

ABSTRACT

In what ways can an architectural researcher explore low-cost housing (as discourse and practice) without taking away the power and privileges which women landlords in MWSHP enjoy in line with the tenurial security emphasised in the 1995 Constitution of Uganda, the National Shelter Strategy (1989), the National Housing Policy (2016), the gender policy and the other laws of Uganda? Being a woman, an architect and a researcher myself, I approached this question from H el ene Frichot’s proposition that “feminist work crafts a different kind of architecture” and a traditional proverb that states that self-help housing breeds no contempt, to find an appropriate position and positionality for this study. Convinced that self-help housing is an effort made by household members concerning the planning, financing and construction of their housing (Cornelissen 2001, p.70), I explored MWSHP in Jinja, Uganda. I acknowledged the current literature and scholarship that emphasises that conceived as a mass-housing project for women in 1989, MWSHP has morphed into a project in which women have modified their houses to suit their needs. I, however, moved beyond typomorphologies, morphological analyses, formalist analyses and Eurocentric modernist approaches to architecture inspired by Uganda’s colonial past, to interrogate the historical contexts and precedents for spatialised power reproduced in Jinja as an urban space in Uganda. I explored the question of how they implicate women’s agency in MWSHP. By using a combined research design based on multiple methods drawn from diverse traditions involving historical research and qualitative research designs, and an architectural phenomenological approach, I linked history, theory and practice to improve the methodology for my creative practice. I also used them to collect, interpret and analyse empirical data, and write this thesis. I conjoined my doing and thinking as I developed and linked the different concepts used in this study. I took an emancipationist position as a researcher; I approached built space as theory, context and history; and I engaged the notions of spatial agency, building-while-in-it, interdisciplinarity, intersectionality, reflexivity, heterotopia, space as power and resistance to explore the power and privileges women in MWSHP enjoy as landlords who build the houses they own and dwell in. This, I have demonstrated and argued, is the context in which widowhood and prostitution/prostitute have gained new meanings and women landlords in MWSHP have used built space as a form of resistance – a counter-space – and where they have defended their access to, and possession of, housing while transforming the houses given to them by DANIDA and the Government of Uganda. The study contributes to the discourse on gender, architecture and women’s agency in Uganda.