

Chapter 12

The Importance of Housing in the Lives of Women: The Case of Botswana

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In my studies of the transformation of urban and rural low-cost housing in Botswana not only the important role of women in providing houses and creating homes, but also the importance of housing in the lives of women has become more and more obvious.¹ Today three important roles of housing can be identified:

- the dwelling is the place for women's domestic work;
- the dwelling offers long- and short-term security for women as householders; and
- the dwelling contributes to strengthen women's identity in their roles as mothers and often also as a wives.

For an understanding of the importance of housing for women in today's society one has to have in mind women's attachment to houses and housing in the Tswana society², a fact I will return to. According to the thorough records of Schapera (1984), the houses, in line with traditional household utensils and furniture, were regarded as the belongings of women and under their control and supervision. Although the plot was allocated to the husband in his position as the head of the family, Tswana houses were referred to by the name of the wife occupying them. As the houses and the yard served as the physical environment for the woman's care of the family, she was the head of these houses. In addition, women played and play an important role in house building.

The paper will discuss and analyze the three roles of housing in relation to low-income women. In the final section some suggestions for developing existing housing policies as a part of gender policies away from discrimination and subordination of women are outlined.

The three roles are by no means separate from each other. On the contrary, they often support each other. For instance, if a dwelling supports a woman in her daily domestic chores, her identity as a housekeeper and good wife is strengthened. I will nonetheless discuss the three roles one by one.

The Dwelling as the Place for Domestic Work

When housing in relation to women is the topic, practical aspects such as how well or poorly the kitchen functions, if the floors are easily cleaned and if there is enough storage space for clothes and china often come to one's mind first, at least for Western women. As the person responsible for household work, a woman may raise a number of demands that the dwelling may fulfill or not. What is the situation in this respect for low-income households in villages and towns in Botswana?

The Village Dwelling

Urbanization is a late phenomenon in Botswana, and consequently most people have gained, and still gain, their first experiences of housing in a Tswana dwelling in the village, that is, in the type of dwelling rooted in Tswana culture and society. The Tswana dwelling of today, though simple in many ways, has some important qualities of utility. The most evident ones are access to sufficient space and the differentiation of the use of space.

A Tswana dwelling is made up of the houses *and* the surrounding yard, enclosed by a fence (Fig. 1). The houses, generally two to four in number, are constructed from mud, wood, and grass, that is, from materials which can be collected in or around the village. Daily activities take place both indoors and outdoors. While indoor space is mainly for sleeping purposes, for storage of personal belongings, and for providing privacy, the outdoor space is used for a number of activities. There may be special constructions for different activities or just an area set aside for a specific purpose. There are special enclosures in which food is cooked on an open fire and household utensils stored. Visitors are often received at the inner courtyard or *lolwapa*.

As necessary building materials are at hand without cost, at least in principle, a new house can be built whenever another room is needed, for instance, when children reach their teens (Tswana rules require boys and girls to sleep apart). Overcrowding and conflicting uses of the same space are thus not likely to occur in such a dwelling.

In contrast, daily household work is rather inconvenient. Firewood is still the most important fuel for cooking. It has to be collected, today often from far away. Also, water has to be fetched, but today most people have a communal standpipe within 400 meters. Due to lack of cold-storage facilities, fresh food, if included in a meal, has to be bought just before preparing. A lot of work takes place on the ground. The hearth is on the ground and there hardly ever is a counter for doing the dishes or washing clothes.

The Modern Low-Cost Dwelling

The main policy for housing the urban population in Botswana, like many developing countries, is home-ownership. Self-help projects have been set up to encourage people to build their own dwellings. In such projects low-income people are supported through the

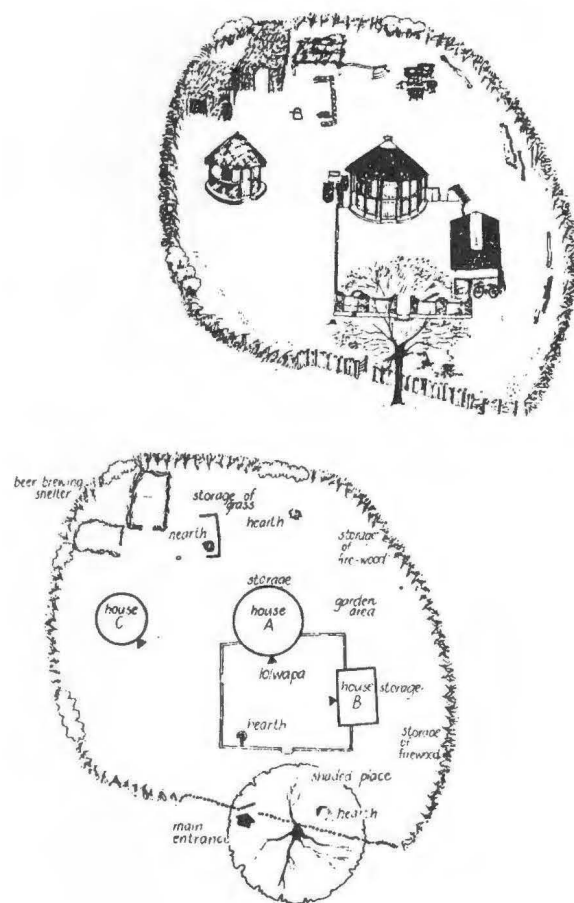


Fig. 1: In the Tswana dwelling both indoor and outdoor space is used for daily household activities. Drawing by Viera Larsson.

supply of building materials loans on favorable terms, technical advice and the supply of standard house plans. The first house to be built is a two-roomed one. Later it is extended by more rooms, or an additional multi-roomed house is constructed (Fig. 2).

In urban low-cost housing areas the infrastructure services are not significantly different from those in rural areas. Water has to be fetched, though the distance to the standpipe is shorter. Firewood can no longer be collected within a reasonable distance. Instead it is either bought or replaced by paraffin or gas. As in the village, lack of electricity prevents most people from having a cool storage space for fresh food. The use of gas or paraffin for cooking requires the stove to be indoors. But generally people cannot afford to set aside a special room only as a kitchen. Instead the stove has to be placed in the corner of a room used for many other purposes. Sinks for washing clothes and dishes are consequently lacking.

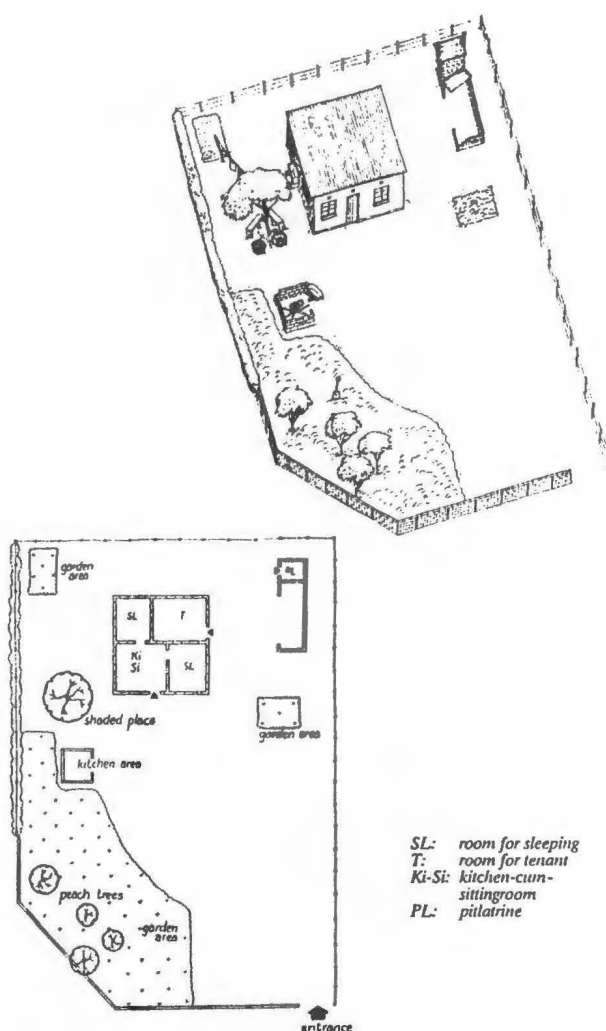


Fig. 2: A modern dwelling in an urban self-help housing areas. One room is let to tenants.

Urbanization and modernization of housing have thus entailed few improvements in facilities making household work more convenient for low-income women. At the same time they have experienced deterioration in access to indoor space. In urban self-help housing areas only so-called modern materials are allowed to be used. For many people such materials mean considerable economic sacrifice and only two or three rooms can be built. In addition, the use of space has changed in the process of modernization and urbanization in conflicting ways: the need for indoor space has increased. For instance, the stove moves indoors due to new types of fuel. The risk of theft in towns requires that many bulky items have to be stored indoors, at least at night. New, modern ways of entertaining visitors indoors, or at least the desire for modern living-room furniture, raises the demand for indoor space. The important quality of

utility, expressed in sufficient indoor space for the family's different needs, including privacy, is thus missing in the modern low-cost dwelling. The traditional rules for arranging sleeping quarters at night can seldom be maintained (Fig. 3).

Sufficient space and adequate facilities for household work are both important qualities of the dwelling when women carry out household chores and take care of the family. Lack of such qualities were, however, not very explicitly expressed by the women in my fieldwork. Most people, whether men or women, who have built a modern house in an urban self-help housing area are proud of their achievements. They seldom see the above conflict between qualities of utility and a modernization of housing as mainly limited to a change of building materials. Complaints were instead generally expressed when I asked more specific questions like "are you satisfied with the arrangements for cooking?" or "are you satisfied with the way you can arrange sleeping quarters?" Then many women answered me with "No, we are overcrowded," "We need more space," or "I would like a proper kitchen."

One woman, an exception in her ability to verbalize her experiences, expressed the difficulties of living in a modern two-room dwelling in town in this way:

We are crowded here, we sleep on top of our food. When I cook during rainy days it is terrible, my eyes get sore from the smoke, and the clothes in the wardrobe get smoky. At night we have to move around things to get space for sleeping. A traditional village dwelling is better, it is how we are born. In the village we have a fire-house for cooking and other houses for sleeping. Here it is more awkward than at home in the village.

Modernization and Improvements of Housing

Why has the modernization of housing not yielded any important improvements of dwellings in amenities to carry out household work and space for the family's different needs? The existence of a domestic sphere for women and a public sphere for men in Tswana society,³ the clear division between them, and changes that have occurred as a result of the introduction of the cash economy offer some understanding.

The domestic sphere of Tswana society includes all types of work somehow related to the care of the family. It includes most duties needed for the preparation and cooking of food, such as fetching water and firewood, making beer, tilling the fields and collecting the harvest.

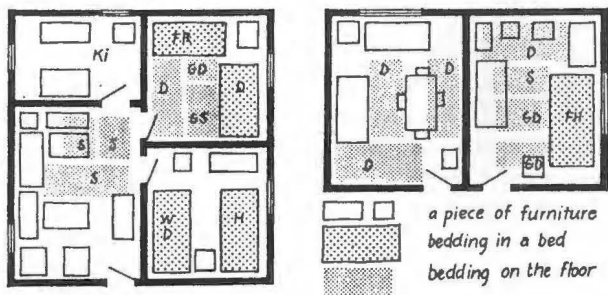


Fig. 3: This figure illustrates sleeping arrangements at night in two "furnished" houses. The house to the left is inhabited by eleven people. Husband (H), wife (W), and a four-year-old daughter (D) sleep in the bedroom in beds; four females and a young male share another room, three of them sleeping on the floor; and three young males sleep on the floor in the living room. In the house to the right a female householder (FH) sleeps in one room together with four small children. Three grown-up daughters sleep on the floor in a room used during the day as a kitchen. GD=granddaughter, S=son, GS=grandson, FR=female relative. Drawing by Viera Larsson.

It also includes building houses and being in charge of them. All those responsibilities are assigned to women in their role as wives. In rural areas these duties of women are still much alive while the roles assigned to men in Tswana society have changed considerably.

The public sphere of Tswana society was concerned with political and judicial decisions made by men only. It was characterized by its hierarchical organization, where the rank of the individuals was based on both heritage and individual achievements. One important means to express rank for men was through the number of cattle they owned.

When labor migration to South Africa started, it was the men who went away to earn cash. Cash earnings allowed them to buy not only food and other necessities, but also different objects such as furniture and to some extent building materials. The replacement of the subsistence economy by the cash economy and the subsequent introduction of modern building materials eventually entailed important changes concerning both the responsibility for housing and the qualities of utility. As modern materials are purchased and the husband earns money more often than the wife, the provision of modern housing has become the concern of the husband. It has meant a transfer of housing from the sphere of women to that of men. In the public sphere of men, the modern house, as a symbol of status and achievement, is of significance in a way corresponding to cattle. Much of women's experiences and knowledge of how to provide a dwelling for the family's needs has been lost in the transfer. The new role of houses as symbols of

status has overruled the role of houses as the place of living for the family. Modern housing has become synonymous with modern-looking houses through the use of modern materials.

The Importance of Housing for Unmarried Women

The few comments by women concerning functional and practical aspects of the dwelling were significant for both married women and single women who headed their own households in Gaborone, the capital. Women householders emphasized the second role of housing. The fact that dwellings provide long-term and short-term security by far overshadowed its practical aspects. Why are these characteristics of the dwelling so important to the single women in town?

The question is partly answered by looking at the background of the single women in Gaborone. That the number of households headed by women, not only in Botswana and Southern Africa but in the whole world, is increasing is widely recognized. The proportion of women-headed households in Gaborone is estimated at 45% (Botswana Government, 1988). The large majority are *de facto* heads of households. As a rule they are unmarried but may also be divorced or widowed. A small proportion are *de facto* heads of households, that is, they take the responsibility to head the household while the husband is away for a longer period, perhaps to work in South Africa.

Women Town-Migrants

The reason for coming to town stated in my interviews was mostly "to look for a job." Some who had arrived in town during periods of drought expressed themselves more dramatically, e.g., "I was running away from hunger" or "I was starving, life was too heavy on me." These types of answers fit well into women's migration patterns that emerge from different studies of rural women and women as migrants (for instance Izzard, 1982). Judging from such studies, a certain group of rural women exists who are more or less pushed away to town to make their living. For this group the traditional family network with its obligations no longer works. Although rural women have been in the role of householders (being widows, divorced, or unwed mothers) since the thirties, they have as a rule belonged to a wider network that could support them. It included men who in their capacity as fathers, brothers, uncles, or adult sons were supposed to help the women both economically and practically (for instance, by ploughing the

fields) according to traditional norms. When such norms are no longer as valid as before, a number of fairly young unwed mothers are left without support and are unable to survive on arable farming only. As possibilities for women to earn cash are almost nonexistent in rural areas, there remains little for this group to do but to go to town and look for a job.

It is this group of women without supporting men that we are likely to find in urban low-cost housing areas, as squatters, as tenants of single rooms, or among plot-holders in self-help housing areas. We may also find them as domestic servants in high-cost areas or temporarily accommodated in others' households. What is important to bear in mind is that, when these women arrive in town, they have no reason to expect much support from relatives, especially not from male ones. If such support had existed the women might have remained in the rural areas. On the contrary, many of these women have aged parents to look after and send money back to. In return, the parents may take care of the women's children until the women have managed to create a platform for life in town.

"A Place of My Own"

My interviews revealed that not only to get a job and an income but also the need to get a "place of my own" are of outstanding importance while securing a platform for the urban life. The importance of earnings are obvious. Cash is needed for the support of children to replace the self-subsistence economy that has failed. Any place to stay provides a shelter to sleep, rest, and store one's personal belongings. Only a house of one's own, however, makes it possible for the woman to run her own household, that is, to become the head of the household. To achieve such a house is a lengthy and tiresome struggle for the women. Nonetheless, a housing trajectory can be traced from the life stories of women town-migrants.

Most women, like other town-migrants, have to be accommodated by relatives or friends upon their arrival in town. Thereby they become dependent on others. This situation is always experienced as temporary and insecure and consequently the women try to find a more secure and less dependent type of accommodation. Some women find a room to rent after they get a job and an income. This is, however, a costly type of dwelling and although the women are heading their own households they may be restricted by the landlord in different

ways. For instance, they may not be allowed to have their children around. Other women get jobs as domestic servants and in that way also a place to live. The domestic quarters are experienced by most women very much in the same way as the rented room. In addition, it is a very insecure type of housing: if the woman loses her employment, she also loses her dwelling.

To get away from the less secure types of housing, many women aim at building a house of their own in a self-help housing area. Women are thus well represented among plot-holders in such areas. According to the 1981 Census and other surveys, the average proportion of women plot-holders is roughly one-third, that is, close to the proportion of women-headed households in towns at the time of these surveys (Botswana Government, 1982 and 1985).

Such a house offers both short-term and long-term security, and it contributes to stability in women's often insecure urban life. It offers short-time security in the sense that temporary lack of a job or money does not force the women to leave their houses. The monthly cost of a house in a self-help housing area (including service levy and repayment of building material loan) is about half of that for renting one single room. In addition, one or two rooms in the house can be let and contribute to the income of the household. It is also a place where self-employment activities can be carried out when other ways of cash earnings are insufficient. And it is a place where the women can have their children around, to raise and enjoy—a desire expressed by most women.

Having a house of one's own offers long-term security in the sense that it provides a place to live in during old age, when no longer working; or to hand over to children so that they may get a fair chance to earn enough cash to support their mother on her return to the home village. Many women expressed a desire for such a return. If the children fail to get jobs in town, there will still be the possibility of getting money through letting rooms in the town house.

Migrating to town and having one's own house are thus important factors of women's survival strategies, and they are closely linked to each other. The house is, however, not just a means of survival. It also offers possibilities to live an urban life under the control of the women themselves and with human dignity. The house is both a means and an end.

Women's Commitment to Housing

My research concerning the role of housing in women's survival strategies has so far only included women householders. Does the dwelling of married couples fulfill the same role for married women? Answers from married women indicate that this is not necessarily the case. Women's subordinated position in marriage may result in a different relationship to housing than that illustrated by the unmarried women. To assume that husband and wife have the same relationship to their joint dwelling is probably a mistake, as suggested by research in Sweden (Bjork, 1989). What the situation in a country like Botswana looks like can be found out only if the gender perspective is brought into housing research.

An indication of a different relationship between housing on the one hand and men and women, respectively, as householders on the other hand is offered by data from an evaluation of the self-help housing projects in Botswana.⁴ It showed that women-headed households earned less than men-headed households, which remained true even when the size of the household was taken into consideration. Despite these differences, the women-headed households had invested the same amount of money and built the same number of rooms for the family. When relating the income to the number of rooms in the house of each household, the survey showed that among households earning sufficient money to have a small surplus for investments, women householders had built more rooms than men householders. Notable also is that women householders were more concerned about paying back building material loans, especially among the households with very low incomes.

Women's Experience of Constraints

The above data support the consistent impression gained from interviews: women householders are sincere in their endeavor to get a house of their own despite having small incomes and many responsibilities. In this process the women experience a number of constraints. Governmental rules and regulations pertaining to assistance given low-income people do not, however, seem to discriminate against single women in any serious way. The constraints are instead related to the situations women confront, e.g., women-headed households are more often among the poor ones, women householders have the sole responsibility of child-rearing, bread-winning, and domestic work, etc. During my fieldwork

a number of women pointed out that housing improvements had been postponed because much money was spent on secondary school fees. The abolition of school fees in 1988 was consequently a great relief to many women householders.

The constraints are also related to women's general subordination in society. Women get little practical support from the agencies of self-help housing. (Instead, I have come across some cases of counteractions.) Women may also be cheated by the local builders employed for building the houses.

The most severe cases of discrimination are to be found in relation to marriage laws and their effect on property such as housing. Women who are divorced, widowed, or "live in separation" as well as married women are discriminated against concerning houses in such laws. Both customary and common law of Botswana are rather complicated and few people understand all the implications of them, both before conflicts in the marriage arise and when problems have to be sorted out. The essence of the law is that a modern urban house is generally under the husband's marital power. Thus a wife cannot prevent a husband from selling the house.

The fact that many women, when they have passed the age of thirty, are reluctant to marry, has been observed by many researchers (such as Gulbrandsen, 1986; Izzard, 1982). Single women, in contrast to married women, do not suffer from the legal constraints related to property. They manage their own property, including the house, and they can own their own business, and buy goods on credit. A married women can do that only if special precautions have been taken at the time of marriage. Under such circumstances, and having in mind that it was long ago that an unwed mother was stigmatized, it is perhaps no surprise that single women aim at becoming plot-holders in self-help housing areas. The very large number of unmarried women living in their own houses can perhaps be interpreted as the result of a very conscious strategy: to run their lives through the support of "my own house" rather than through the unsure support of a husband.

The Role of Housing in Strengthening Women's Identity

From the above it is evident that a dwelling of one's own is important not only for unmarried women's survival in town but also for supporting their identity as independent women and when fulfilling the role as

mothers. Such a woman's own house makes her the householder and allows her to take care of the children herself. But the importance of dwellings for women can be seen not only for unmarried but also for married women in modern urban Tswana society.

Women as Heads of Houses and House Builders

I have previously pointed out the existence of a domestic sphere of women in Tswana society and women's close attachment to housing. The duties assigned to a wife were all related to the care of her family in a wide sense. They included her supervision and building of houses, and her role as the head of the house.

A number of records clearly show that women have long been involved in house building. According to the records by visitors to different Tswana societies during the beginning of the nineteenth century, women did all work related to house-building at that time. They cut the trees and collected grass and mud. They also built the walls, raised the roof structure, and put on the grass (Lichtenstein, 1930 and 1973; Burchell, 1953).

Around the middle of the last century men gradually took over the work to cut wood for the roof structure and to raise it. In connection with labor migration to South Africa, men picked up a new way of thatching from the Boer. This type of thatching, in which a stronger type of grass is used, provides a more solid and durable roof in comparison with the only previous method. Since the beginning of this century, Boer thatching is the work of local craftsmen. The older way of thatching is still practiced and today referred to as the traditional way. It has remained the duty of women, like all work carried out in mud. Although men carried out some duties of house building, Schapera in several of his records from around 1930 clearly points out that women held the responsibility to build houses and that men assisted the women in their work.

The duty as both head and builder of houses assigned to women formed the background, and still does, of the important role houses play in creating married women's identity and confidence in Tswana society. This became very evident in my work documenting Tswana houses in the early eighties. It was the wives of the households who told the story of how, when, and why the houses had been built. They also told how space was used indoors and outdoors and about different physical arrangements in the yard. The interviews all revealed a great degree of pride and confidence in the responsibility for these tasks and in the ability to handle them.

Women's Creativity

I also found that the active role of women in Tswana house building allowed them to develop their creativity, especially when decorating the houses and designing the walls of the lolwapa. Different clays were collected at different places to make a number of colors of the plastering possible. Since the plastering was often redone yearly, the color and the patterns of Tswana houses changed at regular intervals. Lolwapa walls were often redecorated shortly before wedding festivals. It was the pride of the women to have a nice lolwapa wall and women would compete by giving new shapes and ornaments to the walls.

These recent experiences fit very well with nineteenth century records and Schapera's writings. For instance, Burchell, after his visit to the Batlhaping⁵ in 1812, wrote that the house of the chief's uncle "was also of the largest size; a circumstance to be ascribed perhaps more to the architectural talents of his wife, than to his own rank or situation in society" (1953, p. 367). Around 1930 Brown found that "some women show great skill in the ornamentation of the walls and many of them are expert potters" (1926, p. 51) and Schapera noted that "women smeared on the mural decorations which were the pride of every self-respecting house-wife" (1967, p. 14).

Modern Houses and Women's Identity

The responsibility of providing decent housing and a home for the family together with the confidence derived from such tasks are also to be found in urban low-cost areas. The commitment to house the family properly, which I found among the women householders in Gaborone, can be regarded as an indication of the survival of women's traditional duties of providing shelter, although the setting had totally changed.

The creativity that women can develop when actually building Tswana houses has, however, apparently been lost in the process of housing modernization. Only once in a while may one see a colored concrete wall with patterns similar to what can be found in the villages, or a low lolwapa-like wall around a terrace in urban housing areas. Women feel that building in modern materials is a task that can be carried out only by men. This fact, together with the government's decree that only modern materials are to be used in most towns, has meant that women do not develop their skills and creativity in connection with modern housing. Instead they have

been deprived of the confidence derived from their active participation in house building.

The modern house in town contributes to the identity of women in a different way. Migration to town is necessary for many women and in that perspective the achievement of a modern house, although not modern in the sense that it has amenities to make household work more convenient, is an indication of having become a town-dweller. The modern house as a symbol and visible token of modern urban life confirms a woman's success both as a town migrant and a modern person. Instead of decorating the houses as such, attention is devoted to the interior. If the women can afford it, they buy furniture of modern design and put decorations of different types up on the walls.

Summary and Policy Implications

I have so far tried to show how housing plays several important roles in the lives of women. These roles have changed over time. The transformation is linked to the modernization of housing and of society. I will summarize these changes and indicate their implications for the development of housing policies in relation to gender.

Housing has always been important for the support of a women's identity as mother and housewife. In Tswana society this role of housing in Botswana is strongly linked to the domestic sphere of women and all the duties inherent in the sphere. The wife was both the builder and caretaker of houses. The role of housing as a means for the wife in Tswana society to express pride, confidence and creativity has, however, not been carried over into modern society. To build houses in modern materials has instead become the concern of men. In the process of housing modernization, married women have been deprived of their traditional duty to provide shelter for the family. Their most important role today in relation to housing is to carry out the daily household work.

For today's women householders, the situation is different. The role of housing most explicitly expressed in the interviews with such women was that housing was a prerequisite to and a means for running their own households and their lives. An overall modernization of society has allowed such women to become heads of households. The importance of housing is strongly linked to their arrival in town alone in order to support their children. A house of her own supports a woman in her more or less conscious efforts away from a general

situation of discrimination and subordination. If the words of the women are taken as indicators, such a role of housing is by far more important than simply meeting practical needs for shelter. Single women who build modern houses gain and retain their identity, both as modern people and as those responsible for providing shelter to the family.

Married women in the urban setting do not have the same relationship to housing as single women. In contrast, in case of a legal divorce or just a separation, they experience a number of constraints created by the existing marriage laws.

Housing Modernization and the Domestication of Women

Women's traditional knowledge and experiences have thus not been considered as resources in the development of housing after Independence. As in many other cases in developing countries, the government's plans to develop a certain sector have not taken into consideration women and their important traditional roles. Instead, overall changes of society have contributed to what has been called the domestication of women. Rogers (1980) argues that women are generally losers in projects to promote development. Instead of being allowed to participate, they are confined, or domesticated, to the unpaid domestic sector separated from the modern one. This is true for agriculture in many African countries, including Botswana. It is true for housing in Botswana, and perhaps in many countries in the Third World. Housing has become part of the modern sector, and thus housing modernization has deprived women from participation in the development of the modern sector.

Modernization of housing has meant lack of improvements, and even deteriorations in the dwelling's use values. There have been few improvements for women when carrying out their daily household chores of cooking, washing, and cleaning. Instead, women often experience shortage of indoor space and lack of privacy. Women are, however, reluctant to raise claims concerning the practical qualities of a dwelling. This reluctance, I feel, should not be taken as a token of women's satisfaction with existing space and amenities for household work. Factors such as the subordinated position of women, both in the modern and traditional Tswana society, women being used for a great number of labor-intensive tasks in the domestic sphere, and men's important role in modern housing offer important explanations of the present situation. Instead of accept-

ing the course of events as natural, I feel that dwellings, whether in low-, medium-, or high-cost areas, should be improved in this respect. The improvement of qualities of utility in low-cost housing is indeed a little explored area within the field of housing. But to adjust the level of standards to what people can afford will require various means.

A Housing Modernization to Support Women

A way to overcome the shortcomings that so far have been linked to housing modernization is to identify and recognize fully the important role of housing in the lives of women and the important role of women in Tswana housing. One way of doing that would be to aim at a legal position of the dwelling they live in together. Another way would be to allow women to play a more significant role in the development of housing policies.

According to present Botswana law, a wife has a say over the house if the wife is the owner according to the deeds register, only if she and her husband are married *out of community of property* and the marital power of the husband has been excluded through a prenuptial agreement. This possibility has meaning only for women who have enough income or capital to allow them to live economically independently of their husbands. That is seldom the case, and especially not for low-income women.

A first step to improve the situation of low-income women would be to register both husband and wife as plot-holders (holders of certificate of rights) in the self-help housing areas. Presently only the head of the household, that is, the husband in a married couple, can be recognized as the formal plot-holder. The plot could instead be registered in the name of both husband and wife and both could be required to give their consent before the house can be sold. While the woman in such cases may be put under pressure to sell, she is nevertheless given a chance to prevent the sale, if she feels it is necessary.

If the spouses are separated, the main constraints today are not so much the existing laws but the difficulties involved in getting a legal divorce at the High Court. Money and legal assistance are necessary but not available prerequisites for low-income people. If the couple has been married in community of property, the woman will get half of the value of their joint property, including the house in the self-help area. Thus a legal

divorce, after a separation, may make a great difference for her. Many women, however, have to leave the house and other properties in connection with a separation and then start a new life from scratch.

Women householders' economic situation is further weakened by the difficulties unmarried or separated women experience trying to get child maintenance from the father of the children through a verdict at the Magistrate's Court. The experience of many women is that their cases never come up for a hearing in court. They seem to be stuck at the end of the list. Information and legal assistance directed specifically to low-income women in the self-help housing areas would be of great help for many.

Women can also play a more important role in the development of housing policies at different levels in the administration if training and recruitment specifically directed to them are introduced. For instance:

- at the local offices of the self-help agencies: women can be encouraged, even purposely selected, to become technical officers and other types of supporting staff;
- at Town Councils: women can be encouraged to become architects or building engineers involved in tasks such as the design of low-cost dwellings, the development of standard house-types, and the development of building regulations; and
- at the Ministry of Local Government and Lands (responsible for housing) and at the Botswana Housing Corporation: women can purposely be selected to handle housing matters as senior officers.

Women's role as housekeepers, which makes them more concerned about qualities of utility of the dwelling, is one important argument in favor of such changes. Another is that women technical officers are likely to be better at understanding and supporting women who want to get help and advice from the branch offices of the self-help agencies. A conscious concentration on women in the running of the self-help agencies would benefit all women somehow involved in house-building in low-cost housing areas. These changes would also mean that women are offered more types of employment opportunities on the labor market. The outcome of the housing transformation, instead of enforcing the domestication of women, would be to give women more opportunities to participate in housing as a part of the modern sector.

Notes

¹ My studies of housing in Botswana are presented in four reports: Anita Larsson and Viera Larsson (1984), Anita Larsson (1988, 1989, 1990). This article is based on all four reports.

² The Tswana are one of the major sub-groups of the Southern Bantu cultures. Today there are about one million Tswana people living in Botswana (total population of around 1,200,000) and another million living in South Africa, mainly in the so-called homeland Bophuthatswana.

³ I use the concepts "domestic and public spheres" in line with their interpretation by Rosaldo (1974). For a detailed elaboration of their meaning in the Tswana society, see Larsson (1990).

⁴ The evaluation is presented in Botswana Government (1985) but not in relation to male vs. female householders. The collected material included, however, information on the sex of householders and thus the information could be analyzed accordingly. For more details, see Larsson (1988).

⁵ One of the major sub-groups of the Tswana, who lived in the northern part of South Africa at the time of the arrival of Europeans.

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