

## CHAPTER

# 4

## HOME AND INVESTMENT

### *Shifts in Perceptions and Their Material Manifestation*



## INTRODUCTION

Infrastructure and housing investments have been booming in Kosovo since the war ended in 1999. The numerous construction sites for fancy housing and commercial projects and the endless stores selling construction materials and furnishings create the impression that Kosovo is flourishing. Yet, these enormous housing constructions in Kosovo are largely financed by migrants, and although vital to migrants and non-migrants alike, they do not stem from or signal Kosovo's economic resurgence. Similar infrastructural and housing construction projects in other countries, such as Macedonia (Pichler 2009a), Albania (Dalakoglou 2009, 2010), rural Romania (Călinescu and Hodoiu 2013) and also other parts of the world such as Southern Ecuador (Boccagni 2013) or rural Mexico (Pauli 2008), are undertaken mainly by migrants in their home region. As 'elephants of stuff' (Miller 2010: 81), houses 'form the main materialization of migrants' remittances' (Dalakoglou 2010: 766) and ideally provide their owners with a deeper sense of home, belonging and relatedness. As Esin Bozkurt (2009: 13) writes about Turkish migrants in Germany, investments back home, in Turkey, are built on and shift boundaries and binary oppositions between 'modernity and backwardness, of the individual and the collective, as well as the local and the foreign'. 'Home' expresses a variety of personal, social and cultural processes that in-

fluence identities and plans for the future, as well as links to people, communities and localities and the boundaries between them.

The notion of 'being home' (*në shtëpi*) and the materiality of the 'house' (*shtëpia*) are closely interrelated in the Albanian language. It is not just the materiality of the home but also the everyday life lived within the house that makes up the notion of home (Papa-Pandelejmoni, Kera and Hemming 2008: 11; Dalipaj 2013: 29). In practice, however, the interconnections between the material house, the household and the family tend to be quite diverse – especially when house owners and household members are migrants. Sharing food and dwelling – even if only for a limited period – strengthens bonds and renews family and kinship ties. Especially migrants who have moved out of the local community attach great importance to this.

As already shown by Claude Lévi-Strauss (1987), Pierre Bourdieu (1973, 1979), and later by Frances Pine (1996), among others, houses represent material expressions of social organization and often also kinship. Analysing the architecture in his classic study on the Berber house, Bourdieu argues that the house is a signifier of family and gender relations. As house building may aim to divide a larger household or create a new nuclear unit, it poses anew the question of household structures and economies. Often it requires a wider pooling of resources among household members, whereby the underlying family and gender relations play a dominant role.

This chapter is concerned with the conditions, social meanings and ramifications of migrants' material investments in Opoja to create a feeling of home and community or to establish social boundaries. Such investments might carry ambivalence as whilst they are often intended to support relatives and other community members back home, the success of such investments is dependent on their cooperation. This chapter also explores the effects of these investments on family relations and in particular on gendered and generational relations across national borders and their local manifestations. It shows that migrants' investments in Opoja tend to be both past- and future-oriented, reconstructive and transformative. House building projects, and the social relations materialized through such projects, point to the future of the family and the community in environments, contexts and situations increasingly perceived to be uncertain. Investments in the material locus of the family and the household create meaningful social relations, strengthening the 'roots' (*rrënjët*) of migrants to Opoja even for the next generation. While migrants' house building activities demonstrate care for oneself, the family and the kin group, they also challenge these notions, as well as gender and generational relations. The chapter shows that house building stands as much for patrilocal tradition, fraternal unity and the family collective as for modernity and individuality. Houses form a bridge across

the borders and between family members and generations while at the same time creating conflict and ambivalence.

The initial sections in this chapter address the said migrants' house building activities in Opoja and how they envision the household setup – as a joint establishment to strengthen the unity of the extended family, or as a separate setup for the nuclear family only. This provides insights into the materialized concepts of family, kinship and gender in the translocal realm spanning Opoja and migration destinations. It focuses on the style of houses and the different household concepts that express family care and solidarity. The links between the houses and the social status of migrants within the local community are also covered. Further sections analyse alternative forms of migrant investments and their contribution to homemaking and social relations in Opoja, with the last sections showing that house building projects attempt to establish more permanent links to Opoja, especially for the next generation. The perspectives of the migrant children are related to those of the local youth, taking into account their gendered positions within the family and the communities – in Opoja as well as abroad.

### HOUSES AS SIGNIFIERS OF FAMILY UNITY

The various house building projects of migrants back home, in Opoja, shape the notions of 'home', community and family care. Such projects range from houses shared among brothers, even if inhabited by only part of the family for most of the year, to those built specifically for the migrant family to be used only during their annual visits to Opoja, thus remaining largely empty throughout the year. Some migrants who have resettled their families engage in mutual house building with their brother(s) and parents in the village as a gesture of care. The newly built village houses also symbolize the union of patrilocal family despite the absence of migrants for most of the year. However, the ideal of this materialized union is difficult to live up to during the visits as well as when abroad. As Robert Pichler (2009a: 234) writes for houses built by Albanian migrants in the neighbouring Republic of Macedonia:

The deeply rooted desire for familial reunion, as expressed in the architecture, does not match the social reality. People are aware of this discrepancy, as they too are aware of the social dynamics of current emigration, which will most certainly continue in the near future. The construction of large houses, therefore, appears as a compensation for the loss of family co-residence and as a reaction to social and political insecurity. The ideal of a co-residential household community corresponds with the desire to bring together all those members of the family, who live scattered in different places far away from home.

In Opoja, although migrants express the idea that brothers could reside in a single house jointly and closely cooperate in the future, houses are often built such that each brother and his family could occupy one floor, in anticipation of the division of a household. Exemplifying this model is the case of forty-year-old Agim, who graduated from the university in Prishtina before leaving for Germany with his wife in the late 1990s. Agim had financed the building of a new, three-storey house on the parental plot, intended for his brother's use and his own. While Agim's brother resides there with his family for the most part, Agim, his wife and children join them during their visit over the summer, when they live as a joint household, eating jointly prepared meals. However, as the families occupy different floors, they are also free to establish two separate households. The first two floors of the house have a similar floor plan, with a kitchen, two living rooms, a bedroom, and a bathroom, and the third floor of the house has various formal rooms to host guests and relatives.

The house Agim built signalled a form of cross-border solidarity between brothers that allowed for the nuclearization of the households. The fact that Agim reserves a floor in the joint house for his own family can simultaneously be seen as an expression of his intention to return home for good one day in the future. As Müller (1995) has shown for migrants from Turkey, Ülken (2006) for migrants from post-Dayton Bosnia-Herzegovina, Pichler (2009a) for Albanian migrants from Macedonia and Gregorič Bon (2017: 146) for migrants from Albania in the new millennium, the house built back home creates a form of 'presence in absence', or what Dimitris Dalakoglou (2010: 761) also calls a 'proxy' presence. In Agim's case, the house links the two fraternal nuclear families under one roof in the home region. Thus, it bundles together notions of home and family unity in the present as well as in the future while at the same time making space for nuclearization and individualization.

Migrants like Agim, who finance the building of a house that is jointly used by parents, brothers and their nuclear families, said explicitly that they were not interested in separating from their brothers and wanted to build a house that would help to keep the family unity. In some cases in which all brothers migrated, they invest in a common house in the home village. This is the case for forty-two-year-old Hadi and his three brothers. Although they have lived in separate households in Austria for twenty years, they jointly built a new three-floor house next to their old parental house in Opoja, in the vicinity of their relatives' homes in the *mahalla*. This was based on the idea of spending more time in the circle of their relatives during their visits to the village. For Hadi and his brothers, the house embodies their wish to stay connected as a family and linked with their (agnatic) relatives in the home region. It serves as an antipode to life abroad, where brothers and their families are dispersed across different cities.



**Figure 4.1.** Twin houses built by two brothers (© Carolin Leutloff-Grandits)

Yet in various other cases, brothers living abroad invest in houses in Opoja designed only for their nuclear family, especially when the parental village property is already divided and apportioned amongst the brothers. Migrants, at times, also finance or help finance their brothers' house building projects that can facilitate household division. They often build houses in a row on their parental landed property, which is divided among the brothers for this purpose. It is common in Opoja and across Kosovo in general to see extensive complexes of two, three, four or even five houses built side by side by brothers and which are often equal or at least similar in exterior, size and style, like twin or triplet, quad or quintuplet houses. Nebi Bardoshi (2016) and Lumnije Kadriu (2017), who studied house building activities in Albania and of migrants in Kosovo, respectively, argue that such houses represent a material expression of unity and equality among brothers. While I agree with this, it must be added that the assumption of unity and social cohesion among brothers on that basis is sometimes misleading, for often a house building project is advanced by the division of parental property and with the division of the joint household among brothers, resources are also no longer pooled. In that sense, building similar houses continues to be a representative act of demonstrating brotherly unity; however, in and of itself that does not guarantee future solidarity and cooperation among brothers.

Moreover, many such houses remain uninhabited for the most part, as their owners reside abroad in separate households. According to available statistics for 2011, one-third of the buildings in Kosovo remain empty for most of the year, and in the Dragash municipality, specifically, to which the



**Figure 4.2.** Triplet houses of brothers on the outskirts of a village in Opoja  
(© Carolin Leutloff-Grandits)

region of Opoja belongs, about 39 per cent of dwellings were either vacant or only temporarily occupied (UNDP 2012: 63). This number may, however, be explained by the high outmigration numbers (even higher than in Opoja) among the predominantly Slavic-speaking population of the Gora region, also part of Dragash municipality. Furthermore, the brotherly unity as expressed as a chain of identical houses is undermined by the fact that one or several brothers living abroad may decide not to invest in housing in Opoja or at least build a house that is smaller than the others.

Other migrants and returnees sometimes renounce their share of the inheritance and leave the parental house to the brother(s) residing there while they build a new house for themselves. For example, Qerim, who moved abroad in the 1990s, agreed that his older brother, who was unemployed with two sons, should take over the parental house, while he used his savings from abroad to build a new house in the direct vicinity. In this and similar cases, property division and house building projects were premised on continued brotherly solidarity, regardless of their unequal social and economic positions. Taking over the parental house, however, often also comes with the responsibility of caring for elderly parents until they die (see also Chapter 3). This implies that those who inherit the house also have more practical caring obligations.

In short, house building activities resemble very different imaginations of family unity and family care. While fraternal solidarity may be materialized via house building, houses may not be the most accurate or sole indicator of unity.

## HOUSES AS SIGNIFIERS OF INDIVIDUAL STATUS AND MODERNITY

Houses built by migrants signify social status beyond the local village, in the translocal space (see also Morokvasic 1987; Goldring 1997; Portes 2001; Al-Ali and Koser 2002; Pichler 2009a; Nieswand 2011). The fact that migrants proudly put their house building activities on display on social media, like Facebook, shows the border-spanning significance of houses. More broadly, a new, modern and large house represents commitment to hard work and the resultant success garnered abroad. Houses within a compound in diverse shapes and sizes may express the differential status of the owners, within the family and in the community at large. Residents of Opoja aspire to the shiny houses of the migrants, which stand for a (better) life abroad and for the limitations they currently experience in the village.

Qerim's house, for example, stands out because of its windowpane mirrors and the 'American' kitchen with its sizable flat-screen television, which his brothers, who reside next door with their children, cannot afford. As Qerim and his family make only rather short annual visits to the region lasting less than a month, his brothers and their families assume the care obligations for the house, and especially its interior. They check on it from time to time, and the children then admire the modern household equipment. As such, the houses and household interior create dreams as well as a proxy-presence of otherwise absent migrants among kin member at home.

As Arjun Appadurai (1996: 177ff) describes, what is 'local' receives new meaning in times of increased migration and globalization that compresses time and space. Houses built by migrants are material expressions of their belonging to their home locality and community from afar, 'cementing' a lasting relationship to them (see also Schweitzer 2010: 478). For Ylber, who went abroad as teenager, the house he built for his nuclear family, not far from his parental home in the village, demonstrates his strong relationship to his home village and the translocal community. While he considers it important to be a house owner in his home village, in Vienna he lives in a rented flat and does not intend to buy or build a house despite spending most of his time there. He emphasizes that he has adapted to life abroad and that he has managed to overcome a steep learning curve in Austria that would eventually serve him well 'anywhere', but he acknowledges very little emotional attachment to Austria. His relationship to his home region, on the other hand, is closely linked to his nostalgia for family, home and his childhood – to an idealized space in his imagination to which neither the present time nor the future could ever live up.

Houses link to a lost past as much as they are sites of permanent engagement, designed to signify not only modernity and progress but also the status

of the migrant abroad. Contrary to the notion that the building project ends once the house is completed, and with it one's own active commitment to it, house building often turns out to be a lifelong process, binding the owners to the village in a way that it becomes central to their social life (Carsten and Hugh-Jones 1996). In Opoja and elsewhere, many migrants build their houses incrementally over many years. After the initial building period, they modify and add an extension to the house, seeking to integrate new ideas, designs and objects that could raise their social status and bring to the fore the 'good life' they will lead in the years to come. As houses are quite stable, capable of surviving over decades and generations, they not only have a history but also demarcate a 'future-oriented temporality' (Roth 1983). A house has the potential to establish a home and provide security and care for the times ahead; it embodies a 'sense of promise for the future', as Sherry Ortner (2016: 52) puts it. Similarly, for Ylber, his newly built house in the village is a promise of a good life in the near or distant future, and especially after retirement. As he showed me his house, he explained that he was planning to build a bedroom and a bathroom on the ground floor to avoid having to climb the stairs in his old age.

As Dimitris Dalakoglou (2010: 763) and Robert Pichler (2009a) suggest, houses also dynamically link two (and more) spaces and life worlds through architectural elements, building materials or imported furniture, symbolizing back home the life of the migrant abroad. While the migrant's house building activities may signify their intimate links to their home locality, to their 'roots' (*rrënjët*) and the local community there, paradoxically, such activities rely on migrancy – that is, being distant from their home village. Even the architecture and style of the houses are deeply influenced by their migration experience. Building such a house requires the migrants to inhabit a socio-economic context abroad that is relatively more lucrative than the one back home. In expressing this connection to their roots, migrants suggestively try to give the house a more 'modern' appearance, incorporating architectural elements from abroad. While building a house that is distinct from others in the neighbourhood, they also build a bridge between their localized 'roots' and their present locations (Dalakoglou 2010: 773).

Ylber, for example, designed a 'Western-style' house with 'Western' technology, partly using 'quality' construction materials imported from abroad, as he explained to me. He also had to return often to supervise the house building, as local contractors had problems implementing his plans. In seeking to distinguish his home from the older houses in the village in terms of style and architecture, Ylber is not different from other migrants. While older buildings only have one or two floors and are often hardly visible from the main street due to the surrounding walls, most new houses are eye-catching – multistoreyed, with large, reflective glass windows, stainless



steel bannisters and balconies. Often migrants even forego the traditional boundary walls built around the houses – as if openly wanting to exhibit their wealth to enhance their social status, or also as an expression of new, more egalitarian gender norms, as the walled courtyards of the houses traditionally served as a space where the women of the houses were protected from the gaze of the men who were not part of the family.

Older family houses are often demolished to make space for new houses. As traditional architecture is largely not cherished, only a few architectural traces of historic houses can be found in Opoja, mostly in very bad shape. All over Kosovo, the newly built migrant houses along the narrow streets of the village centre, and in the village outskirts, transform the village streetscape. While they symbolize the attainment of a new level of ‘modernity’ and prosperity, they also indicate a vanishing village life – slow in most instances but rapid in some. Similar processes can be evidenced elsewhere, as in the Albanian settlements in Northern Macedonia (see Pichler 2009a), in the migration-dominated villages in Romania (Călinescu and Hodoiu 2013), or essentially wherever migrants choose to invest in houses in significant numbers.

Like Caroline Humphrey’s (1997) characterization of the ‘villas’ of the ‘New Russians’, most of the newly built houses in Opoja break the link to the past through their new architectural styles and new, modern furniture inspired by Western European home and design magazines. The shiny, even clinical, exteriors and interiors of the new houses give them a rather ahistorical and delocalized character. Inside the houses, everything is in order, as the women of the house take care to put things away immediately after use – including the guests’ cups. In line with gender norms for the region, women are habitually responsible for the household and for hosting the guests, proving respect for the guests with their hospitality, but also that they are well-mannered members of the household. Yet, the new interiors, where space is divided on different terms, also serve as an expression of transformed gender and family relations, merging various gendered and spatialized assignments within the household. While older houses have a living area separate from the kitchen, which was traditionally the designated female realm, in the years since the war, a spacious living room with an integrated ‘American kitchen’ has become increasingly fashionable.

Families who do not have close relatives abroad also aspire to build new houses, but not all of them can afford to, and certainly not such large and ‘modern’ ones. Against the new houses, the older houses seem to be characterized by ‘backwardness’ and poverty and instantiate the increasing social stratification and fragmentation of the village community. Still, the lines of division between the old and the new, the modern and the backward are not clear cut. Families with few means to build a new house try to compensate

by renovating their homes; for example, by building a new facade or tearing down the inner walls to build an American-style kitchen. To sum up, the new houses are increasingly a marker of modernity, individualism and often more emancipated gender relations – which indicates the higher status of the owners. Whilst migrants have the means to make such investments and thus link to the village from abroad, this is done partly without taking equal care of brothers who remain in the village and thus the social unity of brothers and of the village community is increasingly undermined.

### HOUSES AS SIGNIFIERS OF GENERATIONAL AND GENDERED FUTURES

Houses create a future vision for migrants, as they materialize family relations and the family future. Commonly owned by male family members and passed on to their sons, new houses (and house building projects) have a gendered potential to channel the future of the next generation. Various migrants, especially fathers of sons, have stressed that building a house ensures a place for their son(s) back home in Opoja. In line with the norms and traditions of patrilocality and male inheritance prevalent in rural Kosovo, the sons, along with their father, are regarded as lifetime co-owners of the house and gain full ownership upon the death of their father. This again explains why migrants strive to build bigger houses. These houses symbolize a materialized link to their home region in Kosovo also for their children's generation. They are intended not only for the use of the migrant's nuclear family but also, down the line, for the families of their children, mainly that of their sons. House building is thus a sign of paternal care for the children, and especially the sons, and links the migrant children to the place of their fathers' origin.

Edona, a young migrant woman I met during her visit to Opoja in summer 2012, invited me to the recently finished, spacious house of her father, who had migrated in the 1990s. Edona explained that her father had started to build their house some years before the war, after dividing the parental property amongst the three brothers. Edona's father sold some of the land he inherited to build their house close to the parental house, which now belonged to one of his brothers. His second brother – also abroad – had already built his house in the same neighbourhood. The three houses had different designs and shapes, but they were located inside a common yard and surrounded by a common wall, highlighting they belonged to a single family. Although Edona told me that it is unlikely that her father will return to the village after retirement, she agreed with this investment. She explained that her father had used the property and the resources he received from his fa-

ther to build it, and this money had to 'remain home', in Opoja. Following the widely shared patrilocal family norms, she assumed that her brother would eventually be considered the co-owner, and later the sole heir to the new village house. In her view, and that of most Opoja villagers and migrants, local house building is a gendered act that reinforces the bond between fathers and sons – a tradition that has hardly been challenged. This also illuminates why in Opoja house building activities are less pronounced among families with 'only' daughters. Moreover, house building also reinforces the bonds of patrilocal kinship, as house building among migrants is typically undertaken in the village of the male spouse. Often the house is built on land held in the patriline for generations, and frequently also next to the houses of brothers – a practice that stresses fraternity. As an effect, the ties of the family of the female spouse are diminished – this is an observation also shared by Jasna Čapo Žmegač (2003) for migrants building houses in rural Croatia.

However, not everyone in the village views the prevailing patrilocal gender norms positively. Especially women are critical of the house building projects in the husband's village, where they feel more restricted if the house is built jointly with the husband's brothers or in the direct vicinity of the husband's brothers' houses. Generally, migrants have the ability to transform gender relations by realizing their own visions about the house and its location – not just in Opoja. As Julia Pauli (2008) describes for Mexico, women prefer to build their houses separate from their husband's relatives, to gain greater agency. In Opoja, various migrant couples compromise by building their houses outside the village *mahalla* where there is more space but still door to door with the husband's brothers. Some couples also opt to buy property in Prizren instead, often at the insistence of the female spouses. Other migrant women prefer to make their housing investments abroad – not least because the patrilocal gender norms embedded in notions of house building and ownership do not apply there. Edona, who lives in Germany, stressed that her father supported her plans to move out of the parental house and had helped her set up a separate household with her husband, which, however, they rent. She also stressed that her brother had to rent a flat for himself abroad, too, whereas in Opoja parents would be expected to provide housing for their son on their property, so rentals are rarely, if at all, available. Edona sees this as positive – not only because it means that her brother and she are treated equally in Germany but also because renting his own apartment has helped her brother to become more independent and self-reliant, as she says.

But not just migrant women are agents of change. Women living in complex households in Opoja often push for a household division to focus on their nuclear unit, which means cooking only for their own nuclear family or supervising and educating their natal children only. As women responsi-

ble for complex households comprising several nuclear families complained, they spend most days at home with no rest (Reineck 1991: 59; Krasniqi 2016: 198), adding that, in such households, ‘crowding’ is a problem (*kallabëllëk*, deriving from Turkish, meaning ‘too many people’). Elderly parents, on the other hand, are often less in favour of it, as they want to preserve family unity and exert their authority. Some thus fault their daughters-in-law for selfishly striving to divide their household (see also Krasniqi 2014a: 206). Yet, many middle-aged and elderly parents, understanding that the times and values have changed, do not interfere with the plans of the younger generation. Some also enjoy a less crowded house in which they live with only one son and his family and in which they have more peace and time for rest. But various other factors, including the number of sons, the economic situation of the household, which is often related to remittances from family members abroad, as well as the number of decision-makers also impact the household division.

### HOUSES CHALLENGING NOTIONS OF HOMECOMING

Although the migrant’s home investments embody their wish to strengthen their link to their home region, their homecoming experiences are rather ambivalent. In our conversations, middle-aged migrants often recalled the times in their childhood in the 1970s and 1980s when a homecoming migrant was lavished with enormous respect and attention, and all children – including themselves – gathered to welcome the relative from abroad. Some contrasted this to their own experiences of being hardly welcomed at all nor bid farewell when they left. They explained that these days villagers were immersed in their own projects and problems and lacked the time. Migrants were often disappointed to realize that times had changed as far as their position ‘back home’ was concerned.

The homecoming experience is also closely connected to the houses migrants build for their nuclear families. Despite all material investments, an ‘empty’ house with no family members waiting to make their homecoming more pleasant is like an empty shell that creates a different picture of village life. Instead of participating in joint meals and receiving assistance with daily chores, visiting migrants are forced to organize their own household, buy groceries upon arrival to fill up their empty refrigerators and cook for themselves. Moreover, housecleaning as a chore is a source of discomfort.

Accompanying Bekime on an initial visit to her sister, who had arrived from Austria with her family a few days earlier, the teenage children conceded that due to the large size of the house, which remained uninhabited for the most part of the year, they had to get to work immediately upon their

arrival each summer to get rid of dust and dead insects before they could welcome relatives and guests. Maintaining a house that is uninhabited for most of the year can thus become burdensome. As observed in various other regions of the world, migrants not only have to worry about the uninhabited house while they are abroad but must fix and clean the house during their visits (see Bendix and Löfgren 2007: 8; Dalakoglou 2010: 772; Călinescu and Hodoiu 2013). The worry intensifies if the house is away from the village centre and thus from locally present relatives who might otherwise be willing to assume care responsibilities. There could be severe consequences for homes lacking caretakers if migrants are away for most of the year. As Bekime's sister told me, their house had been broken into while they were abroad.

Generally, there is no fear of theft in Opoja, and trust levels within the local community are so high that villagers often do not even lock their doors. The fact that thieves broke into a migrant's house suggests that migrants are partly regarded as community outsiders to whom local norms do not apply. The theft could even have been interpreted as morally legitimate, for only portable heaters were stolen, and migrant owners who visit Opoja only in the summer are not affected by the cold winters at 1,000 m above sea level, which Opoja villagers must endure in homes that generally do not have proper heating.

Houses built by migrants who have resettled abroad with their nuclear families do not necessarily function as a bridge to their relatives back home. Some villagers are even highly critical of the separate housing properties of migrants in their home villages, especially if they have no intention of permanently returning. Instead of symbolizing kinship unity and equality, such houses mark the migrants as 'selfish'. A villager critically noted that his brother had moved 'voluntarily' to Germany with his wife and children to realize 'personal goals' and earn money for himself and his nuclear family unit. He pointed out that, in contrast, the earlier generation of labour migrants (until the early 1990s) had saved a good part of their salary for family members back home. His brother used the money he earned to build a huge and modern house in Opoja, designed solely for his nuclear family, which he uses only in summer. He had decided to leave the fraternal unity and invest in his own fortune, without respecting the equality among brothers.

Today, he went on to explain, families are divided at a much earlier stage than in former times, when the ability of families with several sons to 'remain united' in a single household was considered a strength. In response to my question about potential conflicts among migrants and villagers related by kinship, he acknowledged that an unequal economic standing could cause greed and create disputes within families, especially between brothers. He explained that family members were at times jealous when one segment of the family was more affluent than the other, to the extent that brothers

even stopped speaking. He averred, however, that he loved and respected his brother irrespective of whether his brother lived in a small or big house when he returned for his holidays. And yet, instead of acknowledging that his brother's house symbolized his success, he countered: 'an empty house is a poor house'. For the house stood empty for most of the year, pointing to his brother's absence and his voluntary departure from the local community and the symbolic fraternal unity.

More generally, houses of migrants embody the ambivalence of their presence and absence and their belonging within the local community, even from afar. The ambivalence of migrants' investments in large and modern houses that they hardly use is underlined by the fact that the vast majority of migrants do not see an economic basis in the village to return for good – at least not before retirement age. Investment in houses then becomes part of a consumer culture that follows the growing trend of conspicuous consumption and that is mostly not characterized by solidarity within the larger family. Yet, a growing fraction of Opojans are invisible: Opoja migrants who decide not to invest in a house back home in Opoja. One of them is Alban, who went abroad via marriage and finished his studies there. As he intends to live in Germany for the rest of his life, he prefers to invest his money there. Especially younger migrants share his view – but many are already provided a house in Opoja by their parents.

## THE ANTAGONISMS OF HOME INVESTMENTS

One of the annual highlights for migrants from Opoja is their summer 'home' visit to their village in Opoja, and most prepare carefully for it. Buying gifts for family and relatives, mainly clothes and electronic goods and devices, is integral to preparation. With the economic liberalization and globalization since the end of the war, in Kosovo, a wider range of consumer goods, including electronic devices, have become available but are neither affordable or of good quality, which makes goods from abroad all the more desirable and appreciated by the villagers. Bringing such gifts is also an expression of care and emotional closeness. However, many migrants also feel pressured to arrive with the 'right' gifts. That this is not specific to Opoja migrants but is also found in other contexts of migrants visiting their relatives in the homeland is shown by Jasna Čapo Žmegač (2006) with Croatian migrants in the 1990s, who complained that the presents they are expected to bring must include the newest brands and the latest fashions.

Migrants' preparations for their visits 'back home' also include investments into their own appearance, like the purchase of new clothes for themselves and the children and a visit to the hairdresser, manicure and similar. Expenses

do not decrease even after they arrive, which is when a very active season of socializing begins for the migrants and the villagers, mainly among relatives. Migrants invite family members and friends for drinks at various coffee bars or to other locations or into their homes in Opoja and in turn visit them. Investments in special social events and celebrations commemorating birthdays, anniversaries and especially wedding celebrations 'back home' are common, and they help to (re-)establish family and kinship ties, as most guests are related by consanguineal or affinal ties (for wedding festivals, see Chapter 6).

During his recent summer visit, Qerim invited all 'close' family members – especially the families of his two brothers and of his two male cousins, who were all living in the same *mahalla* – to a picnic in the mountains on the day before Ramadan. The group of about thirty people spent the entire day grilling meat, and they even brought cradles along to ensure their infants and toddlers slept intermittently. As he spoke to me about the picnic, occasionally showing me photos, Qerim said that these moments warmed his heart and allowed him to feel he was finally home, and he was thus happy to cover all the expenses for the picnic. He said he enjoys being home, in the circle of his relatives, where he spent his childhood, and it is the place his heart longs for. He went on: 'I miss it in Germany – that is, to go out with my family, to spend together a day outside.' Being at home in Opoja, being with the family and spending money were closely linked.

As also observed by Robert Pichler (2009b) for Albanian migrants in Northern Macedonia, many migrants, especially women, also participate in the numerous weddings that are mainly celebrated in the summer months (see Chapter 6). In fact, their participation in weddings and other family festivals as well as their visits to relatives are among the dominant experiences of being 'back home'. Some migrants even partake in 'wedding marathons', attending up to five to ten weddings during their visit. This is not uncommon for rural communities where family social security is largely based on migration, as is the case in rural Romania, where migrants sometimes claimed to have attended as many as twenty weddings during their summer visits home (Călinescu and Hodoiu 2013), or migrants from rural Kyrgyzstan, who invested in large weddings during their home visits (Rubinov 2014). In Opoja, various migrants, especially those who were on a *Duldung* and could not return 'home' for many years, underscored their longing for such family gatherings and rituals. Apart from weddings, they also celebrated other life-stage ceremonies within the family and village community settings, including the circumcision (*syneti*) for boys. Forty-year-old Nderim told me, for example, that he had decided to combine the *syneti* ceremony of his two sons with the sons of his brothers in his home village, in the circle of the wider family, even if that meant he had to cover a significant portion of the overall expenses.

The longing for intense quality time within the circle of family members partly relates to diminished family life within nuclear households and limited personal interactions with other compatriots from Opoja abroad. Mostly, the number of migrants from Opoja living in a certain locality abroad is simply too small; Linz, however, is referred to as 'small Opoja'. Still, everyday life is so busy with work and family obligations that many migrants have no time for socializing with the community regularly. Others, especially migrants with higher education, maintain a certain distance to other families from Opoja to avoid the community's pressure to conform to patriarchal gender norms that tend to transgress state borders. In this way, they also establish boundaries towards fellow migrants from Opoja (see Chapter 7).

Migrants whose legal and economic position abroad is relatively secure do not necessarily rely as much on (strong) translocal networks. But often they still maintain translocal subjectivities: the translocal dimension is vital to their identity, and they constantly contrast their life abroad with the life in Opoja (for general considerations, see Dahinden 2014b). For forty-year-old Ylber, who lives with his wife and three teenage children in a nuclear household in Vienna, life abroad is good but boring. Over and above his regular job, like many other male migrants he also works privately for extra income to pay for investments in Opoja and Vienna. Reflecting on life in Vienna, Ylber said that he is content to enjoy a sense of security and to make a good living, but the days and weeks look alike; everything is predictable, with no room for manoeuvre due to his many obligations. He looks forward to holidays in Kosovo, where life is less structured and where he can relax while socializing with peers, family and relatives.

Like Ylber, various middle-aged migrants draw a stark contrast between life back home – in Opoja – and life abroad, especially in attitudes towards their family and their readiness to spend money. Back home, in Opoja, they readily spend money on socializing with a wider circle of family and friends or on house building activities. In contrast, the everyday life in the migration destinations abroad is marked by (hard) work and a withdrawal into the nuclear family to save money. After finally receiving his work permit and finding a relatively well-paid job, 45-year-old Qerim initially set the goal of saving up to 1,000 euros each month to renovate, rebuild and furnish his house in his home village, even if that meant living as modestly as possible in a one-room flat with his wife and child:

We save a lot of money abroad . . . I mean, in Germany, I do not have so much time for social activities. For many years, I never went for a coffee. I thought I better drink my coffee at home. This costs me three cents, while outside it costs two euros. Or food. We never go out for dinner.



Many migrants from Opoja only have to spend a small part of their income on food abroad, as they buy groceries in one of the larger discount stores at a cheaper rate. In contrast, Kosovo families typically spend a large part of their income on food and non-alcoholic beverages; in 2016 this was 42 per cent. In order to save for house building and other investments in Opoja, Qerim also took care of all home renovations by himself and frequented sales to buy clothes and household equipment. Other everyday saving strategies, especially among middle-aged migrants, include low-cost housing abroad. Thus, many migrants live in rather small, sub-standard flats with older fittings and fixtures than in the houses they build in Opoja, which they only use for a few weeks every year. The cramped housing conditions and the urge to save money again influence their social life abroad, as it restricts the possibility of inviting other relatives and acquaintances from abroad or visiting them. Forty-five-year-old Veton, who lives in Essen, recalled visiting his cousin Qerim in Frankfurt on his return trip from Kosovo. Qerim's family had to be split up to accommodate him and his family in Qerim's tiny one-room apartment. The women remained in Qerim's apartment, and the men were sent to Qerim's friends. Qerim again explained that he did not visit his brother in Northern Germany much due to the high cost of travel and the cost of gifts, since one cannot arrive empty-handed. The high savings goals impinge on their everyday life and limit their socializing, especially when that entails long-distance travel and overnight stays. Instead, migrants wait to see one another in their home region in Kosovo. For example, Qerim and Veton see each other frequently as next-door neighbours in Opoja on their annual summer visits.

### FROM ASYMMETRIES OF STATUS AND EXPECTATIONS TO FRICTIONS AND RELOCATIONS

The building of nice houses or buying gifts for relatives and paying for social activities 'back home', at times stretching beyond their financial capabilities, enhances the migrants' social status in Opoja and often belies their life abroad. Many migrants who went abroad in the 1990s as young adults only had limited access to the labour market and/or could only take up low-paid blue-collar jobs in the cleaning services or at a factory, as their degree certificates were not recognized. Still, as argued already extensively by Mirjana Morokvasic (1987), Nina Glick Schiller et al. (1995), Boris Nieswand (2011) and Remus G. Anghel (2013), the low social status as well as failed aspirations and societal marginalization abroad sometimes even contributes to their willingness to remain connected with their home region. That is also true for some of the migrants from Opoja. Investments in Opoja serve to create social status in the home context when such a goal is blocked in the

receiving countries, and to create notions of belonging when experiences abroad are marked by disappointments and struggles.

At the same time, the limited avenues for social mobility abroad can limit the migrants' opportunities to invest in projects and achieve a certain status 'back home'. Qerim, who could not find a stable job abroad for a long time and received social transfer payments, complained about his inability to buy a new car, specifically because that impacted his status in Kosovo, where migrants typically show off their flashy cars during their visits. As long as he received social transfer payments, Qerim was also not eligible to invite family members from Kosovo for a visit, if only for touristic reasons or to take up undocumented work. That affected his family relations in the village, for he lacked the asset that ranked very high among kin members (Carling 2008).

While migrants earning low wages or receiving social benefits are unable to upgrade their status abroad and feel that their aspirations for a better life for themselves cannot be fulfilled, in Opoja they tend to disguise their difficult situation abroad and are rarely critical of their new homeland because their status as beneficiaries of a Western lifestyle is an asset that the young generation in the villages in Opoja aspires to. During conversations with relatives in the home villages in Kosovo, they often stressed their success and highlighted the high salaries they and others can earn abroad. Cleaners working for the city administration do not specify their exact job position, stating only that they work for the city council. Undocumented workers concentrate on the positive side and keep other stories to themselves, also because no one asks about the details.

But this positive picture of 'the glorious West' also raises the expectations villagers have towards migrants and their possibilities to finance necessities or social activities. This could be the expectation of being invited to a (fully financed) holiday to the seaside in Albania – often nurtured by reminiscing about joint trips to the seaside in previous years – or having their various expenses covered in Opoja. Migrants are aware of such expectations, which many try to fulfil. In most cases, however, financial investments are related to creating basic social security for family members at home. On his annual visits with his wife and three children every summer, Nderim, for example, covers the unpaid bills of his mother and two brothers in the neighbouring grocery shop, pays for car and house repairs or also bills related to health care. Ultimately, migrants are willing to spend a considerable amount of money on their family members back home in order to provide them with a secure base or even to establish greater material equality among family members. But, as Jørgen Carling (2008) writes, based on the asymmetries of information and expectations between migrants and non-migrants, migrants are partly also insecure about whether the care they provide and the money they spend has fulfilled the expectations of relatives at home. In some

cases, asymmetries in money spending and expectations in this regard on both sides lead to hidden tensions between migrants and non-migrants, which become palpable during visits home and counteract the idealized image of a harmonious family home.

Packing their holidays with social events, as well as with spending sprees to meet everyone's demands, including their own, migrants sometimes find vacations stressful and exhausting. This is exacerbated by the long drives to Opoja, ranging from 1,000 km (Vienna to Opoja) to 2,000 km (Hamburg to Opoja) or more (from Sweden), as flying is rather expensive and often not an option for family travel. In order to rest from their 'home visit' in Kosovo, many migrants desist from spending their entire vacation in Opoja and depart earlier, to have some days to themselves before returning to work. Others divide their time between the village and the Albanian seaside. While some invite close relatives from Opoja to join them for their seaside vacation (Kadriu 2017), others take a break from the intense family life in the village and the exhausting travel, keep to themselves and relax with their nuclear family. In many cases, migrants only spend ten days with their village relatives (instead of the normal two- to three-week holidays in salaried positions). In the short time they spend with their relatives, they attend a flurry of social events and invest more money than usual, especially in gifts. If at all, only women with small children, who are not engaged in wage labour, spend the entire summer in Opoja, often for the sake of their children, who are happy to stay. They then stay with the husband's family for some time, but they often especially enjoy the time spent within the fold of their own natal families in their parental home villages.

The accelerated pace of social events in Opoja every summer, which goes hand in hand with the reduced time migrants spend in the villages, arouses the ire and criticism of the villagers. Some villagers say that migrants, especially those who went abroad as teenagers or children, need stimulation because they get bored easily and often indulge in consumerism – for example, drink coffee three times a day (instead of a small cup once a day, as local people do), dine out and commit to many other social activities in Opoja. Others criticize the migrants for their 'lavish' spending in Opoja, as well as for bragging about their life, although villagers sometimes suspect that migrants are merely compensating for their underdog status abroad. More critical voices can be heard complaining that some migrants disrespect Kosovo's traditional or customary code of social conduct. They blame them for bad habits, like throwing garbage out of the car as soon as they cross the border over to Kosovo, suggesting they behave as they wish because of their money, or dangerous speeding and overtaking others on local roads, which could cause accidents. These stereotypes underlie the villagers' claim that migrants are uncultured or even harmful to the local village community. In our conver-

sations, this gave rise to questions directed at me as to why ‘we’ (the Germans), who claim to be civilized and to even have an ‘advanced civilisation’, did not manage to educate ‘them’ (the migrants) more appropriately despite their long stay abroad, or why migrants forget their good manners when they cross the border to Kosovo, as if ‘civilization’ could be discarded at will. With these notions, villagers resort to discourses of Western superiority to devalue migrants and to place their code of conduct above that of the migrants. In fact, the villagers consider some of the migrants to be particularly conservative, as if they have not developed since moving abroad, whereas their own communities – and Kosovar society more generally – and they themselves have been developing and embracing modernity and change.

Migrants, however, engage in similar forms of reassessment and boundary drawing. They see that some villagers find their behaviour inappropriate and that their many challenges abroad are not fully understood, which alienates them from village life and their relatives in rural Kosovo. They similarly regard their home region as unorganized or even backward and reproduce a West-centred taxonomy of progressivity and underdevelopment. A middle-aged migrant being annoyed about the behaviour on the roads exclaimed, for example, that Albanians are ‘*ein dreckiges Volk*’ (a dirty nation). Thus, migrants increasingly construct boundaries between Albanians in Kosovo, who they consider ‘uncivilized’ or even ‘dirty’, and nations in Western Europe, which they perceive as more ‘civilized’. They do so although abroad, in Western countries, they are regularly seen as Albanians – and/or refer to themselves as such and are thus subject to the same negative stereotypes they ascribe to villagers in Opoja and to Albanians in general. This, in turn, underscores their own fragmented identity and the racist devaluation they have experienced and in part also internalized in the countries of immigration (see also Dahinden 2014a).

### ‘HOMECOMING’ OF MIGRANT CHILDREN

Many migrants regularly visit their home village so that their children can develop a close connection with the region. Nderim, for example, asserted that while he could spend his money on luxury holidays with the whole family at a nice resort in Turkey or Egypt, he wants his children to be close to his home culture and family. In a similar vein, Alban visits Opoja each summer mainly so that his daughter ‘knows where she is from’. The costly visits ‘home’ also represent an investment in the future of the children. Put differently, the children play an indirect yet important role in building translocal relations, as investments in home visits are often made ‘for the sake of the children’ – to connect them to their roots.

Many migrants believe they have succeeded and claim their children – regardless of where they were born – are excited about spending their holidays in Opoja and feel closely connected to it. Like their parents, various migrant children I spoke to painted their time in the village in bright colours. Contrasting their summer visits to their life abroad, in the immigration context, they addressed the daily family dynamics: several claimed that their life ‘abroad’ is marked by a lack of parental time and attention, with parents very busy with earning money, while life in Opoja is organized mainly around family and the members with whom they stay or visit. In addition, many have close relationships with cousins of their own age and look forward to seeing them again each summer. Their relations to Opoja thus also depend on being integrated into a large family and sometimes also a complex household, often in contrast with their nuclear family abroad. The optimistic view of migrant children towards Opoja is partially linked to the quality of their holiday time spent in Opoja, which many regard as cheerful. Having almost no duties or obligations, they often spend their days as they wish, while they see life abroad through the lens of school and homework.

Twelve-year-old Bartha, who moved to Linz, Austria, at the age of seven, talked about the difference between her life in Linz and her experiences in Kosovo as she sat next to me during our twenty-hour bus ride mid-summer from Vienna to Opoja. She was filled with excitement about spending her holidays in Opoja, stressing that life there is, in many respects, more enjoyable for her, as in Linz she lacks time to meet with friends outside of school, and even time spent with family is minimal. She stays at afterschool care until 5.00 PM. every school day, as her mother often works from early afternoon until nine in the evening as a cleaner in a hospital. She does not like the fact that she does not see her mother until bedtime, and her father, who starts work at 7.00 AM, is tired by the time he returns and just manages to heat up the meal her mother cooks in the morning. Bardha’s father works occasionally during weekends, to earn extra money, which makes weekends often even more boring than schooldays, as Bardha is left to her own devices.

In contrast, Bardha experiences her time in the village as fulfilling and exciting, not least because she spends a lot of time with her cousins. In fact, Bardha and her family stay with her grandfather, who heads the household of his four married sons, their wives and many children, who are Bardha’s cousins. During her holidays, Bardha shares a room with her cousins, and they spend the days together. Bardha also likes the fact that she can stay awake until late, often nearly until midnight, while bedtime in Germany is 8.00 PM. She insists on spending the entirety of her summer holidays, about eight weeks, in Opoja, and had discussed this at length with her mother, who would rather return earlier. Bardha’s enthusiastic view of village life is quite

common among children of her age. As summer approaches, some count down the days before they get to return to the village.

But not all the migrant children I met were excited about Opoja. Some children and teenagers expressed a more critical viewpoint with respect to village life and had greater difficulties connecting with villagers and relatives. This is especially the case when their family house accommodates only their nuclear unit, or when no relatives of the same age are around. Eleven-year-old Fitore, who was born in Germany and whose parents have university degrees, said that the time she spends in the village is rather boring, as she does not have many friends there. In Germany, in contrast, she has many school friends, whom she meets after school.

The viewpoints of migrant girls about the village are also coloured by their gendered positionings abroad. Teenage girls, who tend to be restricted in their movements abroad, as their parents fear that a too liberal attitude might encourage them to enter a love relationship too easily or too early, sometimes enjoy the possibility of moving around more freely in Opoja, as parents have less concerns about the dangers and may even welcome their daughter falling in love with a young man from the home region. This contributes to a rescaling of locations – meaning that for these female migrant teenagers, their home region becomes a place of many possibilities in contrast to the environs they live in abroad. However, migrant girls with more freedom abroad, who pursue vocational training and take up employment after secondary school, tend to be critical about the lack of economic opportunities open to Opoja girls and women, not to mention the restrictions to their movements. Twenty-year-old Maja, who worked at a fashion store at one of the large Western brands admired by local youth, had distanced herself from village life even further. She said that life in Opoja is very different from life in Austria, and while she enjoys being ‘home’ in Kosovo and feels close to her cousins, she ‘cannot stand’ being in Opoja for more than two or three weeks in a row, as she feels constricted and overwhelmed by the village and family life.

The differences in life experiences and perspectives of the teenagers in Opoja and abroad also lead to negative stereotyping and boundary drawing between the local youth and the migrant youth. Teenagers living abroad are not used to the conservative attitudes of some of their peers living in Opoja, while Opoja teens view negatively migrant teens showing ‘too liberal’ attitudes in Opoja. Emina and Arbnora, sixteen and eighteen, respectively, are a case in point. They followed their parents to a medium-sized town in Austria seven years ago, where they were allowed to join a sport club and started vocational training after finishing secondary school. Emina and Arbnora return to their home village in Kosovo each year for their holidays, where they

stay in the household of their two uncles. As they do not have many cousins in their age group in Opoja, they spend a considerable part of their time in the village on Facebook and other social media, where they have more than 1,000 friends, among them some from Opoja. Although Emina and Arbnora try to respect what they perceive as local gender norms, their Facebook pages exposed much about themselves and their life abroad. Through their Facebook presence, they were subject to diverse reactions from village teenagers, both on and offline. The girls said that some local boys seek to attract their attention and throw their phone numbers at them when they walk down the street; others verbally harass them. This again makes them critical about life in the village and the gender relations there. At the same time, however, teenagers like Emina and Arbnora also challenge the local gender norms and open new possibilities to their peers in Opoja to imagine their life differently.

In contrast to the teenage girls, teenage boys are inevitably less restricted, both abroad and in the village (see Chapter 1). Like adult male migrants, younger male migrants spend the days with their peers at coffee bars or cruise around in their father's car, which is often an appreciated brand. With the possibility of spending more money than the local youth, they enjoy inviting their friends for drinks, and they can also go to Prizren or visit a swimming pool near Prizren without much ado. Male migrants thus have an easier time accepting gender norms and clearly enjoy being 'back home' even as they get older.

Still, even those male and female young migrants who are excited about life in Opoja admit that life abroad has its advantages and that life in Opoja can be restrictive. Bardha contrasted the nice bathrooms abroad to the stink of the outdoor toilets in Opoja, which some houses lacking a proper sewage system still use, or the glossy shopping malls in Linz, so 'much more modern' and 'nicer' than in Kosovo (however, huge and modern shopping centres have been built close to urban areas especially since 2010). Other young migrants, including migrant children, are critical of their own parents and relatives and, more generally, people in Opoja and in Kosovo, whom they perceive as backward. One migrant in his mid-twenties even told me, nervously, that he 'gets crazy' when he observes his father (a migrant himself) and other relatives back home, who are in his view incapable of learning and behaving 'in the right manner'. Following this logic, these young migrants try to distinguish themselves from the villagers and sometimes from other migrants and family members who are a generation older than themselves by disparaging the habits and 'culture' of Albanians. In doing so, they overlook the fact that many of them themselves have been confronted with such negative stereotypes, common in Western countries, about Albanians in the immigrant society and do not seem to be aware of the fact that by attributing

these negative stereotypes to Albanians they are helping to perpetuate them (see on similar processes among Pakistani migrants Charsley and Bolognani 2016).

Again, villagers are not unanimous in their positive views about the new generation of migrants visiting from abroad. Unlike the earlier migrant workers, known in this region as *gurbetçi*, in reference to a century-old mode of migration to earn money for the family 'back home', who were considered integral to the economic stability of families in Opoja, this new generation of migrants from the 1990s, and especially their children, yet another generation, are considered as 'coming from outside' (*jashtë*), and their belonging to the region is questioned and must be confirmed through multiple actions – symbolic and material. Within Kosovo, migrants are sometimes also called by the German term '*Ausländer*' (foreigners), suggesting differences in membership and marking migrants as not belonging to the national (and local) community. Alternatively, they are also called '*Schatzi*', a derogatory use of the German word '*Schatz*' (treasure), the German equivalent of 'darling' or 'sweetheart' (Behar and Wählich 2012; Paca 2015: 8–14). In Kosovo, '*Schatzi*' is widely used to refer to Albanian migrants from a rural background who, despite migration, allegedly remain 'uncultured' or lose their 'culture' through migration. They are belittled, as Dafina Paca (2015: 11–14) writes, even though they are simultaneously the 'cash cows' of Kosovo, who send remittances and invest and are expected to 'pick up the tab' during their stay back home. This boundary drawing affects the identities and images of both villagers and migrants, and it became clear that parental attempts to facilitate their children to connect with village life are not always successful.

## CONCLUSION

Migrants are the lead investors in houses in Opoja. What they are looking for is not just housing but material manifestations of their social relationships in a physical place that connects to their past ties to the community, family and kinship, and at the same time represents a promise for the future. Investments in housing are, however, strongly gendered and tied to a specific generation. Especially male, middle-aged migrants who left as teenagers or young adults in the 1990s invest in a house in Opoja, as they often yearn for Opoja as representing a lost past and where they want to return to after retirement. While their life abroad is dominated by work to save for their trips and their real estate investments back home, Opoja, on the other hand, represents a place where they spend money and enjoy their leisure time, and where they can dream of a 'good life' after retirement. Those who can afford it build enormous houses, often in a Western style with modern equipment –



not least to create a place for their children and especially their son(s), and as such take care of their children's connection to the place and family. The newly built houses with the technical innovations testify their success abroad and their modernity and advancement, as well as their plans to return to the village.

In Opoja, houses are also markers of the male migrant's family and kinship ties, and of care and solidarity within this family network. The choice of location and the size of the houses may emphasize patrilocality and the close and cooperative kinship relations between male family members – often between brothers – and thus have a gendered, inter- and intragenerational dimension. Many male migrants who live in nuclear households abroad invest in joint family homes with their brothers and enjoy sharing a common household with their close relatives while in Opoja. A special architectonic feature exemplifying fraternal unity are the many twin, triplet, quadruplet or even quintuplet houses dominating the landscape in Opoja region, as in rural Kosovo in general. They create a perception of equality, family unity and respect among brothers and are a sign of brotherly care and selflessness, as those abroad often co-finance the house investments for their brother(s) in Opoja. But within the house building projects, brotherly unity is also contested, as households are divided, and material equality does not necessarily imply cooperation beyond the house building project. Moreover, many such houses remain empty for extended periods, and notions of solidarity and unity are not necessarily linked to everyday life or other activities beyond the dwelling.

An increasing number of migrants also build houses for their nuclear families in the village without seeing to it that the brothers have equal housing conditions. Often, these houses assume distinctive forms, expressing the status of migrants. However, such houses do not necessarily help them to socially integrate into the kin and village community. Instead, some villagers, and often also close kin members, view individual house building as selfish and detrimental to solidarity. This has provoked a certain antipathy of the villagers towards these migrants and has led to their social marginalization in the village or to a distancing within families. But patrilocality and brotherly solidarity are also partially contested by the wives of male migrants, who may prefer to build a house for their nuclear household at the margins of the (husband's family) village or prefer not to invest in a house in Opoja at all.

Beyond the controversial investments in houses as the material locus of the patrilocal family and as an embodiment of their roots in the village, migrants also choose other ways of investing in and caring for kin members back home; for instance, by bringing presents and inviting relatives for coffee and other social activities. Again, ambivalent and partly contradictory social and temporal processes are at stake in which locality matters and the

two locations, Opoja and the places of residence in the receiving country, are often seen as binary opposites but are complementary within the life of migrants. Many middle-aged migrants focus on their work and saving abroad and limit their social contact in the migration context, leading a family life that is mainly confined to the nuclear household. In contrast, their time in Opoja is characterized by their generous spending and plenty of free time, where they enjoy the larger family setup and the manifold family and kin gatherings with parents, siblings, cousins, aunts and uncles, nieces and nephews and other relatives. Yet such 'home visits' are not free of stress and fatigue for the migrants, who will often cut short the time spent in Opoja but without limiting their activities or spending.

Moreover, migrants' investments are also directed at their children and have thus also a clear intergenerational dimension. Migrants invest in house building and other social activities as a way to establish a lasting link to the home region and to sustain the patrilocal family line beyond their own generation, for their children, especially their sons. With their material and social investments and activities back home, many migrant children develop deep affection for Opoja and their relatives there and idealize it as a place with the feel of 'home'. But not all children are positive about this 'homecoming' ritual – which also depends on their social positioning abroad. Adapting to dominant discourses of the West, for many, Opoja comes across as 'backward' and 'regressive', while they themselves live in societies that they perceive as modern. That also has a gendered component, as especially girls criticize the patriarchal gender norms restricting their movements in Opoja once they reach puberty. This colours their view of Opoja and prevents them from imagining living there permanently. In short, home investments are meant to foster or restore migrants' ties to their villages and their families living there and are an expression of self- and family care. They create links between migrants and villagers along kinship, family, gender and generational lines, but are not without controversy. Migrant investments can also create divisions and transform the family and community relations – not least on the basis of a greater need for individuality and an increased emphasis on consumption and status that accompanies neoliberalism. In this respect, these investments demonstrate the migrants' desire to be united with family in Opoja as much as the transformations taking place within the translocal family network.