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UNDER THE SAME ROOF: MIGRATIONS, DOMESTIC ECONOMIES, AND THE MORAL WORLDS OF THE HOUSE IN THE BALKANS

Abstract: This article explores the house as a local concept that mobilizes moral, economic, and religious dimensions in the Macedonian city of Prilep—an urban settlement historically shaped by tobacco farming and industrial work. Drawing on long-term ethnographic fieldwork, it examines how domestic life, migration trajectories, and moral ideologies of the house articulate broader processes of post-socialist transformation. Building on Lévi-Strauss's notion of *house-societies* as intermediary institutions, the analysis incorporates Bourdieu's practice theory, Carsten's emphasis on relatedness, and Sahlins's concept of mutuality of being. It further draws on Gudeman and Rivera's conception of the house as a moral model of livelihood, a space where cooperation and care are cultivated in tension with market logics.

Key words: house, domestic economy, kinship, refugees, migration, tobacco farming, kinship, postsocialism, anthropology of the Balkans, urban anthropology

Through two ethnographic case studies—Greek Civil War refugees who settled in Prilep in the 1950s and rural migrants from the Mariovo region who arrived in the 1970s—the article demonstrates how houses mediate relations between kinship, labor, and the state. The celebration of the *slava* (house patron saint) and the household's engagement in "domestic tobacco" production reveal how work, ritual, and value intertwine in everyday life. The house emerges as a mediating actor situated between the domestic and the market, the urban and the rural, and the material and the cosmological. By following house stories, the article shows how households in Prilep have developed a house ideology of their own.

In his pioneering work, Claude Lévi-Strauss conceptualized "house-societies" as an intermediary form of social institution—situated between societies organized through kinship and those structured by class (Lévi-Strauss 1969, 1979). In his approach the

house was not merely a dwelling but a moral, symbolic, and material institution through which societies articulate continuity, belonging, and hierarchy. The house, as he puts it, is a *"moral person holding an estate made up of material and immaterial wealth, which perpetuates itself through the transmission of its name, its goods, and its titles down a real or imagined line, held as legitimate on the condition that this continuity can express itself in the language of kinship or of affinity, and, most often, of both."* (Lévi-Strauss 1983:1224).

Drawing on a study of the Berber house in Kabilya (Algeria), Pierre Bourdieu shows how the house is more than a representation of an abstract structure but rather a generator of dispositions — a space where people learn, embody, and reproduce social order without conscious reflection. Later in his work he defined the domestic structure as a symbolic structure, internalized by its inhabitants through everyday bodily practices, forming what he calls the habitus (Bourdieu 1970). In contemporary anthropology, Janet Carsten has significantly shaped the field through her shift from a concern with structure to an emphasis on the processes unfolding within the house. She reframes the house as a site where relatedness is actively made, not just inherited. She shows how co-residence, cooking, feeding, and shared substances (blood, food, breastmilk) transform persons into kin (Carsten 2000).

Marshall Sahlins has also contributed to the debate by criticizing Carsten's constructivist approach, widespread in the beginning of the 2000'. He revisits some classical ethnographies, advocating for a more open approach that does not oppose structure and process, and that situates the house within what he calls much more complex "cosmologies". Kinship, he argues, is made, remade and sometimes deactivated within a "mutuality of being" (Sahlins 2011: 9). Kin, who "participate intrinsically in one another's existence," are often produced in houses through feeding, co-residence, name transmission, and sacrifice. But the same mutuality of existence is involved in "trans-specific relations of kinship". For Amazonian or New Caledonian women plants are children of those who cultivate them; seemingly, the animals of Siberia and Amazonia are affines of the men who hunt them. "This is no metaphor, but a sociology of moral, ritual, and practical conduct", he concludes (Sahlins 2011:15).

Here, I bring together Sahlins's approach to cosmologies with Gudeman and Rivera's conception of the house as a moral model of livelihood—an image of "how people should live with one another" (Gudeman & Rivera 1990: 23). The house embodies mutuality, reciprocity, and care — values opposed to the competitive logic of the market. As a place where people live, but also where they make life together. The house is not only a metaphor of kinship but also generates its own metaphors, each reflecting the particular model of togetherness it embodies. The house is the domain of shared life— of making, maintaining, and reproducing livelihood through cooperation, mutuality, and self-sufficiency. Yet it is also a space marked by conflict and inequality, while persisting as a distinctive historical formation of social reproduction.

Similarly to the Colombian house studied by Gudeman and Rivera (1990), the house in Prilep stands at the intersection of domestic life, land cultivation, and the

superior forces that, in local belief, govern the course of life. Ritual practices, most notably the celebration of the household patron saint (*slava*), connect the domestic sphere to the realm of divine or ancestral powers believed to determine prosperity and fate. In contrast with the Gorale house of southwestern Poland house of the Polish Carpathians described by Frances Pine (1997), the Prilep house ideology has been further reinforced by the specificity of the local economy, where for more than a century families have combined factory work and other wage labor with tobacco cultivation. Collective labor and the house's central role in tobacco processing situate this cultural model in the interstice between urban and rural, agricultural and industrial—a space where multiple flows of work, value, and meaning converge to make the Prilep house a distinctive form of domestic economy.

Factory workers on tobacco fields

Prilep can be described as one of the few remaining examples of what, in the Era of empires, was termed a *single-crop city*—an urban settlement whose history, development, demography, and infrastructure have been profoundly shaped by tobacco cultivation and industrial processing. During socialism, its prosperity was also linked to the development of other industrial sectors — most notably in food processing, electronics, machine manufacturing, garment, and white marble extracting and processing. Yet, following more than two decades of deindustrialization, the dismantling of socialist enterprises, and chronic unemployment, Prilep has effectively become part of the global periphery, marked by the proliferation of "global factories" offering low-paid, unskilled labor, particularly in the food, garment, furniture, and marble quarry sectors. The only sector that has endured overtime and continues to sustain the local economy is the more than one century-old tobacco farming sector

Photo 1. Panorama of Prilep with the yellow 1924 Tobacco Monopoly building at the center.

Over the years, I have conducted ethnographic research across several urban areas, beginning in the late 1990s with a study of a community of refugees from the Greek Civil War (1946–1949) who settled on Varosh hill, and more recently in a northern suburb established in the early 1970s by rural migrants from the Mariovo region. My research themes have ranged from studies of refugees and the politics of exclusion and inclusion concerning the *Egejci* (Macedonians from Greece (Monova 2002) to investigations of factory workers' households engaged in tobacco cultivation as a means of supplementing their income, exploring the interweaving of work and ritual life, and examining ideas and practices of sufficiency (Monova 2015a, 2015b). What unites these topics is the focus on the domestic unit, which in Prilep is most often embodied in the house—both as a physical space and as a metaphor for family and mutuality.

In my previous work, I have developed a processual approach to domesticity by examining the social, economic, and ritual processes that unfold within the house (or apartment). In this paper, I invert that perspective by focusing on three aspects of the house: a physical entity, a metaphor of kinship, and a mediating actor endowed with its own agency, positioned between the intimate world of its inhabitants and the broader social worlds beyond it. My emphasis lies on what appears to predominate in the house ideology of the families I have encountered: on the one hand, its materiality — not merely as a dwelling but as an ornament, an aestheticized projection of the inhabitants' social worth, morality, and success; on the other, its fluidity, expressed through the continual negotiation of boundaries between inside and outside, between the private (what is "ours") and the public — the moment where the "outside," the *nadvor*, begins and belongs to others.

To illustrate both the diversity and the underlying coherence of the local house ideology, I draw on two ethnographic examples from neighborhoods inhabited by the descendants of distinct migrant groups. The first neighborhood was established in the early 1950s by refugees of the Greek Civil War from the village of Tushim[1] (Edessa/ Voden region in northern Greece), while the second emerged during the last wave of rural migration to the city in the early 1970s and is composed of families originating from various villages in the Mariovo region. Before developing those two exemples, I shall consider some common patterns in house ideology we can find in Prilep and most generally in Macedonia.

In Macedonia, the house is a salient and organizing social category, serving as the locus of intense social, ritual, and economic activity. The houses are typically inhabited by three-generation working-class families whose histories since the collapse of Yugoslavia

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1   In Macedonian cities, one often hears the expressions "Aegean neighborhood" (*egejska maala)* or "Aegean buildings" (*egejski zgradi*). Still used in everyday speech, these labels denote areas predominantly inhabited by refugees from the Greek Civil War (1946–1949) who fled from Northern Greece, known locally as Aegean Macedonia.

have been marked by recurrent unemployment, yet who continue to engage persistently in tobacco cultivation as a central element of livelihood strategies. Members of the oldest generation often participate in agricultural work or self-provisioning activities in the garden, on rented plots, or in nearby villages. Instances of children attaining higher education remain relatively rare, whereas in the past decade out-migration has intensified, frequently resulting in the fragmentation of the household and the presence of only one or two remaining members. People with higher levels of education are predominantly found among the descendants of political refugees, whose families have already been established in Prilep for three to four generations. In Mariovo neighborhood, founded in the early 1970s, most families count only two generations born in the city.

The House before the marriage

In Prilep, it is commonly said that "the house comes first, before the marriage", a saying that encapsulates the local moral economy in which the establishment of a home is seen as a precondition for forming a family. The groom must already have either his own house or a separate apartment floor in his father's house. The consequence of this is the prevailing norm that "A man without a house cannot marry".

"Women don't want to move from the town to the village; they want a house in town," explained a man in his forties. "I couldn't find a wife until I was thirty because no one want to give his daughter to a man without a house. Owning a house in a village doesn't matter—young women in Prilep won't accept living in a village. So, I married very late."

Yet, in practice, many young people—especially men—do not fully comply with this traditional rule. Mira, a housewife and Ace are both in their early forties. Ace who works in the marble industry comments on the weddings of the two sons of their neighbors:

"They both married very young—eighteen and nineteen—one after the other, while they were both unemployed! They still live with their parents in a small house. Young people marry like this nowadays: neither the groom nor the bride has a job. It's not good. When we got married, we were also young, but we had jobs and some resources. Marrying like this today is a risk for the stability of the marriage. Tell me, with what are they going to build a house?".

Mira, who came from a well-off family before she married, continues:

"I cannot complain—I come from a wealthy family. Now we are poor. From life I learned both: what it means to have and what it means not to have (*znam kako e i da imash i da nemash*). If my father hadn't worked hard in his village, my brother would never have built a three-story house in Bitola. He could never manage on his salary alone. He works

in town but still cultivates the land in the village. Young people today don't want to do that—they don't want to work in agriculture. They just lie on the couch and wait around."

Goran, aged forty, "took a wife at thirty-three—very late," as he puts it. Coming from a poor family in a village near Prilep, he began working as a quarryman in the marble sector eighteen years ago. After moving to Prilep, he rented a small room. As long as he lacked the means to buy a house, "no one wanted to give me his daughter," he recalled. His wife, he explains, was a *begalka*—a "runaway daughter"—who left home to marry her boyfriend without her father's approval.

"Her father was against it because I didn't have a house. The matchmaker asked me, 'Do you have a house?' I said, 'No.' He took his bag and was about to leave, and I begged him, 'Stay, stay, let's talk about it!' But he said, 'No, no, no…'"

Goran eventually bought a house with a 30-year loan, six months before the wedding. His wife also shared her version of the story:

"It's not that I ran away from home—I wasn't fifteen, I was thirty!" protests Lena, rejecting the label of a "runaway daughter." I have decided to get married. You know how people gossip around here; they always have something to say: 'He doesn't have this, he doesn't have that, he doesn't have a house; he's like this, he's like that.' But we knew each other well. We had already told each other what we had and what we didn't have, who we were, how we were. I was adult enough to reflect (*razmisluvam*) on my own situation."

The House slava or the celebration of the patron Saint of the house

Photo 2. House slava table. Waiting for the priest's blessing of the bread

"If you respect me, you will respect my house by making me a visit and honoring the food I offer."

The establishment of a new family in a new house is usually followed, within the first year, by the choice of a patron saint who will protect and represent the household. A visitor can recognize the household's patron saint from the icon prominently displayed—most often at the entrance or in the principal room of the house. The celebration of the slava is the most important ritual taking place in the house. Each year, the nuclear or extended family organizes a festive meal with a rich menu, attended by numerous guests. According to tradition, a son inherits his father's slava, a transmission that occurs naturally when sons follow the patrilocal rule and remain in the same house with their families. Modern life, however, has introduced many variations and reinterpretations of this custom. In urban contexts—where siblings often live apart and family units are increasingly nuclear, the rules have become more complex, and patron saints may multiply with the number of houses established by different sons. This is why I argue that in the urban context, the emphasis in the patron saint celebration shifts from the idea of a shared patrilineal origin and descent to the notion of the nuclear family, and of the house as a space that shelters a bilaterally defined family unit.

In Prilep, the *slava* celebration is said to be more conservative than in other towns. Visitors are almost exclusively close kin, friends, and neighbors—a circle that has gradually diminished over the years of economic crisis and unemployment. When a non-kin person is invited, custom requires that the host first visit them with a small sweet or chocolate and extend the invitation by saying: *"Please, take a sweet and come to my house slava this evening"* (*Poveli, zemi si shekerce i dojdi mi na slava vecherva*). More urbanized families, however, tend to celebrate in a more open fashion. In Skopje, for instance, guests often bring gifts for the household—a casserole, a lamp, or a set of glasses—and families invite a much wider circle of friends.

A dividing brother who moves into a separate household—his own house or apartment—may choose a new patron saint, even while his father is still alive and residing with the rest of the family in the original home. Another configuration arises when the groom moves into his bride's household. The in-marrying husband (*domazet*) then adopts and continues to celebrate the *slava* of the house—that is, the patron saint inherited from his father-in-law. It is important to note that it is not considered proper for two or more brothers, or for brothers and their father living in separate houses, to celebrate the same saint. As one interlocutor explained: "If my brothers and I share the same patron saint, we cannot visit each other during the *slava*. It doesn't make sense." Sharing the same saint while living apart would undermine the principle of reciprocity and gift exchange, and, more importantly, would impoverish the sociality that *slava* sustains among kin, neighbors, and friends.

Five brothers

Riste lives in a house in the city center with his two recently married sons. He comes from a large family of five brothers and one sister. Originally from a village on the nearby plain, the family relocated to the city when the eldest brother began attending

secondary school. Today, four brothers live independently with their families, while the eldest still shares the family house with their ninety-year-old father. What follows is Riste's account:

"We are five brothers, and we're not like others—we truly share everything and have never been in conflict or on bad terms. One day, we had to decide what to do with our father's house. Four of us gathered and agreed that our eldest brother, who lives with and takes care of our father, should naturally inherit it. He would also take over our father's *slava*. So, we called him and said, 'Dimo, get ready with a bottle of *rakia*—we're coming!' We went to his house, and as soon as we entered, we said: 'Dimo, hurry up, we have something to celebrate—fill our glasses with *rakia*!' He looked at us in surprise. 'Of course,' he said, laughing. We raised our glasses, drank together, and I told him: 'Now, Dimo, by giving us this *rakia*, the house is yours. It's done. We brothers have agreed—it should belong to you.'"

After the household division, each brother must choose his own patron saint. A problem arose, Riste explains, because one of his brothers decided to take the same patron saint as their father's. "It can't be changed" he says. "So, we alternate — one year we celebrate with one brother, the next year with the other, together with our father. The rest of us have each chosen a different saint, so that we can visit one another." Riste adds that in his family they are not particularly "religious," especially himself. "I don't believe in either the priest or the imam," (*Ne veruvam ni vo pop, ni vo odza*) he exclaims, quoting an old proverb: "All robbers and drinkers! Once, the priest came drunk — he just wanted to watch TV, he couldn't even stand straight." It was, in fact, his wife who chose their household's patron saint. "One day she noticed, that all the bad things that had happened to our family on a Friday always ended well. That's why we decided to honor Saint Friday (Paraskeva Fryday)."

However, not all households celebrate their patron saint's day; some prefer instead to mark the father's or the children's name day. Only a few manage to maintain all the "traditional celebrations." The reason most often invoked is that organizing a slava can be too costly, especially when it falls on a non-fasting day. Moreover, families with adolescent children must also host birthday and name-day gatherings, which multiply the expenses. Village patron-saint days remain another familial obligation, as grandparents and their descendants continue to observe the custom of returning to the village to attend the liturgy in the local church.

Tobacco in the House: Between Domestic sphere and Market sphere

More than anywhere else in Macedonia, the house in Prilep functions as an interface between the domestic and market economies. The dwelling—together with its garden, garage, and auxiliary spaces—integrates various work activities and tasks associated with the initial stages of tobacco processing. This entire process, known

locally as *"domestic tobacco"* (*domashen tutun*), is a seasonal, household-based, and highly labor-intensive occupation. Within this domestic setting, families carry out every stage of production: stripping the harvested leaves, threading them into garlands, drying them—often suspended in the street or within household spaces—and finally pressing and packing the dried leaves into compact balls. Families living in apartment buildings may also engage in tobacco cultivation, although the spatial constraints of apartment blocks render tobacco-related tasks more complex and demand a careful sequencing of activities across time and space. My hypothesis is that, within the local cultural setting, *"home-grown tobacco"* belongs to the intimate sphere of domestic life. Tobacco is in the house, it clings to its walls, saturates its air, and bears witness to the family's *savoir-faire*, their embodied skill in cultivation and processing. It is not the product of waged labor; it is neither ordered by the state, a client, nor an employer. Rather, the house itself governs the process: *"I am my own patron,"* as people often say.

Photo 3. Tobacco curing. Near the city center in October.

Refugees from the Greek Civil War: From sojourners to settlers

In the Varosh district, where some eighty families of refugees from the Greek Civil War first came in 1949, the house (*kukjata*)—was my primary field site. It was the place where I met families, their neighbors, and friends, and where I collected stories and memories. Unsurprisingly, the house figures prominently in people's narratives, serving as a key reference point through which life histories and family trajectories are articulated. There are stories about *the house we left*—the one that remained in Greece and that "we were never able to visit again"—and stories about the house that families acquired, built, and rebuilt over now three or more generations, a house that embodies the passage from being *refugees* to becoming *locals*.

In people's narratives of war and exile, the lost house—left behind in the fatherland (*tatkovina*)—occupies a special place, standing symbolically above all other houses they may have lived in since. The first generation is already gone, yet subsequent generations recount the same stories about the lost house, evoking a sense of something unique and irreplaceable, something iconic that no other house will ever possess. The significance

of this house lies not in its material form but in its symbolic weight—it encapsulates the uniqueness of a collective historical experience, anchoring memory, belonging, and identity. Of all the houses that followed, this one remains unchanged in imagination and sentiment. The contemporary house in Prilep, by contrast, is the *house of the living*— the house of the new life that began some seventy years ago. This house never ceases to change, it takes on new appearances over time and across generations, accumulating new stories and renewed memories. Narratives about it shift from positive to negative and back again. It is *ours*, a cherished achievement, yet it can never be the house that was lost— the one that embodies origins, foundations, and the primordial trauma of displacement. While the house in Prilep undergoes continual transformation, the house in the village of Tushim—often no longer standing—remains frozen in memory, perpetually retelling the same story even three generations later. It endures as the most precious one: a repository of belonging, a source of both individual and collective identity.

In her research on a Macedonian immigrant community in Toronto, Lillian Petroff offers a nuanced analysis of the differing mentalities among various segments of migrants (Petroff:1995). I draw on her distinction between two orientations toward the host state: those who perceive themselves as *sojourners* and those who act as *settlers*—positions that reflect contrasting understandings of belonging and permanence. Similar processes can be observed among the refugees of the Greek Civil War in the community of Tushimci in Varosh. For the Tushimci, who fled almost the entire village, the *sojourner* position corresponds to what I describe as a *logic of return*—the conviction that their stay is only temporary, that the journey remains unfinished, and that the day of return to their village, "only 60 kilometers away as the crow flies," will eventually come. People recount that "at that time" they conceived of their stay as temporary, always ready to depart as soon as political conditions would allow. They imagined a future return to normality in their homeland—an "after the war" that would restore the earlier order of things in the *rodna zemja* (native land). This was the time, as they say, "when we thought we would go back" (*koga mislevme deka ke se vratime*). Within this logic, they adopted a pragmatic mode of thinking that translated into a set of practices and strategies they described as "doing the minimum to settle here while waiting to return." It implied compliance with the rules and expectations of local society, and hard work to make a living—by men, women, and grown children alike—"because we had nothing."

Another rule was to marry "in" (*tuka*), meaning within the refugee group. Yet *tuka* ("here") referred to the native village in Greece, not to *tuka* in Varosh, Prilep, or the Republic of Macedonia. This endogamous pattern applied to all adults, who continued to follow the same marriage rules as if they were still in their home village. For instance, when selecting a family to form an alliance with through marriage, a given matchmaker would assess the bride's dowry in the native village, as well as the groom's family land, possessions, and imagined future livelihood in Greece. "Because if I married someone from Prilep, how could I go back to my village?" as one interlocutor explained. This pragmatic logic was deemed sufficient to ensure survival during a period perceived as temporary, however indefinite. Interlocutors describe this time as "living a life on hold," as if placed in parentheses—a suspended form of existence that was never meant to endure.

Acquiring a house represents a crucial milestone in the process of establishment, marking the transition from a *sojourner* to a *settler* position. From the outset, the Yugoslav state provided refugees with newly built apartments that they could soon own. Yet, as my interlocutors recalled, "we said no." The eighty families chose instead to remain in the houses of the locals—a decision that not only generated new tensions but also deepened their stigmatization within the host community.

Indeed, a house, an apartment would have meant becoming established for good, to set up "forever". As noted by a diplomat from the French Embassy in an internal note, "Until 1954, Yugoslav Macedonia welcomed the refugees with enthusiasm, and its priority was to settle them in new housing. This enthusiasm abruptly waned after that date, while the long queues forming in front of the Greek Consulate indicated "Slav Macedonians" growing desire to return"[2]. The amnesties proclaimed by successive Greek governments allowed the return of ethnic Greek former communist fighters but were only exceptionally extended to those claiming a Slavic identity.

The second phase of the refugees' life in exile is marked by a shift from a sojourner to a settler position, or from a *logic of return* to a *logic of establishment*. Imagining oneself as settling for good is not an overnight decision, it is a process, and it may come for some unconsciously for other as well thought decision. In all cases, it begins with the realization that the Greek state would not allow the return of the so-called "Slavo-Communists," not even for a brief visit to their native villages. This remained true even in the 1980s, despite the general amnesty issued by the PASOK government, which authorized the return of communist fighters and political refugees. (Rossos 1997) Among the Tushimci, only women and families who had remained on the side of the Greek army—and had not fled "to the North"—were able to return.

For some families, it took only a few years, while for others ten or more, before they finally decided to settle. "At one moment you came to the realization that you can't not go back home", explain to me an aged woman. Gradually strategies of settling replace strategies of sojourner. Marriage alliances with locals serve as a revealing marker of this new stage. We observe, for instance, that men and women who were under the age of 13 or 14 at the time of flight (1948–1949) tended to marry locals, unlike their older brothers and sisters. Gradually, people began to seek homes, secure permanent employment, and respond positively to state policies of integration and assimilation. Over the years, the group's social and economic status changed considerably. Benefiting from preferential hiring under a 1952 decree, they worked as industrial laborers during the winter and as cooperative agricultural workers during the summer. Among the older generation, some received substantial fighters' pensions as combatants against fascism in Greece. By the late 1990s, both women and men in these families were receiving state pensions,

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2   AMAE (Nantes). Fond "Skopje", Consulat, art. 2. Maurice Michelot, Consul de France à S.E.M.

Philippe Baudet Ambassadeur de France à Belgrade : "Publications anti-grecques à Skopje", dépêche nº 30/ 15 Mars 1954.

whereas among locals, female industrial workers are certainly rare phenomena before the 1970's. As a result, refugee households had long benefited from dual incomes and now enjoy two pensions. What was once stigmatized—women's participation in public-sector employment—has gradually become a mark of prestige and emancipation. These advantages were often perceived by locals as a form of privilege. It is precisely at this stage that a certain economic convergence between the two groups became evident. Both locals and refugees—pejoratively labeled *Egejci*—became owners of a house or apartment and a small plot of land for tobacco cultivation, and both counted family members employed in the public sector.

In Prilep, the house is generally regarded as a symbol of social prestige. By the late 1960s and early 1970s, when the rural-urban migration from Mariovo took place, most political refugees in Varosh had already established themselves. Many local families had left for Skopje, selling their plots to the refugees. The new houses are built with modern materials and typically feature at least two stories. Today, the houses of Aegean Macedonians are often described as "the largest and the most beautiful."

The house always in the making: A glimpse into a neighborhood of rural migrant

How striking is the contrast between the neighborhoods established by political refugees in the early 1950s and those founded by migrants from the Mariovo region, two decades later. In the northern suburbs where families settled, modest, narrow houses dominate the landscape; when recently built, they often have unfinished second floors and bare walls exposing their red brick. This district, located on former agricultural land, lacks basic infrastructure and any form of urban planning. New houses are built in an uncoordinated manner, their façades rarely facing the street but rather oriented in directions the family considers less visible to neighbors, creating an overall impression of disorder. Today, the district consists of approximately 300 houses, constructed by families originating from fourteen villages.

In the early 1970s, peasants who had been encouraged by the Yugoslav state to reinforce the new proletarian masses discovered, to their surprise, that they were no longer welcome. Whereas the 1950s and 1960s had been marked by intense industrialization and a demand for labor, the 1970s were already defined by rising unemployment and a shortage of public housing (Woodward 1995). Families faced serious difficulties in securing stable employment and suffered from the absence of state-sponsored accommodation.

While refugees from Greece had once resisted the state by refusing its housing offers, the *Mariovci* resisted in another way—by building illegal houses *"overnight,"* an expression meant quite literally. The municipality responded with campaigns urging them to return to their villages. Previous waves of out-migration had already eroded the social fabric of these villages: schools were abandoned, medical services had disappeared, and transport connections to urban centers were interrupted. In this context, the Mariovci saw

no viable alternative but to stay in Prilep and construct provisional houses squatting the land that did not legally belong to them. When these were demolished by the authorities, they built and rebuilt again and again. In this suburb, none of the houses were originally constructed with legal permits, and for many families the legalization process began only in the mid-2000s, following a state campaign for the creation of a new national cadastral system.

In this comparison between the two migrant groups, the house emerges both as a symbol and a metaphor of kinship, while simultaneously embodying collective strategies and serving as a marker of how refugees from the 1950s and rural migrants from the 1970s understand and negotiate their position vis-à-vis the host state. For the researcher, the house serves as a guiding thread for understanding migrants' trajectories and strategies, while also bearing witness to the social and political transformations that, in a sense, are imported from the outside world into the domestic sphere.

Conclusion

This paper has argued that the house in Prilep is not merely a dwelling but a mediating institution form that draws together kinship, economy, and cosmology. Prilep's single-crop urbanism sharpens this theoretical point. Tobacco—handled, dried, and pressed in rooms, stairwells, garages, and gardens—renders the house an interface between domestic and market spheres. "Home-grown tobacco" belongs to the intimate domain, yet it creates sociality; its smell, dust, and rhythms circulate through kin ties and neighborhood sociability while contributing to making a living. The slava further situates the house within a relationship with superior forces, ritual hospitality and a kind of cosmology that holds people inside the house together. Comparative attention to two migrant groups illustrates how houses mediate positions vis-à-vis the state. Finally, the Prilep case reframes debates on postsocialist transformation. As deindustrialization erodes the socialist wage and public provisioning, the practical centrality of the house expands: it domesticates market volatility, shelters intergenerational strategies, and anchors ritual and memory. Yet this very centrality is precarious, strained by unemployment, out-migration, and the costs of ritual obligations. Attending to houses thus illuminates how urban life in Balkans is assembled in the interstice of rural and industrial, intimate and impersonal, earthly and superior forces. The house, in short, remains a privileged lens for understanding how people in Prilep—and beyond—make kin, make do, and make futures.

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