

## Domestic Architecture

### CHARLES AND SALMA

Charles and Salma's house in Kilimahewa was not yet finished, but it was already impressive. It stood in one corner of a large plot enclosed by a two-meter-high concrete block wall. When they moved into the house in 2012 it was one of the few inhabited houses in their neighborhood. At that time, the surrounding area was occupied by grass, trees, one or two modest houses, and a few improvised fencing poles marking out nearby plot boundaries, some of which enclosed ambitious two-storey concrete block skeletons. They had started building the house six years previously. Charles and Salma's house occupied a single floor in a unique bungalow layout. Occupying only one floor rather than two meant that the house was not too ostentatious. Yet the architecture made a clear statement about the status and taste of its builders, confidently mixing global and local influences to produce a unique design that met the family's needs while reflecting a sense of their place in Tanzania and the world.

As Charles said, when he designed the house, he knew that what he wanted was a house with four bedrooms—a clear aspiration to distinction in a context where three bedrooms was considered to be the standard marker of success. Encountering the actual building, however, the complex roof seemed to most clearly articulate Charles's sense of social status—an origami puzzle of gabled and hipped shapes in modern imported red roofing sheets that rose and fell over the building like a small mountain range. The external concrete block walls had been smoothly finished with plaster and were awaiting paint, their corners picked out with decorative plastered quoins painted in an accent color. A tiled veranda and staircase (the house was built on a slight slope) flanked by concrete doric columns

atop concrete balustrades leading to a heavy carved wooden Swahili-style front door jutted out of the house towards the thick metal gate that slid aside to allow entry and exit to the walled compound that enclosed the house. On another side an imposing bay feature containing three double windows extended the bungalow into the expansive plot. Towards the back of the bungalow a second tiled veranda, also flanked by concrete doric columns and balustrades, served as the everyday entrance to the house. This smaller veranda led from where Charles and Salma parked their cars, through a small cloakroom, into the large kitchen at the back of the house. It was easier to use this entrance than to use the actual front door for everyday coming and going, as the front door was secured from the inside with heavy metal bars. An electricity meter and a series of small security lights were fixed to the external walls, as well as a satellite dish and two air conditioning units, one for the living room and one for Charles and Salma's bedroom. Behind the cars, a water storage tank sat on top of a three-meter-high concrete block tower. The rest of the plot had been cleared except for a mature cashew tree in one corner, the only remnant from the land's previous life. An electricity cable hung across the plot connecting the house to the TANESCO pole in the street that Charles and Salma had paid to have installed. In the other corner, sections of large concrete pipes and piles of aggregate were scattered around the spot where an eighty-meter-deep well was to be dug. Since the house was designed with internal water facilities, water was delivered regularly by truck to fill the external storage tank. After three months of living in the house, however, Charles and Salma had decided that the water deliveries were too expensive, and they had begun to plan a well instead.

Once inside, a visitor would pass through the large kitchen, the walls of which were lined with bespoke dark wood cupboards and worktops, a free-standing electric oven, a microwave, a sink, and a large fridge-freezer. Shiny pale tiles on the walls and floor and highlights of pastel-colored paint lightened the room. If the domestic worker was cooking, the visitor might notice the oppressive heat in the kitchen even in Dar es Salaam's cool season, as the only ventilation came through the mosquito netting at the windows that looked out onto the concrete block walls enclosing the plot. From the door of the kitchen they would enter the dining and living rooms at the heart of the house, which were partly open-plan: large curved arches and pale shiny floor tiles connected the two rooms; but they were also partly separated by a section of structural wall and a series of transitional steps between them and the corridor that led to the sleeping quarters, necessitated by the slight slope on which the house was built. Beyond these public rooms at the heart of the house, the bedrooms were accessed via a large empty space—effectively the entrance since it was behind the large heavy front door—that led from the living room. The children's wing contained four rooms: two bedrooms for three children, a playroom containing a sofa and a television, and a bathroom containing a bath and flush toilet. The master wing was located back along the open-plan corridor

and up some steps, and contained a large master bedroom and dressing room furnished in matching dark wood furniture, and an en suite bathroom.

In the dining and living rooms the overall effect was of space, light, and carefully curated décor. Large double windows constructed from high-quality local wood and secured with bespoke decorative iron grilles let light into these rooms. Charles, a university graduate in his forties who worked for a consulting firm, preferred these wooden frames to the popular, cheaper aluminum windows. His wife Salma, also a university graduate and a middle-ranking civil servant in her forties, had chosen all of the furnishings. A modest glass and black aluminum dining table with six matching chairs stood alone in the center of the large dining room, which was painted the same pastel peach as the kitchen; a cream and gold ceiling fan hung above the table; and a plumbed basin for hand-washing at mealtimes had been installed in the corner by the window. The living room was furnished with low-backed sofas in dark fabric and accent cushions, bought from one of the new shops selling imported furniture located along the industrial strip on the Nyerere Road. They were arranged in an L-shape facing the large flat-screen television with surround-sound speakers in the corner of the room; between them a small glass-topped coffee table stood on a gray rug with an abstract design. A four-foot-high traditionally carved wooden soldier figure stood in one corner of the bay window between two sofas. Above the coffee table a modern aluminum candelabra containing three bulbs in frosted upturned pendants was suspended from a ceiling rose; additional lighting was provided by uplighters on the walls and small lights embedded in the ceiling. The walls were topped with white coving carved with a flower design to match the ceiling rose, and finished at the bottom with a skirting trim of dark shiny tiles. The windows were all dressed with matching pale coffee-colored curtains hung from wooden curtain poles and secured with gold hold-backs. Salma intended to complement them with silver patterned net curtains, which would give a shine effect. On the freshly painted cream walls were hung a few items including a small framed professional family photograph positioned high up above the sofas, a small local painting of a vase of flowers hung above the television, a large plain clock, and an air conditioning unit up in one corner. Salma intended to hang a larger picture of herself and her husband on the wall by the arch to the dining room so that it would be easily seen by visitors as they passed from one room to the other.

#### THOMAS AND ROSEMARY

Thomas and Rosemary worked in routine administration in central government offices in Dar es Salaam. They lived in a modest house in Salasala. It was in quite a good location, not far from the tarmac road, but the area had become more popular in recent years and their neighborhood was changing fast. When Thomas bought the land, about ten years before he and Rosemary were married in 2014,

there were fewer buildings in the vicinity. By 2015 they could no longer park their pickup and their small four-by-four-wheel-drive vehicle in front of the house, as newcomers had bought small plots and built their houses encroaching onto the path that led to Thomas and Rosemary's house. Beyond their house, the path narrowed further as it dropped down a steep hill and meandered through the houses built on the hillside. It was passable only on foot, and neighbors had to secure it with sandbags during the rainy season. Thomas and Rosemary had to park their cars on a yet-to-be-developed plot of land nearby.

Thomas and Rosemary's house was perfectly comfortable for them and their three children, containing a living room, three bedrooms, a kitchen, and a bathroom, with a higher-quality finish than many of their neighbors' houses had. But they aspired to something better, and to that end they had bought land further out on the suburban frontier, where they planned to build a larger house in the future. At the front of the existing house, they had built a distinctive small veranda with curved arches and finished with a bright pastel paint and white trim. Thomas often sat there, especially if he was drinking bottled beer with a friend in the evening, but it faced the concrete block wall of a neighbor; and since they hadn't yet completed their own wall enclosing their plot, it was open to passers-by on the other side and therefore lacked privacy. As Rosemary opined, there was little space inside or outside their house. Sitting in the living room, one could watch pedestrians through the windows as they navigated the sandbags on the path outside. The neighbors' walls abutted the space outside their kitchen door where Thomas kept a small chicken coop. The rest of the house, a square shape with a half-veranda at the front, was painted a sage green color. A simple hipped and gabled roof constructed with regular roofing sheets sported a satellite dish. Inside, the wooden window frames and mosquito netting were secured with plain metal grilles. They had managed to connect to electricity via a branch initially installed by a neighbor who was the first in the neighborhood to connect to the grid, but there were no water or sanitation services to connect to in this part of the city.<sup>1</sup> At the back of the house stood a four-thousand-liter water tank that was refilled by a delivery truck with a long hose every three weeks. Thomas used jerry cans to bring the water inside the house. One was placed in the kitchen, and the other was used to top up a larger water tub in the corner of the bathroom.

In the living room, terracotta-colored matte floor tiles contrasted with pale painted walls and cream and brown patterned curtains tied in the middle to let the light in; net curtains provided extra privacy. Ongoing improvements were in evidence from the freshly painted walls and freshly splashed unpainted wooden doors. A neutral-colored low-backed L-shaped sofa was pushed up against two walls facing the small flat-screen television attached to the opposite wall. On the floor in the center of the room was a large brown rug on which stood a low coffee table with a glass top and dark wooden legs. It sheltered four nesting tables covered in imitation leather, which could be moved around to serve drinks to

guests. On the other side of the living room a wooden dining table covered with a brightly colored plastic tablecloth and four matching chairs was pushed up against the wall. On either side of the doorway to the kitchen stood a water cooler and a chest fridge. The small kitchen contained a gas-canister-powered freestanding oven and storage for food, cooking utensils, and crockery; there was also a small charcoal stove that was placed on the external steps outside the kitchen when used for cooking. A corridor to bedrooms and a bathroom containing a latrine led away from the living room, concealed by a hanging curtain, the fabric of which matched the window curtains. Another matching curtain was hung across the inside of the front door. On the walls were placed a picture of Thomas and Rosemary's wedding reception, two photographs of Thomas, and a wall calendar with a photograph of Lake Victoria.

#### NYUMBA NZURI (A GOOD HOUSE)

Charles, Salma, Thomas, and Rosemary were all members of Dar es Salaam's middle classes. Charles and Salma came from upper-middle-class families. They had masters' degrees from Tanzanian universities and they both aspired to pursue PhD's; they had stable jobs with good salaries in the private and public sectors; their three children were studying in good private boarding schools; they had both traveled internationally for work to Europe and China; they each owned farms in their home regions, and they owned two houses (one in Dar and one in Dodoma, where Salma's office had relocated after President Magufuli's drive to complete the government's move to the capital city). Both sets of their parents also owned property in Dar es Salaam. Thomas and Rosemary came from lower-middle-class families and were the first generation in their immediate families to own property in Dar es Salaam. They both worked in rank-and-file positions in central government offices. Thomas had a diploma from a college in Dar es Salaam, while Rosemary had a bachelor's degree from a Tanzanian university and was seeking sponsorship to pursue a master's degree in business studies. Their three children were enrolled in local English medium primary schools. In addition to the house they owned in Salasala, they both owned plots of land in their home regions, as well as the plot they had bought on the very edge of Dar es Salaam's suburban frontier, where they planned to build a larger three-bedroom house. The plan was to eventually live there, and to rent out the house in Salasala.

Despite the differences between them, Charles, Salma, Thomas, and Rosemary all had the capacity to build *nyumba nzuri*—a comfortable house constructed with permanent materials, some modern conveniences and aesthetic flourishes. The focus on houses in this chapter builds on the earlier analysis of middle-class property-making through acquiring land (chapter 3) and shaping landscape (chapter 4). Here I shift the focus to the new styles of domestic architecture favored by the middle classes building on the suburban frontier and the ways in which house-building

is intimately related to the making of middle-class property and the properties of middle-classness. The good house and the practice of building it are key to being middle class in Dar es Salaam.

Scholars of social class have been less interested in housing compared to other attributes such as occupation and education. Yet there is recognition—most of it from European and North American contexts—that housing is related to social class in a number of ways, from political economy approaches that analyze housing as property or an asset that is owned or rented,<sup>2</sup> to historical cultural analyses of the relationship between class, gender, and domestic interiors,<sup>3</sup> to architectural analyses of middle-class suburban architecture,<sup>4</sup> to sociological and geographical analyses of housing types, aspiration, and gentrification.<sup>5</sup> More recent work on the anthropology of architecture and material culture has turned attention to how individual buildings “make people.”<sup>6</sup> The housing of the new global middle classes has attracted considerable anthropological attention since the turn of the twenty-first century. This work has pushed class analysis in new directions by examining the ways in which middle-class distinction is achieved through the domestic arrangements and aesthetics of consumption in places such as China, Hungary, India, and Vietnam.<sup>7</sup> In these accounts domestic architecture and interiors are treated as significant sites through which middle-class subjectivity is expressed,<sup>8</sup> as well as signaling new tastes and patterns of consumption associated with new configurations of ideology, identity, and belonging.<sup>9</sup> As I show in this chapter, this is particularly salient in the autoconstructed city where self-built houses are about building the self as much as they are about constructing a place to live.

In Tanzania, as in much of Africa, self-built domestic architecture is political.<sup>10</sup> It is not only a question of who is able to build what kind of house and where, but also one of aesthetic politics. Building materials, architectural styles, and the speed with which a building is constructed are all significant. Where do materials and styles come from, and what do they signify? What is the rhythm of building, and what does that reveal about the wealth and moral worth of the builder? In colonial Dar es Salaam, as we have seen, legitimate urban residence was associated with productive employment and housing constructed with permanent materials.<sup>11</sup> Given the paucity of land, and later housing, provided for urban Africans, most lived beyond any urban entitlement in self-built structures of temporary materials. During the socialist period, after a brief spell in the early 1960s during which the National Housing Corporation constructed some urban housing, the socialist state reframed housing as part of self-reliance, opting instead to provide land on which people could build their own houses—though as we have seen in chapter 1, the supply of land was never able to keep up with demand. The materials with which people built their houses, and their interior furnishing and arrangements, either confirmed allegiance to the state’s socialist ideology or suggested that one’s affinities lay instead with bourgeois-capitalist ideals. As Anne Lewinson notes, “sparse utilitarianism, neatness, and an emphasis on

accommodating people rather than things characterised the *ujamaa* interior décor.”<sup>12</sup> Young unmarried women who enjoyed comfortable living arrangements that appeared to be far beyond their means could be suspected of being someone’s mistress, and thus a threat to the gendered social order based on marriage and the nuclear family. During the Operation Economic Sabotage campaign in 1983, when people were encouraged to report suspected illegal activities among their neighbors to the authorities (such as obtaining luxury or everyday items on the black market), people resorted to burying or hiding domestic appliances, cash, building materials, or even cars and motorcycles.<sup>13</sup> The status of building materials was more ambiguous. Building with concrete blocks, rather than with temporary materials, was originally promoted by Nyerere in the early independence period. Concrete would build a modern socialist self-reliant nation of factories, government buildings, and homes. Tanzania’s first concrete factory was opened in Wazo Hill (near to Salasala) in 1966. It was nationalized in 1974 and constantly hampered by production problems related to the lack of skilled labor and the rising costs of importing oil and spare parts. Nevertheless, Tanzanians took to building in concrete blocks with enthusiasm, when concrete could be purchased. By 1977 Nyerere was trying to reverse the preference for concrete, encouraging people to build instead with burnt bricks, which could be more easily manufactured locally. Yet concrete blocks remained popular because they signified permanence and modernity, despite Nyerere’s complaint that building in concrete—or “European soil”—was a sign of a colonial mentality.<sup>14</sup>

#### UWEZO: THE CAPACITY TO BUILD

Today the self-built house is a barometer of *uwezo*,<sup>15</sup> or the capacity to build. The self-built house is the most durable and visible evidence of a person’s capacity to meet theirs and their family’s needs, as well as a public statement of aesthetic judgment and moral values. The size and style of a house, and the speed with which it is completed, are read by the builder, their family, friends, and neighbors as a statement on who they think they are, their place in Tanzania and the world. On the contemporary suburban frontier, smaller buildings in more densely built areas, often without exterior paint or concrete block perimeter walls and which might be poorly finished or in need of repair, are read as having been built by those with less financial capacity, who have prioritized other investments (such as in local businesses, trade, or a farm elsewhere) or whose capacity has been stretched by competing demands (such as children’s school fees, an unexpected bill for health care, or obligations to relatives). These houses do not necessarily lack architectural flourish or attention to aesthetic detail, but the scale of such buildings and the resources required to pursue their builders’ aesthetic ambitions are more limited. At the other end of the scale, the wealthy build more ostentatious two- or three-storey villas surrounded by tropical gardens and high concrete block walls. Such





FIGURE 7. A typical *nyumba nzuri* (good house), Salasala. Photo by author, September 2012.

buildings are often admired, but they can also be read as evidence that a builder has developed too high an opinion of themselves, or has enriched themselves in illegitimate ways and is therefore not of respectable character. Houses built by the middle classes occupy the interstitial ground between high- and low-quality housing: their houses are neither too big nor too small, neither too ostentatious nor too humble. They are the material manifestation of *uwezo*: the capacity to build something of good enough quality. These houses are distinguishable by the attention paid to relatively modest details of architectural design and interior space. Building something more elaborate than the template of the Swahili house and choosing the most up-to-date paint colors, roofing materials, and sofa designs take on significance as elements of an emerging middle-class domestic style. The capacity to build also captures the sense of achievement when a house is ready to be lived in—not necessarily finished, but livable.

Houses are big, unpredictable projects that consume money, time, imagination, and emotion. To build a house is a huge effort, often taking many years. A house may not be completed, as the many half-built, empty ruins that litter the new suburbs testify. People start too big, run out of cash, are distracted by other claims on their resources, or even die. Yet building too fast can also be problematic. Neighbors note who is building what in their vicinity and at what speed; new constructions of unknown provenance still invite speculation about the builder and the legitimacy of their apparent wealth. To build slowly and incrementally is more respectable. Neighbors recognize the familiar rhythms of cash flow, materials



acquisition and the faster and slower phases of the development of the building, and are reassured that their new neighbor is of good moral character.

The capacity to build draws attention to the *process* of building as much as to the house itself. Charles, Salma, Thomas, and Rosemary were all architects of the houses they had built: they had imagined, designed, planned, project-managed, and decorated their houses with skill and care. They had also been frustrated by and had persevered with their building projects. The experience of building a house over many years oscillated between the capacity to aspire and the possibility of disappointment, and is central to middle-classness.

#### DOMESTIC ARCHITECTURE AS MIDDLE-CLASS PRACTICE

House-building has long been recognized as a skilled activity,<sup>16</sup> yet the buildings that are constructed by ordinary self-builders are rarely considered as architecture. Despite the fact that a large proportion of the built environment in African cities is constructed in this way for residential purposes, most surveys of architecture in Africa focus on vernacular or colonial buildings or contemporary projects built by professional architects. They have little to say about the way that the majority of urban residents either experience or make architecture in their daily lives. The kinds of houses that have been built by Charles, Salma, Thomas, Rosemary, and others are invisibilized: neither sufficiently traditional in style, materials, or method to count as “vernacular architecture” nor sufficiently authored by trained architects to count as architecture. The analysis of domestic architecture developed here takes its lead instead from David Adjaye’s continental photographic survey of architecture, which challenges ideas about what counts as architecture in Africa.<sup>17</sup> The residential architecture included in this collection covers the whole range of urban domestic buildings from shacks to modest concrete block bungalows to apartment buildings to villas.<sup>18</sup> Significantly, many of Adjaye’s residential buildings are ordinary houses made out of cement blocks, much like Thomas and Rosemary’s, and Charles and Salma’s houses in Salasala.

If the houses built by Dar es Salaam’s middle classes can be considered as examples of African domestic architecture, what then are their architectural characteristics? This is a distinctively hybrid form of domestic architecture in terms of its styles, influences, and materials. It is not “vernacular architecture” in the sense of using traditional architectural forms, materials, or methods. It is also not the Swahili house—the single-storey square or rectangular design with gable roof and an extendable series of rooms opening onto a central corridor with shared space at the back. Domestic architecture among the middle classes is now more open to experimentation with spaces and shapes such as complex roofs, imposing columns, curved walls, open-plan spaces, and double-height rooms. This architecture is global in the sense that ideas can be plucked from any place and any



FIGURE 8. An elaborate floor plan with circular living room takes shape on a building site among more modest houses. Photo by author, April 2016.

time. Classical columns, Chinese gateways, and modernist concrete sunshades in improvised shapes adorn bungalows and villas. House-builders get inspiration from social media, television, neighbors, and their own experiences of traveling—whether within the city or further afield. For example, there were several houses in Charles and Salma’s vicinity that had external wall corners decorated with the same concrete quoins picked out in accent paint colors, yet this design is less common across the city. Floor plans experiment with new shapes and layouts such as hexagon-shaped living rooms and internal balconies. External walls are finished from the palette of newly available paints in rainbow colors, or are even mixed for the customer to create a bespoke hue. Outside space is also carefully curated, with attention paid to the design of perimeter walls, decorative paving stones, and garden features such as lawns, flowers, and trees, sometimes with a separate space for poultry, gardens, or other small business activity. Heavy metal gates provide another opportunity for ornamentation, the more imposing the gate suggesting the wealthier the occupant.

Building materials are also a hybrid of the locally made and the imported. Cement blocks are the most popular building material in Dar es Salaam and are made from mixing cement, local sand, and water. Cement production in Tanzania has expanded since the early 2010s (from three plants to twelve by 2022) but it is

also imported from Kenya, the Middle East, Turkey, and Pakistan to try to keep up with demand. Cement blocks can be bought from one of the small factories that have sprung up across the suburbs in which young men feed block-making vibrator machines with different ratios of cement, sand, and water to make different-quality blocks that are then cured and stacked along the roadside for sale. Alternatively, the cost-conscious house-builder can rent a manual block-making machine, hire a few casual laborers, and oversee the block-making process themselves on their building site. Iron grilles for windows and doors, and decorative concrete blocks, are made by small local businesses and distinguished by their design; bespoke designs are more expensive. Complex roofs sport the latest roofing sheets made to look like tiles using a combination of aluminum, zinc, and galvanized iron and coated with granulated PVC in red, green, or blue. Interiors are organized with specialized uses in mind (sitting room, dining room, bedroom), and most domestic activities can in principle take place inside the house (as for example with internal kitchens and bathrooms). Small details differentiate these interiors from those with less space, time, and resources to curate their domestic space as they might wish.

The private spaces of the house, such as bathrooms and bedrooms, are demarcated from the open-plan family living spaces by solid wood internal doors (rather than a curtain hung across a corridor or doorway), large windows facilitate time spent inside (rather than outside in the compound), and there is attention to interior design details such as cornicing, ceiling roses, and painted skirting trims (rather than fading paint or undecorated internal walls). Rooms are less cluttered with previously popular mass-produced consumer goods such as soft toys, anti-macassars, plastic flowers, religious images, and scripture quotations, or large wall calendars produced by Tanzanian parastatals. Furniture is either imported or made locally to appeal to a globalized IKEA aesthetic. There is a preference for low-backed, large-cushioned neutral fabric sofas rather than the cheaper and previously ubiquitous locally made wooden sofas with thin cushions; shiny surfaces on tables, floors, and TV cabinets predominate over the previously popular dark, natural materials such as local wood and textiles; walls are adorned with framed photographs of nuclear family members, certificates, and graduations rather than mass-produced religious or parastatal wall-hangings.

What makes the domestic architecture of the middle classes significant, however, is not only the particular configurations of design, materials, and décor. For builders like Charles, Salma, Thomas, and Rosemary, architecture is also an everyday practice. Building a house is a huge undertaking. People are always thinking about their building project, real or imagined: how to save money to buy bags of cement; what kind of decorative blocks to buy; how to fit the shape of the house they want into the parameters of the plot they have; what not to do the next time they build. Domestic architecture is achieved through an ongoing process of experimentation. The middle classes have the capacity to

build, and the production of domestic architecture is central to middle-class practice and experience.

#### AGNES AND ARNOLD

Agnes was a lecturer at a higher education college in Dar es Salaam. She and her husband, a legal professional, rented a house in an inner suburb near to his job and their daughter's school, but they had been building a house in Salasala for several years. In fact her husband had bought the land in Salasala in the late 1990s when it was cheap and relatively easy to obtain. They started to build in the mid-2000s. The house had been designed by Agnes's husband and a friend of his who was an engineer. It was a curious shape. In order to secure their claim to the plot, they had initially built a small two-bedroom building with a simple gabled roof. Later her husband and his friend had designed a more ambitious three-bedroom bungalow with a large circular living room and veranda, which they positioned behind, but not adjoining, the original building. They subsequently decided to join the two buildings together by constructing a large concrete block linking room that could become either a storage room or a garage. Both buildings had been finished in high-quality materials with matching dark wood window frames and a smart paint scheme (pale green walls, black skirting trim and fascia boards, white windowsills, external cornicing and internal veranda walls). They were roofed with locally manufactured concrete tiles. Agnes explained that they were more cost-effective than roofing sheets, which have a lower life span in the tropical environment, although when building the roof they had also discovered that, since the tiles were much heavier than roofing sheets, they required a lot more wood in the roof to hold them up. Constructing the roof had therefore been more expensive and taken longer than they had anticipated. Inside the larger building, the stump of a decorative column hung down from the ceiling of the living room like a concrete stalactite, awaiting a decision on what form its design would take.

As Agnes walked me around, she explained that building the house had been a learning process and that she now knew what she would do differently next time. She would insist on smaller rooms ("What do you need all that space for? It's just status"), and she would avoid wasting space, as she felt they had done with the corridor that ran from the living room past the bedrooms to a dead end. They were considering putting a door at the end of the corridor so that one could pass from one building to the other via the garage. She would not buy materials imported from China again; she was disappointed with the sinks they had installed in the original building that were already corroding. Durability was key, she said: the quality of materials was very important, because if something was not durable then it would have to be replaced and end up being much more expensive. She was pleased with the decision to only have one en suite bathroom (attached to the master bedroom) and one additional bathroom. So many people don't think about maintenance when they build, she said, they just want to have a big house.

Why would you need three en suite bathrooms, she asked me: who is going to clean and maintain them? Outside in the compound, she showed me her main current problem: what to do about the huge volume of rain that ran off her neighbor's roof over the boundary wall and straight into her plot.

### FLEXIBLE HOUSES

A new concrete skeleton frame had been attached to the front of Clara and Cosmas's house since I had visited the previous year. When I asked Clara what they were doing, she replied, "Oh it's just Cosmas's latest thing, he's always doing something . . . the house is never finished." When I visited again, over three years later, the red roofing sheets of the house had been extended out over the concrete frame to provide an area of very welcome shade over the front entrance. Since it was a hot February, we spent much of the time sitting under the new canopy to enjoy the breeze and the view of the Indian Ocean, from where we could admire the new trees that Clara had planted in the garden, the ornamental bird feeder she had bought on impulse from a roadside trader, and the small solar panel that stood next to it. We speculated about what species the new trees Clara had planted might be (one had produced an unidentified fruit, which later turned out to be a grapefruit); what could be put in the bird feeder to attract birds; and the benefits of the new mobile solar panel (and the problems caused when the supply switched between it and the TANESCO system). At the back of the house, they had also extended the two back bedrooms since my last visit, adding two small en suite bathrooms.

Domestic architecture in Dar es Salaam is endlessly reconfigurable. Regardless of the scale of available resources—whether the builder is poor, middle-class, or elite—all building projects require the ability to design, problem-solve, and adjust. What differs is the scale of the project and the materials used. Over the long time period during which a house is being constructed, ideas germinate, are tried out, revised, and amended, each new layer of the building produces new questions about how the whole fits together, and solutions are arrived at through trial and error. The experimental nature of domestic architecture is partly enforced by the incremental manner in which most people finance their house according to available cashflow. Since it takes several years to get a house up to at least a basic living standard, there is plenty of time to think about alternative ways of doing things. Domestic architecture is also malleable because most house-builders do not use the services of professional architects. Instead they effectively project-manage the building of their own house, designing floor plans, entrances, and window grilles, sourcing their own materials, and contracting labor when necessary. House-builders conjure the house they want in their imagination, and then seek a local builder who can translate that image into the phases of a building: the foundation, the walls to the lintel, the top of the walls, and the roof. Since the different phases are dependent upon having large amounts of cash to buy materials and pay labor,

there is often a long time lag between them, and different parts of the building might be completed by different builders and laborers, who might themselves have different ideas and ways of doing things.

The slow tempo of building means that many of the more aesthetic finishing touches are attended to after moving into a house. Charles and Salma's interior was mostly finished when I first visited them, but three years later the finishing touches had been completed, with the exterior walls of the house and the plot perimeter painted in matching cream tones, the balustrades and columns picked out in white, and a decorative plant border installed at the base of the bay window. There was still more work to be done replacing the earthen floor of the plot with patterned paving stones and trees. They had also started work on the next house in Dodoma, where Salma's office had relocated. The new house was now taking up most of their time, resources, and energy.

The flexibility and open-endedness of self-built houses means that they can be reconfigured to meet a family's changing needs. As children arrive and grow, or elderly parents need home-based care, new bedrooms can be added or refashioned out of spare rooms or storerooms. Houses and plots can also accommodate economic activity. Home-based enterprises range from the more capital-intensive and ambitious to the smaller and more popular. Robert, an accountant for a Tanzanian safari company, had built a modest house in Salasala with his wife over a decade. The house itself was a simple bungalow topped with plain roofing sheets. Robert and his wife had had to balance building the house with educating their three children, who had all attended good secondary schools and were now pursuing diplomas and certificates. To help pay fees, Robert and his wife used the space in the compound behind the house to invest in a large chicken house for a thousand modern-breed chickens; the chickens and eggs were sold to local catering businesses and provided an income stream with which to pay the fees for the children's education. Others kept one or two zero-grazed cattle on their plots and sold milk to neighbors, or grew fruit, vegetables, or plants either for home consumption or to sell to neighbors. Women with good kitchen facilities made use of these to generate additional income, such as preparing spice mixes for sale or offering cookery classes to neighbors' children. Baking cakes was becoming a popular home-based enterprise among women with ovens at home, selling cakes to neighbors and relatives for family occasions and celebrations.

#### ZACHARIA AND ZAINAB

Zacharia and Zainab's house had gone through a number of transformations. Zacharia bought the land in 2004 for a good price, at a time when Salasala was still considered by many to be far from the city center. He bought his plot, wedged between two others on a piece of sloping ground, from the landowner, who had acquired the land as a much larger farm years previously. He was now



selling off small parcels. Using local laborers, Zacharia started to build a two-storey house into the slope of the plot, and managed to complete a split-level ground floor before going abroad to study for a master's degree. When he returned he discovered that cracks had appeared in the walls. The laborers who had made the bricks on site had mixed too little cement with sand to make the blocks, so that they could sell the unused bags of cement themselves to make extra money. This had weakened the construction and caused the walls to crack. Zacharia realized that building a house on a slope required more technical expertise than he had appreciated; he also realized that he needed to choose and supervise his builders and laborers more carefully. The whole lower ground floor of the house had to be demolished and rebuilt with a proper foundation. He paid an architect US\$760 to produce a plan for a three-storey house on the site, which clearly indicated structural details such as the number of steel rods required for the outer supporting concrete pillars. Zacharia proceeded to personally oversee the building work on weekends. By 2012 he had a middle management job with an international telecommunications company and several building projects (the house, a local shop, and another small shop near the Kariakoo market in the city center), which he attended to in sequence. Once the two shops were up and running, he focused on the house, putting his monthly salary into the purchase of materials for the next phase of building.

When I first visited Zacharia's house in 2012, the original upper ground floor of the house at the top of the slope still stood, housing the caretaker's room, a room for Zacharia's sister, and lots of bags of cement. The lower ground floor was in the process of being completely rebuilt. This time Zacharia had employed a builder recommended by a relative, and he was personally overseeing the work every weekend. The materials for the foundation alone had cost US\$12,700. Although Zacharia had paid an architect to draw up the plans for the redesigned building, in practice he didn't completely follow the architect's vision for the house. The lower ground floor, according to the architect's drawings, comprised a double garage and back entrance to the house. A decade later the lower ground floor was still the main living space in the house, containing the living/dining room, two bedrooms and a bathroom, as well as the main front door. Up to three cars could be parked—if one knew how to angle them—between the back of the house and the perimeter wall.

By 2015 Zacharia had married Zainab, who worked in the city as a medical professional. Although wedding preparations had somewhat stalled the building process, they had nevertheless been able to finish the interior of the lower ground floor to a comfortable standard and were living in that part of the house. In addition to the living space that they occupied on the rebuilt lower ground floor, a domestic worker had a room and used a small kitchen area in the old upper ground floor building as well as an outside cooking area. Both were only accessible from the lower ground floor by a small path cut between the house and the perimeter wall, via the main front door. They had laid the slab for the first floor, where



they intended to put an internal kitchen. The first floor was a building site, in the middle of which was a large plastic tub. A hosepipe snaked through a window, its bunged head hanging into the tub. The hose was connected to the neighbor on the other side of the street, whose large three-storey house had already existed, behind its high walls, when Zacharia had started building his own house. The owner—a man who owned several businesses in the city center, whom Zacharia and Zainab hardly ever saw—had dug a well on his plot and was supplying several neighbors for a fee. Zacharia's long-term plan was to build a well with his immediate neighbor on the other side: he said it was cheaper if you did it together. They had also had to pay attention to security after thieves had tricked the domestic worker into leaving the place unattended during the day; Zacharia's computer and some other small electrical goods were stolen. The mirrored PVC windows were now covered with bespoke iron grilles, the heavy wooden door was fortified with three locks on the inside and an iron grille on the outside, and the perimeter of the plot had been secured with a high concrete block wall and heavy sliding metal gates. They also employed a night watchman.

Things changed again in 2017: their first child had arrived and Zacharia's mother, who was unwell, was staying with them in the original upper ground floor building. The first floor was still under construction, and they had laid the slab for the second floor, where Zacharia intended to put the master bedroom and a study. Zacharia was toying with the idea—a suggestion from one of his friends—of building an external curving staircase that would lead from the car parking area to the first floor of the house. Building had stalled again anyway as Zacharia had been laid off from the telecommunications company. Many middle managers in international companies had had similar experiences as the business environment had become more difficult, he said: Coca-Cola and Tanzania Breweries had just gotten rid of a whole layer of management. Rather than try his chances in an increasingly competitive labor market, Zacharia had decided to invest his retrenchment package in starting his own business making bespoke logo cloth carrier bags. He had taken several trips to China in recent years to investigate machinery and other business opportunities. By 2018 he had bought his first machine and was waiting for it to clear customs. A few years later he had finished building a small factory in one corner of the plot and had started production with four employees. In the house, the open-plan living room and kitchen was now in use—mostly by the domestic worker and the nanny, though their bedrooms were still in the old upper ground floor building. Zacharia was anticipating turning the second floor—now a building site—into a master bedroom and bedrooms for their two children.

. . .

Dar es Salaam's middle classes are a diverse social group that includes office workers, civil servants, employees in the private sector, and the self-employed, with varying levels of education, income, and assets. What they have in common is

the capacity to build and the experience of building *nyumba nzuri*. Building a good house demonstrates *uwezo* or the capacity to build. The design and décor of these buildings stake a claim to middle-classness through their architectural influences and incorporation of new consumer goods from paint colors to roofing sheets, to water coolers and IKEA-style sofas. In addition to the style of these houses, the experience of building is also central to middle-classness. Located between the capacity to aspire and the possibility of disappointment or failure, house-building is both a material and an emotional undertaking—almost a test of one's middle-classness. Those without the *uwezo*—material, social, practical, emotional, aesthetic—are less likely to complete a house to their satisfaction. These self-built houses are flexible, but in their dwelt state they are also often a compromise between the builders' vision and the realities of what could be afforded, what architectural desires could be achieved in practice, and whether the resulting built form itself coheres and endures.<sup>19</sup> In their not-quite-as-imagined state, with unfinished upper floors, decaying fixtures, yet-to-arrive infrastructure, and encroaching neighbors, these houses capture both the desires and the frustrated aspirations that characterize middle-classness in Dar es Salaam. Yet read against the context of the city in which they have been built, the increasing number of *nyumba nzuri* in places like Salasala indexes the growing inequality that has characterized the postliberalization era in Tanzania. Hidden in plain sight, these houses say what cannot be said about inequality and social class in Dar es Salaam.