



Introduction

Self-Sufficiency as Reality and as Myth

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Our comparative study of six sites in postsocialist Eurasia investigates the ideals and practices of the house economy and self-sufficiency. These two themes have a long history in European thought and custom. But we were surprised at their continuing prominence in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Our larger research project, as described in Volume 1 of this series, focused on economy and ritual; however, the economy of the house emerged so prominently in the ethnography that we felt compelled to probe more deeply into its description and analysis. Because the six study areas were reputedly in transition from socialist to market economies, we were initially surprised at the research results. Socialism supposedly integrated rural households into a wider industrial division of labor, thereby superseding the household as the basic unit of production and consumption. As for capitalist market economies, they too are supposed to promote an increased division of labor so that even where farming persists on a family basis, it becomes capitalized and the old labor-intensive forms of household production are superseded. These models are not entirely false, but in the course of our project we found ideals of household self-sufficiency to be of major importance. Studying this historical moment illuminates not only postsocialist transformations but also central features of human economy in general.

No economy, whether at the level of the house, community, or nation, can be self-sufficient. House economies always exist within a larger social and political order. The practices and images nurtured in the house are also found at other institutional levels of society, which contributes to blurring the very definition of “the house economy.”

We identify a number of features of the house economy. They do not form a fixed set but nonetheless cohere as a model of activity. This contemporary existence of the house economy is provocative because it is situated at the opposite pole to the market, which is the dominating institution in

almost all current economies. By focusing on the house in its many forms we are not only responding to the ethnographic data but also questioning economic theory that focuses on markets alone and applies the logic of maximization to every human activity. From an efficiency perspective, social practices, such as reciprocity, lending a hand, and sharing, either are not part of the real economy or must have some hidden functional capacity that furthers self-interest. We argue, instead, for an institutionalist approach that prioritizes social relationships, norms, and ideations and shows how needs are met at different spaces of economy. If economic activity refers to securing human livelihoods in the fullest sense, we need to emphasize yet again that a great deal of everyday behavior contradicts the model of *homo economicus*. Sociality and mutuality are often valued in themselves, and not merely as a means toward satisfying private preferences. Our first volume demonstrated that ritual is an integral part of these and cannot be reduced to considerations of economic efficiency or inefficiency. The long-term mutuality and solidarity highlighted in ritual are in a dialectical tension with the short-term logic of rational choice, optimization, and individualism as exemplified in markets. This tension between mutuality revealed in the house and impersonal relations cultivated in markets characterizes all human economies (Gudeman 2008).

The theme of mutuality, which we employ in the context of the house economy, has in recent years been increasingly elaborated by anthropologists in the context of kinship. Marshall Sahlins (2013) has drawn on this literature and defined kinship's quality or constitution as "mutuality of being." Our perspective is different, for we see mutuality as a broader notion than kinship alone. It is nurtured and nourished in the house through practical material activities and spreads widely beyond it and also beyond the domain of kinship (Gudeman 2001, 2008, 2012). Mutuality means commonality or connection with others as opposed to personal self-interest. It is expressed by sharing, reciprocity, redistribution, and related practices. For Aristotle "philia," which we feel for friends, family and other associates, means wishing well for them, not for one's own sake but for theirs, and the feeling is reciprocal. There is philia between lovers, cities, tribal members, and associates of the same religious group, among others (1984: 1380^b36–37). Philia may be viewed as one form of mutuality. Mutuality in its various forms implies a degree of empathy or the ability to see oneself in the place of the other, and perhaps to see oneself as does the other. In these implications it is very different from self-interest (unless, as some economists claim, at the risk of contradicting themselves, it is self-interested to empathize with the other). This distinction between self-interest and mutuality is typified by the contrast of calculated behavior in markets and making material life through social relationships as in the house and beyond.

Aristotle and Self-Sufficiency

Self-sufficiency is a very old idea. It lies at the heart of Aristotle's formulation of the *oikos*, the well-ordered house that was set within the community and *polis*. Market activity was in the hands of traders (*metics*) who were external to the *polis*. Keen observer and moralist, Aristotle's conception of *oikonomia* was taken up by many others: Roman writers on the *latifundia*, the Mishnah, medieval accountants, St. Thomas Aquinas, John Locke, and Karl Marx. The Aristotelian discourse influenced the workings of the medieval manor and monastery (Duby 1969; Postan 1975), as well as the house and hacienda in the New World, where it helped to shape the rural community in relation to the state (Gudeman and Rivera 1990). More recently, its influence can be detected in the expanding interdisciplinary literature on "moral economy" (Booth 1994).

Aristotle was the first to distinguish between an object's value in use and its value in exchange. This prescient vision allowed him to separate two forms of wealth acquisition, two methods for setting exchange rates, two functions of money, and two ways of acting in the economy. He did not deny the existence of a "market mentality" but asserted the ethical superiority of the communal form: group was emphasized over individual, relationships for provisioning over the acquisition of material goods, social justice over personal greed, and plurality of values over the commensuration of goods through a monetary calculus. He well knew that goods may be exchanged in pursuit of gain, but he argued for basing an economy on excellence as opposed to efficacy. For him, virtuous activity was central in maintaining material life, because it allowed for human flourishing; the self-sufficient community that promoted excellence was the greatest human bulwark against uncertainty.

Bernard Mandeville (1970 [1714]) and Adam Smith (1976 [1776]) turned this argument upside down when they urged that an enduring economy, providing not only the greatest wealth but also the greatest freedom, and benefiting the social whole, could be founded on the exercise of what had hitherto always been considered a vice, namely self-interest. Under industrial capitalism, the Aristotelian message remains profound in its negation. Today, compared to the Aristotelian vision, everything is reversed: the market is construed as liberating, the house and community are seen as constricting. Yet twist the lens again, and the Aristotelian vision of economy becomes available as a critique of the market, with its foundations in individualism, hedonism, efficiency, and rational thought. With a well-woven argument that stretches across a number of his works, Aristotle contested exactly those features of the market that have been delineated and prioritized by economists in the last two centuries.

Aristotle recognized that self-interested practices can become dominating in life, but he set these actions against excellent or virtuous behavior. His first words in the *Politics* announce the centrality of human sociability: “Every state is a community of some kind” (1984: 1252^a1). Tracing the origin of community to human nature, Aristotle urged that man is inherently a social or “political animal” (1984: 1253^a2, 1253^a30). The self-sufficient individual, living outside community, could only be a god or a beast. Drawing on a different analogy, Aristotle compared the single human to a playing piece on a board game, “a part in relation to the whole” (1984: 1253^a26–27). Outside the state, humans lack excellence and goodness, and are “full of lust and gluttony” (1984: 1253^a32–37); they look only to the endless satisfaction of material desires. Distinguishing thus between individual and community self-sufficiency, Aristotle established a vision of the human-in-community, and of community as fulfilling the totality of material and moral needs. This social perception, long anticipating the sociology of Émile Durkheim, provides the setting for his economics.

The foundation for Aristotle’s arguments about economy, which are inextricable from his social philosophy, is laid in the *Ethics*, where he urges that human satisfaction is linked to the achievement of self-sufficiency in community (1984: 1097^b14–15). Self-sufficiency means achieving completeness, but the wholeness to which Aristotle points is social, not individual: “By self-sufficient we do not mean that which is sufficient for a man by himself, for one who lives a solitary life, but also for parents, children, wife, and in general for his friends and fellow citizens, since man is sociable by nature” (1984: 1097^b9–11). Later, in the *Politics*, Aristotle presents an origin story about the self-sufficient community. He distinguishes three forms of association: the household, the village, and the *polis*. Each is a component of what follows and each displays distinctive characteristics. Formed to meet the needs of the family, the household was the first mode of association. The uniqueness of the household was temporary, because as population and families expanded, households grew into villages. “Suckled with the same milk” (1984: 1252^a18), sharing the same blood, and bound together by the morality of kinship, villagers were governed by a senior male. Eventually, the *polis* or self-sufficient community emerged. A collection of villages, the *polis* met all material needs and provided the context for the development of human excellence or flourishing.

What Aristotle considered to be the highest, best, and natural condition of a community—material self-sufficiency that combats uncertainty—is from the standpoint of modern economics the most unnatural and backward state. For him, the people of a house within a community and *polis* should not need to exchange with others from want or for gain. Aristotle offers a story that moves from inside to outside, from small to large, from

origin to florescence, from self-sufficiency and community transactions to impersonal trade, from moral transaction to amoral acquisition, and from the density of the household, whose members are “companions of the cupboard,” to the open space of unrestrained trade whose participants share nothing. With this narrative, Aristotle presented a platform for later community or moral critiques of the market from Karl Marx to Max Weber, and from Thorstein Veblen to Karl Polanyi. The work of the last and youngest of these critics had a strong direct impact on anthropology in the middle of the twentieth century. According to Polanyi, the formation of a “market society,” in which land and labor were “fictitious commodities” separated from human life, was the key to understanding the catastrophes of modern history. The “great transformation” he called for was predicated on a revival of the Aristotelian conception of the human economy, in which economy is embedded in society, and political institutions rather than “the market” are dominant (Polanyi 1957, 2001 [1944]).

Economics and the Anthropological Critique

In light of the Aristotelian vision, it is ironic that the modern discipline of economics takes its name from the Greek word *oikos*. Its premises are completely different, first under the impact of Mandeville and Smith in the eighteenth century, and later under that of the “marginalist revolution” that replaced classical political economy with a “neoclassical synthesis” from the 1870s onward (Hann and Hart 2011). As modern economists concerned themselves with highly developed commercial economies functioning on the basis of the division of labor and self-interest, it was left to historians and anthropologists to theorize “primitive economies” in very different, opposing terms. In the influential origin narrative of economic historian Karl Bücher (who grew up among farmers and artisans in nineteenth-century Hessen), our ancestors were originally impelled by the search for food on an individualist basis (*individuelle Nahrungssuche*). He considered this phase in human evolution to be “pre-economic.” According to Bücher’s typology, the first “economic stage” properly speaking was characterized by the “closed household economy” (*geschlossene Hauswirtschaft*). Taken literally, this was an easy target for twentieth century ethnographers. The most devastating criticism came from Bronislaw Malinowski, who showed that the Trobriand Islanders and their neighbors, though undoubtedly “primitive” according to the categories of that age, were capable of sustaining the complex inter-island exchange system known as *kula* (Malinowski 1922). But perhaps Bücher did not wish to be understood quite so literally. Among these Melanesian horticulturalists the gifting of surplus yams to one’s in-

laws, the ceremonial exchange of valuables in the *kula*, and the concomitant barter of utilitarian goods did not challenge the basic principle of maintaining household sufficiency (Spittler 2008: 225–226).

The professionalization of anthropology in the course of the twentieth century led ethnographers to amass vast quantities of data pertinent to self-sufficiency, though without necessarily bringing them any closer to resolving the definitional and theoretical issues. It was taken for granted in the “modernization” literature that a decline in self-provisioning was a measure of progress. The literature on “peasant societies” (a category invented in this era, as anthropologists gradually gave up their exclusive focus on the “primitive”) tended to privilege the level of the community. The rural community formed a “part society,” more or less integrated into larger societies and “great traditions” (Redfield 1956). In the later Marxist formulation of Eric Wolf, peasant households produced a surplus that was creamed off by their exploiters (1966). Where the image of the “closed corporate community” approximated economic reality, this too was the specific product of uneven development rather than an original state. Non-Marxist accounts confirmed the enduring significance of the house, sometimes deriving from adaptations to a distinctive ecological niche (Netting 1981). In other cases, such as that of the *zadruga* among the southern Slavs, strong notions of household self-sufficiency do not correspond to the realities but serve ideological and exoticizing functions during the emergence of new property systems and national identities (Todorova 1989; cf. Monova’s discussion in this volume). The importance of the house as the symbolic focus of economic life has been recognized most comprehensively in Latin America (Gudeman and Rivera 1990). It is awarded a potentially universal significance in the evolution of human social organization in the late work of Claude Lévi-Strauss (see Carsten and Hugh-Jones 1996). However, this account of “house societies” and the discussions it has generated have not paid a great deal of attention either to European societies or to the economy—two deficits that we seek to make good in this volume.

Despite accelerating globalization and neoliberal markets, it is still the case in the early twenty-first century that hundreds of millions of households produce with their own labor the greater part of the staples consumed by household members. In theorizing this very literal resilience of the household vis-à-vis the market, the work of the Russian agrarian economist Alexander Chayanov has had an extraordinary influence (Chayanov 1986 [1924-5]). Chayanov was well aware that the Russian villagers whose economy he analyzed in the precollectivization era were closely involved with a new commercial economy. To that extent, Lenin was right to theorize the penetration of capitalism as a cause of social differentiation and rural impoverishment (1956 [1899]). But Chayanov argued that this social

differentiation (observable in statistics recording acreage) was due not so much to new processes of class formation as to the internal processes of the household in the course of its developmental cycle. The household was caught up in a wider economy, but it did not respond to market signals in the same way as a capitalist firm. Rising prices, which would usually lead a firm to expand production in order to increase profits, might have the opposite effect on a peasant household pursuing its own notion of flourishing rather than profit. This household might be expected to curtail work (considered to be unmitigated drudgery) as soon as its cash targets had been met. So long as the household was the basic unit of both production and consumption, the dynamics of its production process (in terms of labor intensity and/or area cultivated) were thus shaped by considerations grounded in the internal ratio of workers to consumers and not by wider class struggles.

Chayanov's elaboration of a house model for the Russian countryside was a heroic achievement, especially when one considers that he spent the last five years of his life in a labor camp before being executed (Shanin 1986). It inspired Marshall Sahlins to coin the notion of a "domestic mode of production" and to explore its workings in a range of "tribal" societies (despite his distaste for the "marginalist" economic language in which Chayanov presented his arguments) (Sahlins 1972: 88). The Chayanovian model has been productive in peasant studies and economic anthropology more generally (Durrenberger 1984), as well as in rural sociology (Galeski 1972).

But this approach also has its weaknesses. Sahlins himself noted contradictions and raised the Aristotelian question of public goods in a system grounded in "anarchy and dispersion" (1972: 95–99). Marxists complained that class polarization and wider networks of oppression were blended out of the model. Feminists complained that Chayanov never engaged closely with patriarchal power relations inside the household. Indeed, he treated the house as a "black box" in much the same way that many economists have traditionally approached the firm, without paying attention to the myriad factors that lead actual behavior to deviate from what a mechanistic application of the worker-to-consumer ratio would predict. For example, instead of working harder when they had more mouths to feed inside their households, adults might seek help among kin or in wider networks of friends and cooperating partners. The principle of self-provisioning might be expanded, to include transfers of food and/or labor to those in need; or it might be infringed by sending "surplus" youth to work for patrons. But such deviations would not constitute evidence that the self-sufficiency of the house had been displaced as an *ideal*, a standard to be maintained and even vigorously asserted in the course of daily life, as in displays of generous

hospitality. The members of our research group delved into these and other discrepancies. Several were struck by the seeming contradiction between a decline in “real” autarky, in terms of self-provisioning, and an emphatic assertion that the members of the household were pulling together in the cause of self-sufficiency, even when farm work had become insignificant and the resources needed by the household were gleaned in very different domains of the commercial economy and the state. In cases such as these, the researchers probed the extent to which disparate resources amassed by individuals were in fact pooled and redistributed in nonmarket ways.

The Socialist Culture Area

Models and practices of self-sufficiency are prominent in rural ideologies throughout the world, including the ex-socialist “culture area” in which our project was based. In this section we look more closely at how these have played out materially and immaterially before, during, and after the experience of Marxist-Leninist socialism.

In the countryside of Eastern Europe in the era of imperialisms (Tsarist, Ottoman, Habsburg), self-sufficiency at the level of the household was for centuries stymied by the dominance of large estates (sometimes called the manorial economy and comparable to the *latifundia* of Latin America). Relatively complex divisions of labor at this level coexisted with production and consumption in the framework of the house. A degree of autarky was promoted at the level of the community, but markets were also important, both for local and regional commerce, and for long-distance trade. By the twentieth century, following the abolition of serfdom, the great estates were condemned as socially unjust and economically inefficient by populist movements. Alexander Chayanov was their outstanding theoretician. Ideologies of “land to the tiller” underpinned the distributive land reforms of presocialist governments.

These reforms had very limited success. Many of the new independent farms brought into existence were not viable in the prevailing conditions, which did not yet offer the rural population viable alternatives in the form of urban, industrial jobs. The consequences of this uneven capitalist development were demonstrated following both world wars. From the early 1950s socialist industrialization was designed to remedy this historic backwardness. The nationalization of industrial property in the cities was accompanied by the collectivization of land in the countryside. The socialist onslaught on the self-sufficient household was a “form of integration” reminiscent of those that Karl Polanyi (2001 [1944]) characterized in other contexts of centralized power as “redistribution.” Arguably, it was consonant

with the Aristotelian primacy of the political over commercial exchange. The agricultural sector became an integral part of the centrally planned economy. Where state farms were established, the members of rural households were supposed to approximate factory workers in the cities. Even where collective farms were established (a lower form of property according to socialist ideology), the requirement to work for the socialist brigade in return for receiving a more or less regular income stream ensured a sharp break with the traditional autonomy of the smallholder.

This was the theory. In fact, significant elements of household self-provisioning persisted almost everywhere. In some regions, due to the chaos that accompanied the establishment of the new socialist institutions, it gained in significance compared with the marketized economy of the presocialist era. The suppression of private property rights was almost universally unwelcome. Socialist collectives did bring significant investments to the rural sector, and in many regions they laid the foundations for an extraordinary increase in living standards (Hann et al. 2003). Ideologically, however, they were seen as destructive of a moral order, one that had its own ideology of modernization based on *embourgeoisement* or the transformation of peasants into capitalist farmers.

In a larger perspective, Soviet socialism, seen as an “alternative modernity,” was the principal countercurrent to the institutions of market economy and liberal democracy as they developed in the West. The principle of the market was heavily circumscribed and, contrary to the original internationalist ideals of the communist movement, the Soviet Union under Stalin was effectively compelled to pursue “socialism in one country.” When this plan was modified, central planning allowed for some regional specialization and for exchange between socialist countries. The creation of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON, 1949–1991) led to a limited division of labor in key industries across the Soviet bloc. In the era of *détente* in the 1970s, several socialist states stepped up trade with Western countries while beginning to borrow heavily (and unwisely) from the capitalist enemies. Others (notably Romania) struggled to pay off foreign debts and reassert a principle of national autarky. Even today, long after the collapse of COMECON, a principle of autarky and self-reliance, with a suspicion of markets worthy of Aristotle, is prominent in the world’s few remaining socialist states (notably, North Korea).

Reliance on “rational redistribution” was the prime feature of the economies that practiced “actually existing socialism,” but it was never the only form of integration, and markets never disappeared altogether. For example, while state officials determined that allocation of new apartments in cities and those rights of occupation tended to be inherited within families, village houses and dachas could still be bought and sold. Markets in

consumer goods improved greatly in most countries in the last decades of socialism. As for the other key principle in Polanyi's typology of forms of integration, namely, reciprocity, it too showed great resilience in the rural sector. Reciprocity was also to be found in the under-urbanized cities where mutual prestations in the grey (or black, underground) sector were essential in dealing with the gaps and shortages resulting from the imperfect meshing of redistribution and markets.

Alongside varying combinations of socialist redistribution, limited market exchange and interpersonal reciprocity, self-sufficiency never lost its importance. What Karl Polanyi identified in his early work (Polanyi 2001 [1944]) as the principle of householding remained more conspicuous in the rural sector due to self-provisioning. In some countries, households formed a successful symbiosis with collectivist institutions. The former concentrated on labor-intensive activities on the "household plot," while the latter allowed for economies of scale and the adoption of new technologies (see Vidacs 2014; this volume, chapter 1). This householding was quite different from the Chayanovian ideal type, in which the household has no regular source of wage income. Nonetheless, socialists could plausibly claim to be implementing the Aristotelian ideal of human flourishing, or the populist ideal of the good life at a supra-household level.

In some variants of Hungarian collectivization, the most flexible in the region, the old unity of house production and consumption persisted in the sense that all members were free to remain full-time smallholders if they wished (Hann 1980). However, even here most households had at least one member earning wages or a pension, which gave scope to purchase goods with cash and eventually to produce in more specialized ways for socialist markets instead of self-provisioning. Yet the material benefits brought by the new divisions of labor of the more successful variants of collectivization could not disguise the fact that it cut deeply into cherished norms of private ownership and self-sufficiency. Idioms of the latter were nourished by the fact that household members spent a high proportion of their "leisure time" engaged in the production of commodities, using labor-intensive methods that had not changed greatly. One might buy bread in the new cooperative store rather than bake at home, but meat and vegetables still derived overwhelmingly from activities in the backyard. The first generations of socialist workers felt that, when they returned to help village kin at peak periods and in return took quantities of pickles and smoked meat back to the city, they too were still participating in the old moral economy of self-sufficiency (for the case of Bulgaria, see Smollett 1989).

The sudden disintegration of socialism brought a collapse of socialist workplaces in both town and countryside. The old ideologies of the peasant

smallholder political parties were revived, but they proved to be no more viable than they had been in the 1940s. After protracted privatization procedures, capitalized family farming in the Western manner still remains the exception on the postsocialist countryside. Successful entrepreneurs (often the old power holders in new guise) depend on personal links to national elites and access to EU subsidies. Under these conditions, literal self-sufficiency in terms of self-provisioning tends to be the last resort of the dispossessed (Leonard and Kaneff 2002). The ideals of self-sufficiency have persisted and proliferated everywhere in these societies, however. As the contributors to this volume show, they can be stretched beyond the domestic realm to include the participation of household members in different branches of the new market economies.

Self-Sufficiency and the House

The ideal of self-sufficiency may be unattainable, but it has been persuasive as a model and as a set of practices. In this it resembles its opposite, the “perfect market.” Self-sufficient can mean producing what is consumed and consuming that which is produced. But we also parse the idea of self-sufficiency into further components and meanings, many of which can be found in the studies in this volume. For example, sufficiency can mean having enough or meeting one’s needs as socially defined, and being satisfied with what one has. It can stand for the opposite of accumulation, as a signal of resistance to profit making in markets, and as an ethical idea. Often it is a response to both external and internal influences. Similarly, “self” can refer to a house, a collection of houses, a community, a nation, or a combination of these institutions. As an ideal, self-sufficiency is a bastion against uncertainty and instability or contingency (Gudeman 2001). In this respect, it has a broader reference than its antonym, the market, and can include the social relationships that make *life* itself sufficient. Together the two words form an oxymoron, for no self can achieve sufficiency without others (as Aristotle observed). But the imagery has been persuasive in history.

More broadly, self-sufficiency has ideological value and potency in shaping the identities of persons and groups. In some parts of the world the maintenance of a single crop or seed strain—its seeding, tending, harvesting, consumption, and reseed—represents the durability of the social unit that holds it. Such crops may include potatoes, yams, rice, or other staples, which may have special powers of growth or vitality and provide this vitality to other crops, to animals, and to the people of a house. These identity crops may be divided when houses and other groups separate, so

providing them with a continuing source of vitality. The crop (or line of animals) has the symbolic value of self-sufficiency in addition to its practical uses (Gudeman 1986, 2001, 2008, 2012; Gudeman and Rivera 1990). One of the striking findings from the studies of this volume is the resilience and resurrection of such images, and the many forms they take, which include sources of nourishment (crops, animals, land, forest, and special foods as suggested by Light, Vasile, Cash, and Monova) as well as the rituals that transform these resources into social nourishment and well-being (e.g. through protective saints and hospitality practices). The symbolization of self-sufficiency occurs at different institutional levels and includes linkages to others as ways of preserving a sense of autarky.

The second finding of our studies confirms the enduring importance of the house as an economic institution over several centuries of economic transformation. As demonstrated in our previous volume, the house takes many forms, covers different tasks, and is variously constituted in our six sites, but it is a persisting economic institution in all of them. The house has endured through many economic formations and “superstructures” from ancient times. In the culture area that we investigate it was a central institution in presocialist times. In most of the studied sites, the house approximated Chayanov’s “peasant” household, being only partly integrated into quasi-feudal or market structures. The house retained an important place in most rural areas during socialism, as we have noted above, even for those who moved away from the countryside for new urban jobs. The symbiosis of house and socialist collective, which had much regional variation, was not recognized by the architects of “shock therapy” (originally devised by economists for different conditions in Latin America). Economic reforms in the postsocialist countries were directed to removing the state’s role in directing production and consumption along with other institutional and legal barriers to trade and market activities. Under such conditions, the individuals within domestic groups should have “naturally” turned their energies to selling their labor and provisioning their needs and wants through market purchases. They should have pooled resources within the group, or shared with other domestic groups, only when individual interests clearly coincided. House economies should have disappeared in the face of the efficiencies and attractions of market life. Yet the house economy has endured and even gained in significance, both real and symbolic (let us note in passing that the crises of the neoliberal era have recently increased its salience in many parts of the “advanced” West). The house economy is at once a buffer against larger structures, a marginal institution in the sense of fitting within different larger structures while lying at their peripheries, and a way of making economy with its own characteristics.

Our ethnographies reveal the following characteristic processes in house economy:

1. The house economy is an incomplete but irreducible unit in economy. It is incomplete because houses are connected one to another, embedded in communities and linked to trade systems. The house economy is irreducible because it is not built out of subsidiary units, except component houses. For example, a house may contain several families who eventually separate in a developmental cycle or smaller sub-houses. The “house,” thus, can be a single unit, a combination of families (usually linked by kinship), or a combination of part-houses, as in the case of affiliated elders who may help with childcare and other tasks.
2. The house economy relies on a flow of material life that underlies all economic formations. It helps constitute these flows, which link the house to its environs of the natural and social worlds, in the double sense of *oikos* as economy and ecology. This flow of material life is often symbolized by a particular food, as illustrated in Miladina Monova’s study of *ajvar* in Macedonia (chapter 3).
3. In the house economy mutuality or jointness are basic social and economic acts. Productive efforts and their returns are shared, according to one or another set of values. From the house, sharing in its many forms, including reciprocity, welfare, and care, spreads into the larger social order. These processes of micro-adjustment defy any simple translation into statistics, as Jennifer Cash (chapter 2) explains with reference to her household survey in rural Moldova.
4. The house economy tends toward self-sufficiency in which significant outputs are used for inputs rather than exchanged for profit. This feature of house self-sufficiency contrasts with modern corporations, which depend on specialization, optimization, and exchange (although firms sometimes find it profitable to behave like houses and produce some of their inputs internally, in order to avoid “transaction costs” in a risky environment). The house is never autarkic, but all houses in our study are to a degree self-sufficient, even if this is limited to the opening of a homemade bottle of wine to host others, as reported by Cash. Self-sufficiency is locally defined and represented. It can mean self-provisioning in a single crop; it can mean keeping domestic animals, such as chickens and hogs, for their meat; it can be represented by herding larger animals for their products; and it can mean having free access to a resource that can be sold, as in the case of lumber in the Apuseni Mountains of Romania (Vasile, chapter 6).

In a more structural sense, self-sufficiency can be a model by which the house arranges itself—some members earn money, some members work for food, and some members raise house food so that the totality achieves a degree of independence, as in the Bulgarian case reported by Tocheva (chapter 5).

5. The house is characterized by tinkering, recombining, and inventing on a small scale—so small that it often escapes the observer’s notice. Internally, handymen and handywomen “make-do” and recycle leftovers. Externally, the house adjusts to its conditions, whether a state farm or market, as Vasile reports for Romania. These dynamic adjustments are well documented for rural Hungary by Vidacs (chapter 1), even though this case stands out from the others in this volume in the extent to which the older ideals and practices of self-sufficiency have been transformed.
6. The house exercises economic functions that are only partially found elsewhere. Being parsimonious or thrifty is a typical house process. It is different from profit making. Being thrifty, which can be accomplished by restricting consumption, by saving leftovers, or by finding new ways to accomplish needed ends, preserves means for a new day. Thriftiness can be consistent with profit making, as in downsizing a corporation, but in the house thrift is not about making a profit. It is a strategy for making savings to be held, as in reusing string or carefully preserving potatoes under stairs for the winter. Thrift helps achieve self-sufficiency. House maintenance and growth occurs through saving and risk avoidance rather than the “animal spirits” of entrepreneurial investment. Savings as hoards are often put into the house itself: with savings a new room is added, or another floor is constructed, rather than directed to a venture outside the house. Similarly, a crop, meat, wine, or other product is kept at the house as a hoard to be available for meeting social needs, as is the case with animals in rural Kyrgyzstan, discussed by Light (chapter 4).
7. House economies measure their food needs and supplies, the work that has been accomplished and needs to be done, and money savings. The purpose is not to calculate a profit but to meet house needs, achieve sufficiency of supplies for communal obligations, and maintain a sense of “well-being,” which may be partly accomplished through reciprocity and sharing with other houses and participating in social rituals.

No house economy in our study fits all these characteristics, and some have other important features. All the houses we studied also engage in market activities. But these are some of the qualities that we have found and investigated in our comparisons, and that have a presence elsewhere.

Community, Nation, World

The characteristics of the house economy place it in dynamic tension with other institutions of society and their associated forms of economy. For example, the house and community are often mutually supportive. The communities studied in our project varied greatly, from the urban neighborhoods investigated by Miladina Monova in Macedonia (chapter 3) to the rather remote village studied by Nathan Light in Central Asia (chapter 4). Beyond the level of the house, all of our researchers were in one way or another continuing the venerable anthropological genre of the community study. Each one of them lived locally and experienced the “face to face” quality of social life, in many ways still the antithesis of the norms of the modern metropolis. Through participant observation they were able to show how, when the house fell short of meeting its vision of sufficiency, the deficit was sometimes made good, at least in part, through community support, for example through labor cooperation. House and community, however, may be brought into relationships of tension through the forces of the market and the state. The end of socialism placed some individuals in a position where they had no alternative but to offer their labor power to their entrepreneurial neighbors. Sometimes this was formalized as an employment relationship, but often it was disguised and represented as temporary help. Many disadvantaged villagers became dependent on state handouts, which often depended on highly personal decisions taken by the mayor or other representatives of the local state (Thelen et al. 2011).

As these examples indicate, we should be wary of romanticizing or distorting the “holistic” character of social relations in small communities (Creed 2006). The sanctions of the community may be experienced at times as harsh and unfair. Just as there can be conflict between brothers within a house, so there is potential for many kinds of conflict within communities. The settlement studied by Detelina Tocheva (chapter 5) is divided between Christians and Muslims, but this line of cleavage seems less significant than the economic differentials, which are beginning to expand following the impact of tourism and the market economy. As Tocheva shows in her contributions to this volume and its predecessor, community rituals conceal these widening gaps.

The degree to which the economies of house and community are embedded in much larger economies has changed greatly since the time of Adam Smith, and even since the age of Alexander Chayanov. According to standard economic historiography since Smith, each new epoch has been marked by the reduction of state protectionism, and the lowering of barriers and boundaries to the free movement of goods and labor. In the late eighteenth century, Smith still recognized the desirability of constraining

the market principle in order to protect “infant industries.” In the twentieth century, socialist economies were still highly protected to achieve ostensibly social goals. In the 1990s, this protectionism ended abruptly when it became possible to purchase new imported goods and to migrate abroad on a scale not known previously in the socialist culture area. Within each of our countries, mobility to cities increased substantially, though there was also significant movement the other way when the older established urban workplaces vanished. The houses studied by Tocheva in the Rhodope Mountains have long had close relatives in the capital and other cities in Bulgaria. Two decades after the end of socialism, more than a million Bulgarians live in Western Europe. The proportion of rural Moldovans (Jennifer Cash, chapter 2) who have migrated west and east in search of better opportunities is thought to be even higher.

This mobility of persons and goods appears to signal the transcendence of the last vestiges of the principle of self-sufficiency through the power of neoliberal markets. We have seemingly reached the dystopia of Karl Polanyi’s “fictitious commodities.” But what if the migrants meticulously send remittances to the rural houses that they still consider their primary affiliation, their home? What if the household members who earn cash closer to home in different branches of the national economy continue to pool their incomes and determine expenditure in old-established ways? This house may be far-removed from the old peasant ideal-type of self-provisioning, but the renewed emphasis on this institution after the collapse of the socialist institutions has also revived an ethos of resilience that knows no boundaries of space or sector. The rural house may no longer be providing its own food to any significant degree; the community may or may not continue to assert the virtues of honest manual work; the populist press may rail against the contamination of foreign goods in the new supermarkets and insist that land, the ultimate foundation of the nation, should not be sold to foreigners; but if, despite these unpropitious circumstances, or perhaps because of them, houses persist and their members continue to think and act “as if” their reproduction depended on their own more or less ingenious pursuit of self-sufficiency, the ethnographer has to take note of this obstinacy and delineate its consequences.

The house is an enduring model for the organization of economic activity, especially among domestic groups and at the community level. But when self-sufficiency is focused too narrowly on the house, society is fragile and contingent. The renewed emphasis on close kin in the practices of self-sufficiency that our group studied also implies a decline in trust, a closing-in on the part of the group that has accompanied postsocialist economic transformation. Market ideology presupposes that the sociability formerly attached to economic transactions can be relocated outside the

economic domain. In the postsocialist region, this was expected to emerge with the rise of a “civil society” of free associations, which individuals can move in and out of as they please. Society appears to be alive and well in postsocialist Eastern Europe, with the expansion of many civic groups and NGOs. Yet such associations tend to be less common in the countryside, and even when they are present, as in the Hungarian village studied by Bea Vidacs (chapter 1), they do not substitute for the benefits provided by the more basic affiliation of citizenship, which are channeled by the local state. At the time of Vidacs’s fieldwork, the Hungarian state had not cut back significantly on the social benefits introduced under socialism. It was, however, in the process of introducing new schemes to deal with high rural unemployment – “workfare” that is urgently needed, because many households have lost the employment security they enjoyed under socialism. In the open multi-party elections that have replaced the staged rituals of socialist elections, villagers tend to vote for parties that exploit these fears by whipping up sentiments against imaginary enemies: the distant bureaucrats of Brussels, or the impoverished Roma within their own communities. These expressions of populist politics can be theorized in terms of Karl Polanyi’s model of a “double movement” (Polanyi 2001 [1944]). The expansion of the market principle provokes society to self-defense, but these mechanisms of defense are by no means benign for all citizens.

When taken up at the national level, we can expect to find the ideology of self-sufficiency prominently asserted in this double movement. Self-sufficiency underwrites protectionism as a form of self-defense from the expanding market and promotes exclusion and internal divisions, when what is needed is the consolidation at the global level of the values of Aristotle’s original *oikos*.

The Studies

The ambiguities of self-sufficiency as ideal and moral critique are captured by Bea Vidacs in chapter 1. She shows that traditional norms are still asserted by some Hungarian villagers, though the realities appear to be largely in line with the archetypal postulates of modernization theory. For example, younger villagers and newcomers in this Hungarian village are less inclined to spend many hours toiling in their vegetable gardens when the same products are readily available in the small town nearby. In the presocialist past, the villagers of Péterszeg took some of their “surplus” produce by cart to this town and the proceeds formed an important part of their income. Socialist farms eliminated this commerce but the household plot ensured a high degree of self-provisioning on the basis of family

labor. Today, villagers travel by bus or by car to town and come home with plastic bags bursting from the branch of one or another German supermarket chain. Vidacs shows that the elderly Hungarian villagers who criticize newcomer neighbors or Roma for not being prepared to get their hands dirty in their gardens are themselves far from being fully self-sufficient. All exhibit forms of dependency—on neighbors, on markets, and on the state. As she explained in her contribution to our first volume, the number of households raising pigs for domestic consumption has declined greatly since the 1970s; again, the supermarkets provide easier options. Most families have one or more members earning a regular wage, drawing a pension, or receiving workfare or other state benefits, a pattern that emerged under socialism and has not fundamentally changed. The symbiosis of large and small farms in agricultural production has been eliminated; while some “losers” in the transformation have reluctantly intensified self-provisioning for the lack of any alternative, others are in a position to profit from the greater choice nowadays made available through the market. Presumably, some have a bad conscience in doing so, knowing that every bottle of imported wine purchased at “dumping” prices is a blow to the wine industry of their own country.

Wine is central to the local ideal of self-sufficiency among Moldovan villagers, as Jennifer Cash analyzed in her contribution to the previous volume. Self-sufficiency of the house, whether in crops, animal husbandry, or clothing, has dramatically decreased in the community she studied. It remains highly valued, however, as the use of home-produced wine and food in hospitality rituals demonstrates. In her contribution to this volume (chapter 2), Cash explicates the local ideal of having enough or achieving sufficiency, which implies good management of the household, regardless of whether the supplies themselves have to be purchased. Giving via hospitality is an indicator both of self-sufficiency and of good management, so much so that poorer households can achieve status by giving away what little they have. The wealthier have a greater obligation to give, while failure to do so brings loss of prestige, denigrating labels, and even God’s punishment.

Miladina Monova’s study of *ajvar* in the Macedonian town of Prilep (chapter 3) reveals the complexities and ambiguities of household self-sufficiency in light of dramatic economic change, invented traditions, the symbolism of self-sufficiency, and reliance on the market. *Ajvar* is prepared from peppers, oil, and other ingredients. Considered a necessity, it is preserved in order to last through the winter. Today, *ajvar* enjoys recognition as a national dish that is pure, tasty, and healthy because it is made in the home. Each housewife’s recipe is different and represents her culinary artistry. The preparation of this dish requires time and physical effort as well as skill, and is often done in the street or garden, where the work is socially

visible. People passing by stop and comment, and see how the entire house is involved in contributing. But almost all the ingredients of this essential national dish are purchased. *Ajvar* is itself available in shops, but few purchase it, despite the considerable inconvenience involved in manufacturing it with family labor. The domestic production of *ajvar* is relatively recent, so it is hardly a traditional dish or an embodiment of “real” self-sufficiency. Nonetheless it has become a symbol of self-sufficiency in the course of the dramatic transition to a market economy. The ideal of the house economy was resilient in this part of Macedonia before socialism, through socialism, and now under capitalism. More broadly, one can state that the house economy adapts to many different political and economic superstructures, to all of which it offers both a material and social base (Gudeman 2001). Monova’s study acquires additional poignancy in view of former Yugoslavia’s endeavors to accomplish self-sufficiency at higher levels (republic and socialist federation). In tracing the contemporary symbolism of *ajvar*, Monova depicts it as a creative house response to the changing faces of state power. Symbolic of house independence and sharing, it is a way of adapting to a changing economy and state that still carries conviction for the inhabitants of Prilep (though apparently less so in the capital Skopje, and not at all in neighboring Bulgaria).

Nathan Light’s ethnography of a Kyrgyz village (chapter 4) takes us to a very different geographical and economic setting. Before socialism the people of this village were nomadic, but during the Soviet period they were gradually settled in collective and state-owned farms where sheep were raised, milk was produced, and some crops were sown. With the recent arrival of markets, beans have become the principal cash crop while other crops, such as potatoes and maize, are grown in domestic gardens. Although intensive breeding of high-value sheep has ceased, animal husbandry remains important, not for home consumption or market sale but for ritual giving and display on which much time is spent. These rituals, including weddings, commemorations, funerals, birthdays, and other events, represent household viability and self-sufficiency. The rituals can be small or large, and they may yield a material return to the giver because guests bring gifts that can exceed the costs of the ritual. But the monetary balance sheet is not crucial to the way household sufficiency is figured. Light’s calculations show that at least a third of the year is spent in ritual activity that connects people. He terms the outcome “social sufficiency,” which above all consists in maintaining a network of ties outside the household and even outside the community. These extensive ties nowadays melt into market ties, as they formerly melted into the hierarchies of the socialist institutions, but at the moment it seems that their deeper *raison d’être* is to keep the house viable in unstable postsocialist conditions.

The Balkan villagers studied by Detelina Tocheva (chapter 5) live high in the Rhodope Mountains of Bulgaria, close to the Greek border. This beautiful, pristine area features some agriculture and pastoralism, a few stores, some labor migration, and some hosting of tourists. Tocheva focuses on a common metaphor of the people: “working in a closed circle.” It captures the ordinary meanings of household self-sufficiency, such as using local resources, drawing on household labor, and limiting dependency on external institutions. The metaphor has been used more frequently with market expansion. As Tocheva explains, the house economy (which in her main example is composed of three nuclear families) must combine different income sources, including money from tourism, with self-provisioning. The metaphor also implies pure, high-quality food that has no additives. The food, the house, and the way of life all have to be ecologically clean. To achieve this Aristotelian condition, the household draws on the work of all house members. Working in a closed circle means avoiding commercial products, such as soft drinks, and relying on local milk and yogurt. The aim is to provision the house from within, while remaining open to a limited range of market purchases. The strategy of offering domestic foods to tourists without expending much cash is profitable in the economist’s sense, but more important in Tocheva’s analysis is the way in which the closed circle—of provisioning from the house while drawing on the market, of coping with the latter by relying on the former—yields a sense of control. This is the other side of “self-exploitation” as described by Chayanov (1986 [1924-5]) or “debasement” in Gudeman’s terms (2008). Like the Apuseni villagers described by Vasile in the following chapter, economic activity in the Rhodopes is driven by the goal of achieving mastery of a socioeconomic situation and bringing greater predictability and lower risk to material life.

Monica Vasile (chapter 6) lived with relatively remote villagers in Transylvania, Romania. Before and during socialism, they were poor for lack of resources. With the opening of markets and the lifting of state controls, they have been able to take advantage of the surrounding forests to cut trees, mill the logs, and transport the lumber for sale to the urban construction industry. The resulting boom testifies to intensified involvement in markets, but Vasile finds that people still talk about household independence and achieving self-sufficiency. Their houses are emphatically not closed units, yet the inhabitants often talk as if they were. As Vasile unfolds the situation, it becomes clear that self-sufficiency refers not to the house or to food, or even to the house and the forests on which the people depend. Self-sufficiency means being in a position to engage with changing natural and social environments, as well as the market in lumber. People are energetic, practical, and tactical in the ways they make a living. They

are flexible in adjusting to their conditions. But is this a “house” or “market” practice? Making-do and tinkering usually are associated with the house, whereas innovation is the name we use for the market practices. Either way, with a sense of mastery and flexibility these villagers feel self-reliant and self-sufficient, even as they achieve this condition through their engagement with the market and reciprocal prestations with other households. Self-sufficiency in Vasile’s village has to do with being one’s own master, above all by possessing money and the equipment necessary to produce lumber. It also means not being in debt, being self-reliant, and being quick to take up opportunities.

* * * * *

By different paths, these studies all return us to the Aristotelian vision and amplify it for us. The Aristotelian “house economy” is the *oikos*, which is the root of both our modern terms “economy” and “ecology.” Most people separate the two and think of ecology in terms of niches and a material world that is separate from the human realm. These studies show us not only that they are indissoluble but also that the social world is part of the ecology of the house. Self-sufficiency always takes place in a social context, despite many protests to the contrary. It can be a reaction to the market or a way of managing it, it can frustrate voices of free trade, and it can subsidize free trade through the costless inputs it may provide. It can be a moral ethic of different types, it can refer to mastery, control, and social respectability—but it remains always a model, an ideal, and a persuasive one at that. Would a better understanding of this impulse help us see more clearly today’s pulls and counter-pulls of economy within states, between states, within and between larger configurations, such as the European Union, and within our fragile planet?

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