" that becomes visible in the migrants' style of modernizing the rural family house is a way in which migrants "anchor" in the rural (Bank 2015: 1069, 1078). The desire of urbanites, however, to have a "rural anchor," be it a house or livestock, can also deepen already existing inequalities in rural areas. In Namibia, so-called "weekend farmers" – better-off migrants owning a house in the city and another in the village – keep large herds of cattle on the communal rural lands (Schnegg et al. 2013). This leads to conflict with the permanent rural settlers who fear land degradation because of the migrants' high number of animals.

A different kind of family house exists in urban areas of post-apartheid townships. Bolt and Masha (2019: 147) show how during the 1980s, "apartheid's twilight," quasi-owned and rented family houses became increasingly private property. Mixing customary rights of collective ownership with racialized forms of exclusion from ownership during apartheid, the family house is part of the broader legacy of discriminatory spatial planning in South African cities. Decades later, unsolved questions of inheritance trouble the families owning an urban family house (Bolt and Masha 2019: 157–160).

The examples discussed so far, mostly from Southern Africa, demonstrate how spatial, temporal, and social aspects of houses are entangled with the specific political economy. That housebuilding continues to be an enormous struggle for so many is a direct outcome of colonialism and apartheid. Extending these findings, the next section discusses a different aspect of social class and homemaking by taking a closer look at the housebuilding practices of regional elites and emerging middle classes. Although colonialism and apartheid also shaped the livelihoods of African middle classes, because of their more prosperous economic backgrounds, these social classes have been more privileged in realizing their aspirations of home and house.

SOCIAL CLASS AND THE EMERGENCE OF CONSPICUOUS CONSTRUCTIONS

With the end of colonialism and apartheid, more conspicuous house constructions emerged. "Conspicuous construction" (Thomas 1998) was stimulated by the rise of colonial and postcolonial regional elites and, increasingly, also international migration. In her analysis of domestic architecture and class formation in Tanzania, Mercer (2014) distinguishes four types of houses and relates them to different periods of Tanzanian history. Her results are based on the description and biography of 18 houses and their owners in both rural and urban Tanzania. Internal and international migrants have built almost half of these houses. Mercer (2014: 234) places her analysis against the wider background of colonial intrusions into housebuilding and homemaking: "Architecture has changed from compounds of conical huts made of banana palms, each with a specialized function (for men, women, and cattle), to simple mud-brick two-room bungalows containing a bedroom and living room, to large extended variations of single-story bungalows built in permanent materials." Houses have also grown in size and number of rooms.

The first type of house Mercer (2014: 235) presents is the "respectable house," a bungalow whose form was introduced to West Africa by British colonial officers in the 1880s. Since the 1950s, Tanzania's elite has drawn on this design. More recently it began to replace the comparable modesty of the respectable house with new styles and functions, to form what Mercer (2014: 238) terms the "local aspirational house." This house is an upgrade of the respectable house, often by a younger generation. The most conspicuous house is Mercer's third type, the "global aspirational house" (Mercer 2014: 239). Unlike the other types, this house is a conspicuous expression of class distinction and status, consisting of two stories and several foreign architectural features (e.g. verandas, columns, staircases). This type of house is built by a new elite and emerging middle class of successful entrepreneurs and professionals. Its spacious living rooms and the reformulation of the kitchen express modernity (see also Pellow 2015 for Ghana). Mercer's fourth house type is the "minimalist house" (Mercer 2014: 242), championed by educated international return migrants and predominantly built in urban areas. The minimalist house has some similarities to the global aspirational house but is substantially more modest in interior and exterior design. Mercer's analysis illuminates a number of formative trajectories in homemaking and migration in Sub-Saharan Africa. Working through the different house types, she shows how housebuilding is used by upwardly mobile Tanzanians to express their identity, belonging, and distinction. Importantly, class mobility, crucial for the building of conspicuous constructions, can be achieved either through internal or international migration. Many of Mercer's informants have acquired their wealth within Tanzania.

Mercer was among the first researchers to point out the importance of house construction for emerging African middle classes in different regions of the continent. Several recent studies have followed her lead (Alber 2018; Andreasen and Agergaard 2020; Durham 2020; Ndlovu 2020; Page and Sunjo 2018; Sumich and Nielsen 2020). Gastrow (2020: 520), for example, observes that for middle-class Angolans "the formal house also became the means for performing middle-classness through everyday actions." Among other forms of consumption, like lavish weddings (Pauli 2018, 2019) or vehicles (Durham 2020), houses in Sub-Saharan Africa have become a central way to express belonging to the middle classes. Additionally, actively building a house also communicates that one is on one's way to becoming middle class. This aspirational dimension of reaching for "being middle class" (Lentz 2020; Scharrer et al. 2018; Spronk 2020) helps to explain why building, and not dwelling, is now the focus of much anthropological research on homemaking in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Archambault (2018) describes how her Mozambican interlocutors try to slowly accomplish their probably never to be fulfilled "concrete aspirations" of a house one cement block at a time. To build a house out of concrete, and not reed, is perceived as the ultimate achievement. She notes that Africa is the continent with the fastest-growing cement consumption worldwide, "the last cement frontier" (Archambault 2018: 693; see also Morton 2019; Nielsen 2011). Similarly, Sinatti (2009: 54) has described the construction activities in Senegal as an overall "cementification" of the landscape, while Caroline Melly (2010: 40) speaks of Senegal's "generation of concrete." Hope fuels these "concrete aspirations" of upward mobility. At the same time, anxiety of losing it all, house and hard-won middle-class status, troubles most homeowners (Durham 2020; Mercer 2014; Sumich and Nielsen 2020). To build a house of concrete is also a central motive to migrate internationally.

LONG-DISTANCE BELONGING AND TRANSNATIONAL HOUSEBUILDING

West Africa is the focus of most research on transnational housebuilding. A major theme in African migration and transnational studies is the housebuilding by Ghanaians in Ghana while living and working in Europe, the United States, Canada, or Australia (e.g. Berry 2009; Coe 2016; Diko and Tipple 1992; Grant 2007; Kuuire et al. 2016; Nieswand 2011; Obeng-Odoom 2010; Pellow 2003; Smith and Mazzucato 2009; Tipple and Wilis 1992). Other research on transnational house construction comes from Cameroon (Ndjio 2009; Page 2021; Page and Sunjo 2018), Senegal (Buggenhagen 2001; Hannaford 2017; Melly 2010; Sinatti 2009), Nigeria (Osili 2004), and Madagascar (Freeman 2013). To carve out similarities and differences between the findings of these studies, I use as heuristic devices the three dimensions introduced at the beginning of the chapter – the spatial, temporal, and social dimensions of houses. All housebuilding starts with some sort of planning. The planning is in one way or another connected to the life circumstances of the person (or group of persons) wishing for a house. Thus, in order to discuss the actual building of transnational houses – the spatial dimension – I first need to scrutinize its temporal aspects, including the planning. My discussion concludes with observations on the social and symbolic dimensions of transnational housebuilding.

The Temporal Dimension

A common theme in the literature on housebuilding in Sub-Saharan Africa is the need for young men – and to a much lesser extent women – to build a house in order to achieve adult status (e.g. Page and Sunjo 2018: 90–92; Van der Geest 1998: 345). One way to acquire the necessary funds for building is through international migration. Melly (2010: 56), for example, describes how men in Senegal lament "that they could not marry (for the first time or with additional wives) because they were unable to build a house." Hannaford's (2017) work on transnational migrants from Senegal working in Europe echoes Melly's findings. She details how marriage is increasingly tied to migration. Only those men who have migrated internationally and are able to build a house and buy consumption goods are perceived as appropriate marriage partners by young women. The timing of housebuilding is thus tightly connected to (international) migration and marriage. In some cases, migrants engage in migration and housebuilding in order to generate a family that does not yet exist. Presenting the case of an unmarried Senegalese return migrant and his not yet finished house, Melly (2010: 55) says: "The house, in fact, was thought to *bring about* the family."

The house's potential to generate a future is also noted by Coe (2016) in her work on female health-care workers from Ghana living in the United States and building a house for retirement in Ghana. In a telling vignette, she describes how she visited the building plot of a 62-year-old health-care worker she calls Millicent in a suburb of Accra together with the migrant's daughter and another relative. While Coe struggled to imagine what the final house might look like, her companions seemed to perceive effortlessly the future lived in the three-bedroom house: "Millicent planned to retire in it; the nephew and his wife might be the caretakers of the house in her absence; and the daughter with her siblings would probably inherit the house" (Coe 2016: 368).

Coe's research also highlights how the meaning of transnational housebuilding may change when moving through the life cycle. For younger migrants, housebuilding is about beginnings, of becoming an adult, marrying, and forming a family. Later in life, housebuilding increasingly shapes endings. In the Ghanaian context, the centrality of having built a house in one's hometown for retirement, funerals, the final rest, and eventually inheritance has been repeatedly stressed (Kuuire et al. 2016; Smith and Mazzucato 2009; Van der Geest 1998: 664). At this stage, housebuilding turns into a crucial practice of preparedness (Cassarino 2004). Finishing a house prepares long-term transnational migrants for their final return: to their country, their home, their kin, and their ancestors. The temporal dimension of transnational housebuilding, thus bringing about a future and preparing for a future, is translated into specific spatial practices.

The Spatial Dimension

While migrant housebuilding can be a form of investment (Grant 2007; Melly 2010; Page and Sunjo 2018; Sinatti 2009), much research stresses its non-monetary aspects, especially the desire to belong to a community (Berry 2009; Kuuire et al. 2016; Obeng-Odoom 2010; Page 2021; Pellow 2003; Smith and Mazzucato 2009). The homemaking practices of transnational migrants communicate specific, often paradoxical forms of belonging. Many migrants imagine continuing to fit into and to belong to their home communities, despite their migration. They use their houses as proxies for themselves during their absence (Dalakoglou 2010;

Pauli and Bedorf 2018). At the same time, migrants also want to use their distinctive houses to communicate their economic achievements. Many transnational houses thus substantially diverge from local building styles and materials, challenging local practices and norms. Therefore, the conspicuousness of transnational houses can lead to conflict with non-migrants and local elites.

Basile Ndjio (2009: 75) recounts the "construction of extravagant houses with novel architectural forms" among Bamileke émigrés from the Grassfields region of west Cameroon. In his detailed social analysis, Ndjio shows how previously marginalized social juniors, who through their international migration had moved up the social ladder and become the area's "nouveaux riches," challenged local elite hierarchies through their housebuilding. Before transnational migration, elite status was expressed through building on low-lying sites. In contrast, transnational nouveaux riches built their houses on heightened layouts, such as the tops of mountains or hills. In addition to this spatial reconfiguration of status, the migrants changed the landscape by adding artificial lawns and lakes, and by hiring Western architects to build mansions as in South American soap operas (Ndjio 2009: 92). Several other researchers have also noticed the practice of building up in transnational housebuilding, with height indicating status and distinction (Freeman 2013; Melly 2010; Pellow 2003; Sinatti 2009). Luke Freeman (2013: 106) links this preference for height and size to the colonial past and the architectural practices of the missionaries in Madagascar: "The churches they built were usually the biggest and most conspicuous buildings in the highland valleys." In transnational housebuilding, physical height has thus become associated with heightened social status.

Yet not in all migratory contexts do regional elites feel challenged by migrants' transnational housebuilding. Page and Sunjo (2018: 95) describe for the Cameroonian university town Buea that, regardless of popular stereotypes, "houses built by return migrants or expatriate members of the diaspora tend, in general, to be more modest than those built by resident elites." The interaction between transnational migrants and local elites is thus not predetermined but in flux, depending on the specific local circumstances. This is also sustained by Ndjio's (2009) own findings. Although local elites in the Grassfields now emulate the housebuilding practices of the transnational migrants, also building on hills, they are nevertheless still in power to decide whom to incorporate into their local political structures. As an example, Ndjio narrates the story of a successful businesswoman he calls Tontah. After many years as a successful migrant, she was finally appointed by the local elite to become a noble in her home village (Ndjio 2009: 94). Thus, while Tontah's housebuilding influenced how and where local elites built their houses, the local elite shaped Tontah's political belonging.

Tontah's story illuminates a further spatial aspect of transnational housebuilding. Tontah built not only a large house on a hill in her home village; she also invested in real estate in the Cameroonian city of Doula. Investing in and owning multiple houses in different locations in the country of origin has also been described by Smith and Mazzucato (2009) for Ghanaian migrants and by Melly (2010) for Senegalese migrants. Kuuire and his colleagues (2016) even found Ghanaian migrants who built houses both in Ghana and Canada. This research indicates that while building in the home village or hometown is a way of securing belonging and preparing for the future, one's return, and even one's death, housebuilding in cities and a country's capital is more often associated with investment. This observation finally leads to the social dimensions of transnational housebuilding.

The Social Dimension

Transnational housebuilding in Sub-Saharan Africa must be understood within the complex webs of social relations in which it is embedded. In many "scattered" or "stretched" families the different forms of migrant housing described here (self-help/state housing, elite/middle-class building, and transnational home construction) can be found simultaneously. I have exemplified this multiplicity of migratory house histories with the Namibian vignette at the beginning of the chapter. Similar to our Namibian hosts, translocally dispersed kin groups are often internally heterogeneous in their social class status, including members with very different economic standing (Alber 2018; Coe and Pauli 2020; Lentz 2020; Pauli 2020). The heterogeneity of such "multiclass families" also finds expression in the different kinds of houses kin inhabit, ranging from shacks to mansions. Although some research on African transnational housing acknowledges class-based heterogeneity of the kin group (e.g. Berry 2009; Coe 2016; Ndjio 2009), in-depth family histories on housing histories of migrant and non-migrant kin are rare (an exception is Page 2021). Such approaches that trace housing histories for all members of a kin group at different points in time would allow a better understanding of success and failure in migrant housebuilding projects.

In contrast to this research lacuna, some knowledge is available on how non-migrant, often economically destitute kin support migrants in their transnational housing projects (Page 2021; Pellow 2003; Smith and Mazzucato 2009). Kin that remain behind are often in charge of the building process and later help maintain the building as caretakers. Very often non-migrant kin may also profit from the transnational housing activities of their migrant relatives. Kin and other non-migrants find employment during the building phase (Sinatti 2009) and often stay in the houses rent free once the construction is complete (Berry 2009; Obeng-Odoom 2010). Having a decent place to stay in metropolitan areas like Dakar or Accra can be crucial for non-migrant kin. Most research indicates that transnational housing substantially helps to alleviate the dramatic shortage of affordable housing in many African cities (e.g. Grant 2007; Melly 2010; Page and Sunjo 2018). This practice, however, might also further deepen already existing inequalities between migrant kin and their non-migrant relatives (Berry 2009; Ndjio 2009). The ambivalence of the relation between migrant and non-migrant kin also finds expression in the desire by many migrants to stay in their houses upon return visits and holidays and not with their kin (Ndjio 2009; Obeng-Odoom 2010). Most migrants thus do not want to stay in their kin's houses when visiting but want their kin to stay in their houses during their absences.

Finally, it is important to note that in some migratory contexts transnational houses are not integrated into kin relations, instead remaining empty. Freeman (2013: 94) opens his analysis of absentee émigré houses in Madagascar with the description of a decaying "monster" house standing empty. He argues that transnational housebuilding is not always and only about staying connected. Instead, empty transnational houses may also signal disconnection, detachment, and the separation of kin. His work stimulates further questions for future research. Much research on national and transnational housebuilding in Sub-Saharan Africa conceptualizes housebuilding as a long-term process of becoming. This becoming as building can eventually lead to dwelling and a home (Boccagni 2020). Freeman's work cautions us, however, to consider that this process can have a different ending: a house might never become a home, instead transforming into an uninhabited ruin.

CONCLUSION

This chapter summarizes some of the more general dynamics of migrant housebuilding and homemaking in Sub-Saharan Africa. Rural–urban connections and "stretched families," translocally dispersed kin groups living in multiple households, continue to be a defining feature of migration throughout the region. In Southern Africa, rural migrants have reconfigured racist colonial and apartheid infrastructures by appropriating space in state housing and through self-help housing in informal settlements. The migrants' urban housing experiences have also reshaped housing projects in rural areas. The continuous interconnection between urban and rural life worlds is not limited to the economically marginalized but includes all social classes. Housebuilding by local elites and emerging middle classes in West, East, and Southern Africa is as much about aesthetic distinction as about social and regional belonging. Transnational housebuilding, mostly researched for West Africa, has extended these practices of social belonging internationally. The different forms of housebuilding and homemaking described in this contribution are thus not separate phenomena. Instead, in many kin groups they are simultaneously enacted in different localities. Taking into account various forms of housebuilding among connected kin living in different localities will lead to a more nuanced understanding of the nexus between migration and homemaking. Sjaak van der Geest (1998: 349) reminds us that "no one builds a house for himself alone." More research on housing histories within kin groups could thus provide unique insight into the complex webs of exchange, support, but also competition among translocally and transnationally dispersed kin living in "multiclass families."

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

NOTES

1. Together with my husband and fellow anthropologist Michael Schnegg (Schnegg 2021), I have been conducting fieldwork in Namibia since 2003 (Pauli 2019).
2. Homemaking practices of refugees and inner African migrants, for example, will not be discussed here (but see the special issue edited by Brun and Fábos 2015).

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