



Delft University of Technology

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### Reconsidering the anatomy of houses in Western societies

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#### DOI

[10.7340/anuac2239-625X-5046](https://doi.org/10.7340/anuac2239-625X-5046)

#### Publication date

2021

#### Document Version

Final published version

#### Published in

ANUAC: Revista della Societa Italiana di Antropologia Culturale

#### Citation (APA)

Cieraad, I. G. (2021). House and home: Reconsidering the anatomy of houses in Western societies. *ANUAC: Revista della Societa Italiana di Antropologia Culturale*, 10(2), 197-214.  
<https://doi.org/10.7340/anuac2239-625X-5046>

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## House and home

### Reconsidering the anatomy of houses in Western societies

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**ABSTRACT:** The article develops a critical and transversal reading of the special issue. Each contribution inspired the author to seek for a mirror image or an analogy in Western societies and test the mentioned Carsten and Hugh-Jones observation of the seemingly self-evident relation between house and the self. Rosalie Stolz' contribution on the changing communities of sounds in northern Laos changed the author's perspective on the background of the popularity of camping in the West. Jonathan Alderman's contribution on the bloody libation rituals performed in the patio of rural houses in Andean Bolivia made her realize that there is a heightened sensitivity in the West towards blood, and more in particular visible blood spatters, be it animal or human blood. From this consideration, the article presents some reflections on the relation between house and blood. The cultural dead-lock between home-ownership and manhood in southern Tunisia, as described by Pontiggia, points to a general relation between the material home and the male self.

**KEYWORDS:** HOUSE; HOME; SELF; COMPARISON; WESTERN SOCIETIES.

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“Western children’s drawings of houses with two windows and a door – two eyes and a mouth – underline this projection of the self in the house but there are surprisingly few anthropological explorations of this identity between house and self in non-Western societies” according to Carsten and Hugh-Jones in their introduction of *About the House: Lévi-Strauss and Beyond* (1995: 3). Perhaps not so much in the title of this special issue *The Anatomy of Houses. Materialities of Being at Home*, as in their selection of articles discussing fieldwork related to houses in regions as diverse as Laos, Bolivia and Tunisia, the editors may have had the intention to repair the lack of anthropological explorations of the house and the self in non-Western societies. Still the self in the physical interpretation of the body, its gender, functions and fluids is only indirectly addressed in relation to the houses under discussion in the articles. For that matter the title “the anatomy of houses” of this special issue may seem farfetched, but the articles each in their own way inspired me to seek for a mirror image or an analogy in Western societies and test Carsten and Hugh-Jones initial observation of the seemingly self-evident relation between house and the self in Western societies.

The subtitle of this special issue *Materialities of Being at Home* is even more intriguing. Although the title of Stefano Pontiggia might suggest otherwise, home as a topic in its own right is not addressed in the selected articles. Combining house and home in one and the same title is a courageous attempt in joining together what in anthropology has always been separated. The friction between the concepts of house and home has a history of its own as I have pointed out elsewhere and will summarize in the section below (Cieraad 2018). The anthropological concept of the house lacks the emotional connotation of home which Westerners including anthropologists find so special about their own dwellings. Home’s emotional meaning, especially that of the childhood home, is more related to the psychological or mental aspect of the self (the mind) than the physical or material aspect of the self (the body) as represented in anatomic analysis of houses (Carsten 2018). Still home is not only about emotions or memories, but also about bonding with a place and a material environment, ranging in scale from a room, a dwelling, a street, a neighbourhood, a village or town, a region or a country. It will almost certainly also include an emotional attachment to one or more living beings in that location, ranging from pets, significant others, family members, and friends to neighbors, fellow citizens,

and compatriots. Although there is a hierarchy in home attachments of ties to people over places, both commitments are not necessarily twinned and both will change in the course of a lifetime. In my view home is not fixed in time and space, but is reinvented time after time in different locations. It is in fact a lifetime cycle of reinventions of home in different locations (Cieraad 2010, 2017).

My research pertains to the home and its history in Western societies. It has been part of a lifelong professional project in reversing anthropology's scope by bringing so to speak anthropology home and look for the exotic in the familiar (Cieraad 1999). The concept of home defies easy definitions, not just because it is layered and multifarious but more so because it is deeply engrained in Western culture and societal organization. Western culture and society thrive on the emotional, social, and spatial opposition between the domains of home and work. From my anthropological perspective home is one of the core concepts of Western culture. It is the outcome of a historical development toward the progressive separation of two domains, represented in the separate urban domains of consumption and production as the spaces of living and working. The cultural meaning of home is molded in the nineteenth century by a middle-class history and gender ideology in which men are breadwinners and women are housewives. In the twentieth century the cultural meaning of home with all its middle-class implications, became even stronger when urbanistic solutions for the housing of the working classes were modeled on the suburban ideal of the middle classes. At present, in the twenty-first century the domains of home and work may not be as strictly separated as before but they still play a major role in society as well as in individual life histories.

The personal and the cultural meaning of home still thrive on its opposite, on the non-home so to speak. For adults the non-home will be work but for children it will be school. Home is in essence a place you want to return to; as such home gains more meaning the longer one has been separated from it (Cieraad 2020a). The separation may even develop into homesickness and the fact that children are more prone to homesickness than adults demonstrate the age-relatedness of the personal meaning of home. Even young children prove to be capable of expressing multiple dimensions of their personal meaning of home. Their answers varied from "home is where Mum and Dad are," in which they addressed the all-important convivial dimension of home, to "home is where my toys are," in which they addressed the material dimension of home, which will become more important in later life. To children the convivial home, the presence of one or more meaningful others, supersedes the material dimension of home. The answers of school-

children presented an even wider variation. In “home is where my bedroom is,” they addressed the privacy dimension of home, which is also the dimension adults appreciate so much; and in the answer “home is where my friends are,” they addressed the neighborhood dimension of the wider home. More importantly, it illustrates that the personal meaning of home not only for children but also for adults has a much wider meaning dimension than domestic space, or the interior of the house, because it may encompass a neighborhood or even a home country. As such it parallels the different scales and meaning dimensions as described in this issue by Jonathan Alderman for the house in rural Andean Bolivia.

Practices are vital in keeping the dimensions of the personal meaning of home active, in the same way as the performance of rituals in the Bolivian case as described by Alderman in this issue. Both the convivial dimension and the privacy dimension of the home are effectuated by demarcation practices, such as the shutting of doors and the closing of curtains. The modern family home in particular is an arena of demarcation practices. Memories to the childhood home are tied to all meaning dimensions of the home but in particular to the convivial dimension and the related family practices – not only mundane practices of having dinner together or watching television but also the more ritual practices of celebrations. Homemaking practices, as mundane as cleaning and cooking, appeal to the child’s senses and contribute to the important, but often neglected, sensory dimension of the home and the childhood home in particular (Cieraad 2010: 97-99). Not only the materials, tools and household equipment, food stuff and liquids used in homemaking practices could be interpreted as the materialities of being at home, but also the comforts and conveniences of home, which are supported by a vast network of public utilities. There is, however, an interesting and even cultivated ignorance in Western homes regarding their dependence on public urban utilities, like the sewer system, piping, electricity and more recently the fiber optics network (Cieraad 2020b).

Not only the homecoming of anthropology but also the study of the contemporary home in consumer societies have resulted in a revival of material culture studies. Individual consumers appropriate mass-produced objects by incorporating them into a domestic universe of personal meaning, that is also more and more the case in non-Western societies. Already more than a decade ago Vellinga noted that “the new studies of material culture suggest a more equal connection, in which objects do not passively represent or stand for a subject, but actively help to define the latter” (2007: 761). In addressing an example of Cameroon where chiefs are perceived to have more

materiality in the form of body substances, such as blood, saliva, and semen than commoners Vellinga concluded that not only the degree of materiality ascribed to persons and objects may differ, but also that the boundary between the subject and the object is much more fluid in nonacademic thinking (Ivi: 763). In academic thinking there has been an acceptance of the dualism of subject and object, in which subjects have agency over objects. French structuralism, however, Lévi-Strauss cum suis, rejected the mind-body dichotomy, and paved the way for a more lenient academic approach in anthropology. It led to the present approach in material culture studies in which materials and objects are reversely perceived as having agency over subjects. That is the point where houses as material objects, their building materials and architecture come in. Testing the agency of houses, building materials, construction methods and architecture over subjects will be a valuable starting-point for my peer review of the articles in this issue.

### *Privacy and Permeability*

Rosalie Stolz in her article “Listening through houses: Changing communities of sounds in northern Laos” discusses the negative effects on community life of a recent change of building materials of houses in northern Laos, from permeable walls of woven strips of bamboo to more solid walls of timber and concrete<sup>1</sup>. In villages with traditional houses of bamboo screen walls conversations and sounds easily transgress the boundary of the individual houses and created, according to Stolz, a soothing village soundscape of familiar sounds and voices. Not only do modern houses with concrete walls block the transmission of sounds and voices, but also force unwanted family privacy on the villagers. In response villagers tend to spend the evenings in front of their concrete houses to keep contributing to the cherished community of village sounds. Stolz’s article confronted me with my dislike of camping and more in particular its lack of aural privacy, which had to do with my teenage experience of lying awake all night due to an unknown snoring man in a neighboring tent. Despite my pride of having a tent of my own and thus being able to secure the primal visual privacy akin to the closed door of my bedroom, the snoring neighbor made me realize that the canvas blocked the gaze of others but not the noises produced by neighbors, and as such completely failed in providing aural privacy.

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1. Also Alderman in this issue alludes to the potentially negative effects of changed construction materials in Andean Bolivia from the traditional indigenous adobe to the modern non-indigenous materials of red-brick, cement and ceramic tiles on the inhabitants relations with the house as the center of rituals that need to ensure individual and collective wellbeing.

The vivid memory of my invaded teenage privacy illustrates that the visual and aural privacy of one's bedroom were and still are the most appreciated dimensions of home. Especially by Western teenagers, who like to create with their own music preferences a private soundscape within their bedrooms, which in turn will be a test of their parents' noise tolerance. Present family homes are in fact a collection of private soundscapes, which thanks to the technology of ear phones can peacefully mix together. Technology, however, is only a poor help in cases of noise disturbances on camping sites. Nightly conversations can be stopped by active intervention, but actively intervening and stopping noises produced by neighbors, be it snoring, farting, vomiting, crying, or loud sexual intercourse is far more difficult if not impossible, for these body related sounds normally produced within the secluded privacy of bedrooms and toilets have to be politely ignored. My teenage frustration made me realize that Western ideas of visual and aural privacy are shaped by the brick and concrete walls of our houses, which also prove more practical in a cold and windy climate characteristic of the Western hemisphere. Without the agency of these solid building materials privacy never would have been developed into such an important dimension of the Western home<sup>2</sup>.

The western history of privacy is written along the lines of spatial demarcations, and the ensuing multiplication of separate rooms for persons and functions (Flanders 2015: 55-93). Solid dividing walls made of timber, brick or concrete progressively separated private spaces from more public or shared spaces, and thus separating individuals from each other, and groups of individuals from the larger community. First of all by concentrating family groups in their own spaces or houses to facilitate collective sleeping and working, which resulted in a kind of family privacy centered around the hearth for cooking and heating. When work spaces were separated from living spaces of the family, domestic servants as workers within the living space of the upper classes were not treated as part of the family anymore but spatially separated and relegated to the kitchen and the back zones of the house. The front zone of the upper-class house became the liminal reception space for outsiders to the family. Family privacy was restricted to the

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2. Stolz's article reminds of Helliwell's study of Dayak longhouses which contain nine to fourteen apartments separated by flimsy walls. According to Buchli (2013: 79) Helliwell is "at pains to note that [...] the flimsiness of partitions also assures a certain privacy [...] accepted rules of propriety [...] are strictly observed, assuring a guarded privacy within this highly communal space". This leads Buchli to the conclusion that "Flimsy walls' produce a complex sensorium enabling the negotiation of individualizing and communalizing needs through their materializing effects" (*Ibidem*).



intimate, but collective family space of the living room, which did not mean that every family member was entitled to individual privacy. Visual privacy for individual members within the family home developed along the lines of hierarchy of age and gender, which first and foremost entitled husband and wife to have their private bedroom(s), followed by teenage sons and daughters. In the first half of the twentieth century when publicly facilitated amenities for defecating, bathing and washing were integrated into the private space of houses, they produced a further compartmentalization of the internal living space. Private flush toilets, bathrooms, and wash kitchens required, however, the penetration of public piping and sewers through the walls of the house. Their installation had to be hidden behind and within walls, and under floors in order not to disturb the autarkic illusion of the home as a fortress of family privacy secured by seemingly impenetrable walls (Cieraad 2020b).

### *Camping: A ritual of reversal*

The history of privacy makes one wonder why so many people in the West love to camp and are willing to sacrifice – at least temporarily – the privacy that has been painstakingly created within the built environment. Camping is effectively and willingly reversing the history of privacy. Tents have no, or only scant internal divisions and if so they are made of canvas and closed by zippers. Ringing the door is impossible in the case of a tent, or knocking the door to get permission to enter and abide the individual privacy is as ineffective on canvas as well. Also there are no locks on a tent either, while in a home situation there are multiple locks on the front door to prevent burglary, including simple locks on bedroom doors and bathroom door to protect the privacy of the individual family members. Considering the absence of locks it is amazing that a camping as a temporary community of strangers is able to create a communal feeling of safety and social control, a real *communitas*, for zippers do not give any protection against burglary, like the flimsy shell of most tents does not protect against violent assaults by a knife.

Interestingly the rise of camping in the early twentieth century paralleled the rise of housing acts regulating decent housing for the working classes. For sanitary reasons the legislation forbid the very combination of sleeping and cooking in one and the same room. While sleeping next to the cooking fire was and still is one of the joys of primitive camping. Even in modern caravans and campers sleeping and cooking are joined in the same space. The housing acts ordained not only a separate kitchen and separate bedrooms which were separated by walls from the living space, but also a



separate space with a flush toilet. A bathroom, however, was not ordained in the Dutch housing act, which presumed the presence of public bathhouses in urban neighborhoods. Most women, however, preferred a weekly bath within the privacy of their own kitchen, and stimulated the construction of private showers. Considering the post-war luxury of a private shower for the urban working classes, it is all the more amazing that campers wittingly sacrifice this luxury and gladly use the public conveniences provided on site. This sacrifice becomes more of a burden for middle-aged campers which explains why they often change the tent for a caravan or camper with a private toilet.

The many privacy sacrifices made by present-day campers makes it clear that there should be major gains involved to make them worthwhile. I may not be the best judge of the joys of camping, but Solz's article suggests that also for convinced campers their favored camping site does create a temporary community of soothing sounds, which represents the relaxing atmosphere campers associate with a summer holiday. Even the sound of rain drops falling on the tent's canvas, or a nightly thunder storm can heighten the holiday feeling. A primeval connection with the forces of Nature is seen as one of the dubious pleasures of camping, but only if it is temporary. It contrasts with the history of housing, which shows a continuous effort in making the built environment more weather and sound proof, not only by the application of insulating double or triple glazing and sound proof floors, but also by the installation of lightning-conductors and air conditioning in order to protect and isolate inhabitants from Nature's forces and noises produced by their neighbors. The temporary character of camping in the best season of the year is part of its pleasure, for otherwise it will turn into the nightmare of a refugee camp. Camping is in essence a summerly ritual of domestic reversal, which like carnival will not be appreciated by everybody.

### *Blood: Protection or pollution, life or death*

Jonathan Alderman's article "House personhood in rural Andean Bolivia" impressed me most by his description of the bloody libations performed in the patios of houses to ensure a good harvest, and thus the prosperity of the inhabitants, house and cattle. Spattering the blood of freshly offered animals, more in particular guinea pigs and llamas, against the walls of the patio and drinking the blood of the animals demonstrates according to Alderman "the consubstantiation between the house and its inhabitants." By quoting Carsten and Hugh-Jones "[t]he house is an extension of the person" (1995: 2) he wants to put the ritual in a more general perspective. The quote, however, is cut short and continues as follows "like an extra skin, carapace

or second layer of clothes, it serves as much to reveal and display as it does to hide and protect” (*Ibidem*). Equating the protective cover of the house, its walls and roof, with the human skin is not so farfetched, but it leaves in my view no room for the interpretation of the libation ritual. For blood and bleeding entails a damaged skin. The libation ritual of spattering fresh animal blood from a ripped-out heart on the walls of the house presents first of all a physical and symbolic analogy between animals and humans as both species have a skin which needs to be pierced to start the bleeding and both have a beating heart as their crucial blood pump. Only in second instance there is a relation between the owner of the house who paid for the costly sacrifices of the guinea pigs and lamas to command the prosperity of his house, harvest and cattle. The burial ground of the sacrificed animals at the wall of the patio is the most sacred spot of the house comparable to an altar or shrine.

Ripping out the beating heart of humans, mostly captives, was the gruesome libation ritual the Aztecs were known for; they saw human blood as the necessary fuel of the cosmos. To Western eyes Alderman’s image of a blood spattered house gives the impression of a crime scene where someone is stabbed and probably killed. A bloody murder case means an extreme defilement of the house. Even after a thorough clean-up selling a house with a bloody history proves to be difficult. In the West there is nowadays a heightened cultural sensitivity regarding not only human blood but also animal blood. While bloodshed and sacrifice of either humans or animals were and still are a crucial part of most religions, not in the least in Christianity, there is also within religious circles a growing sensitivity towards its bloody aspects. The ritual throat cutting of animals in Islamic tradition is deemed barbaric by outsiders. Although the consubstantiation of the blood of Christ into wine and his body into bread is a crucial and sacred part of Christian services celebrated by the ritual consumption of bread and wine, it has become more and more a matter of speech in which the death of Christ has resulted in eternal life of his believers. Depictions of Christ’s bloody crucifixion scene which were so prominent in medieval churches, have gradually disappeared from the interior of modern catholic churches in the second half of the twentieth century<sup>3</sup>. Present-day slaughter-houses are perhaps the best proof of the heighten sensitivity towards blood. They are closed-off locations where cattle is brought in alive and leaves the premises as sealed packages of bloodless pieces of meat.

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3. In protestant churches which exist since the late sixteenth century only a simple wooden cross refers to the bloody crucifixion scene and is a token of Christ’s sacrifice to redeem the sins of believers and bestow eternal life on them.

The meaning of blood, its spilling and visible blood stains has clearly changed in the West. From the sixteenth to nineteenth century it was a normal medical procedure to incise the veins to get rid of so-called bad blood, or too much blood. The cure was practiced by barbers but also by the patients themselves performed within the domestic environment without fear of defilement. At that time blood was only one of four essential body liquids which all needed to be in balance with each other. Bloodletting was such a common practice that it led to the manufacture of specially shaped and decorated china bowls as receptacles for the blood. The uncontrolled loss of blood did not seem to scare people, like the china bowls were show pieces in seventeenth-century Dutch interiors. It is such a contrast with the present situation, in which even the natural blood loss in menstruation has to be carefully concealed and any spontaneous blood loss is an alarming topic only to be discussed in the privacy of a doctor's consultation room. Uncontrolled loss of blood may cause death, while controlled blood donation and transfusion can be lifesaving. Blood has become the one and only vital body liquid, which is not only the bearer of a person's unique DNA, but also the medical mirror of a person's health and disease.

Still, although blood lines have become the key medical and biological kinship structures in Western societies associated with genetically transferable diseases, they have lost their cultural importance as physical foundation of kinship structures within modern households, which are primarily based on affective bonds of love and care between adults and children living in the same house. Modern family households are more diverse in composition than ever before, not only households of same sex parents which may entail sperm donation, surrogate motherhood, or adoption of foreign children, but also households of divorced single parents with shared parenthood which means that children constantly shift between two houses, and large composite households of former divorcees which easily leads to three types of blood-related children, the ones related to the divorced mother and those related to the divorced father and the children born out of the new relation between the former divorcees<sup>4</sup>.

Although the bloodlines have lost their importance in modern family structures of affective kinship, most adopted children feel the need to know their bloodlines and start searching for their biological parents in their country of origin, and the same with children who are beget from sperm of anonymous donors, or carried by anonymous surrogate mothers. Especially

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4. The doubling of houses is only the case when divorced parents remarry, and not when widowed parents remarry.

from the perspective of children of divorced parents who are living in two households at the same time Western society could be perceived as a modern interpretation of Lévi-Strauss's concept of *société à maisons*<sup>5</sup>. Children of divorced parents speak about "houses" as they narrate about their daily life in either their mother's or father's house. In this modern interpretation houses are temporary moral and social entities of affective nature in contrast to the traditional interpretation of the noble and royal houses in which the continuation of rights and possessions over the generations is most important.

### *Nesting: Condor and stork*

Not so much Alderman's description of a house construction ritual in which a lama fetus is buried in the cement of the foundation as a sacrifice to Mother Earth, *Panchamama*, which in my view could be perceived as an embryonic conception of the house as a person, but more so his description of the roofing ceremony when the house has reached its highest point, which in his view is an illustration of the symbolic personhood of a house when the house gets 'hairs.' However, in the related ceremonies there is an even stronger link with the animal world in comparing the house to the condor's nest which is associated with the birth of humans. According to his informant "*Condor Tapa Mammani* is the god of the house, because once the house is finished it is like a person. It is living energy." The energy of the Condor deity, however, is not restricted to the house but paramount. Offerings in the shape of a nest of wool fibers filled with coca leaves may serve as a personal penance to *Panchamama* and the divinities. It illustrates in my view not so much the consubstantiation between the house and its inhabitants as the consubstantiation between animals and humans, between nests and houses, between the deities of heaven and earth.

There is an interesting comparison between the ritual role of the Bolivian condor and the European stork. Since the beginning of the twentieth century the stork plays an important symbolic role in Germany and the Netherlands as the deliverer of babies to the house. Its wooden image in front of the house signifies the birth of a child and symbolically turns the house into a real family home. Like the condor also the stork is a rare and special bird mainly because of its size. The stork's solitary nest is huge and built in plain view on special high poles, which are placed by farmers in the middle of a meadow. Having a stork's nest on one's ground or on the top of the chimney

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5. The English translation of Lévi-Strauss's concept of *société à maisons* into "house societies" (Carsten, Hugh-Jones 1995: 1) seems problematic as the French term stipulates society in the single and houses in the plural, literally "society of houses".

is interpreted as a blessing and promise of posterity. Its symbolic role as deliverer of babies is still very popular and celebrated in all kinds of house decorations also for urban settings. Again the similarity between nests and houses, between animals and humans is stronger than between the human body and the house.

The warm and affective relations between humans and their pets in Western societies have often encountered disbelief in Africa and Asia. Pets, more in particular cats and dogs, have become surrogate children and favorite family members who may even have their own room, but they are certainly pampered with special food, have their own toys and are played with. Especially small dogs are sometimes clothed with a jacket against the cold and wear shoes. Pets are taken to a therapist when they have behavioral problems, and when ill the owners go to great length in paying the doctor's bills hoping for a recovery. When the cat or dog sadly dies s/he will get a grave with a grave stone, or its urn will put on display in the living room next to the cat's or dog's portrait. The humanizing of pets may have to do with the fact that affection has become the core of Western kinship structures, and for that matter may also explain a growing sensitivity towards animal suffering and blood.

### *Home-ownership and Manhood*

Without mentioning the impetus of economic migration Stefano Pontiggia's contribution "Great Home-Spectations: 'Houses-to-be,' Marginality, and Social Expectations in Southern Tunisia" addresses without doubt one of the most urgent social problems in contemporary history. The poor economic prospects of able and ambitious young men in the Global South, including the Tunisian men as described by Pontiggia, are the long-term effects of a history of colonization and exploitation by the Global North<sup>6</sup>. They have set in motion an exodus of young men seeking for job opportunities elsewhere. Some are so desperate that they are willing to pay a huge amount to human traffickers knowing that they will have to risk their lives at sea in order to reach Europe and make their dreams come true. Pontiggia's article clarifies why in particular unmarried men instead of unmarried women are so desperate to find a poorly paid job as illegal immigrant in Europe. An adult Tunisian man is under social pressure to become a home-owner before he has any chance of getting married and start

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6. In footnote 2 of his article Pontiggia alludes to the peculiar demographics in his fieldwork town in southern Tunisia where most of the men between 28 and 35 years old have left town "looking for employment on the coast or in Europe".

a family. With rising unemployment there is not much chance of becoming a home-owner and thus a suitable marriage partner, and the present situation in Tunisia is even worse than the period Pontiggia described.

The cultural complex of home-ownership, manhood and marriage chances has become visible in the poor region of southern Tunisia in the many unfinished house building projects. Building a house has become a long-term project which will depend on savings and investments. The houses under construction, Pontiggia calls them houses-to-be, are often of poor quality and testify to the desperate situation of men trying to become suitable marriage partners. That is why the average marriage age of males has risen above the age of thirty. If home-ownership is the pivot of young males' dreams, but also of their fears of not being successful in reaching this dream, as Pontiggia concludes, it makes you wonder how young females as potential brides-to-be experience their fate of being the final objective in the often risky undertakings of potential marriage candidates. With no job opportunities in the region it will be a marriage with a labor migrant as an absentee husband. One might hope that Tunisian parents of marriageable daughters and sons confronted with this critical situation will become more creative in dealing with this suffocating cultural complex. For example, the creative solution of the Turkish parents who lived in exile in Greek refugee housing and who dug out a cellar apartment for themselves in order to be able to give the ground floor of their refugee accommodation as dowry to their marriageable daughters (Hirschon 1981).

The immediate postwar housing shortage in Western Europe due to war damage and a lack of building materials also led to creative and temporary solutions to accommodate the many newly-wed couples. For example, the forced sharing of houses which were occupied by only one person, or the transformation of boats into floating houses. The cultural norm in the Netherlands also demanded independent housing for newly-weds, which due to the circumstances had to be reduced to a separate room in one of their parents' houses or forced co-housing. Most couples in the postwar period started their families in these cramped accommodations. The newly constructed housing stock was state-funded rental housing. Its houses and apartments were fairly distributed among the families on the waiting list. It was seen as God's gift when after years of waiting a rental apartment was finally allotted. At that time home-ownership was not an issue at all because the Dutch had always been a nation of renters in line with a strong social-democratic tradition. Thirty years later, however, when the political wave of neo-liberalism got hold in Europe, home-ownership in the Netherlands



became not so much the norm as the ideal. The once state-funded social housing is now more and more sold to the highest bidder. Within four decades the Dutch have become a nation of home-owners.

Since the 1970s marriage is not a necessary condition anymore to be selected for a rental apartment as it was in the postwar years. Not only the ideal but also the right of independent housing for singles has been widely acknowledged. Dutch university students have set the trend in the late 1960s in not just renting a bedroom from a landlady but favoring independent accommodation with kitchen facilities. Nowadays Dutch freshmen will start searching for a rental room with kitchen facilities some months before classes begin. In creating the material conditions of an independent household, the student-to-be shapes his or her new social identity as an independent citizen (Cieraad 2010: 88). Leaving the parental home and have a place of your own has become the most important rite of passage for adolescents, males and females alike, which does not coincide with marriage or living together anymore. The transitional home experience of students has set an example for today's working girls and boys who also want to leave home and have a place of their own, which has led to a shortage of affordable housing due to the subsequent rise of commercial rents and real estate prices. The present situation is annoying but it does not lead to risky undertakings or a halt on love relations or marriage, as in the Tunisian case.

### *Conclusion: Towards a reinterpretation of société à maisons*

The three articles under discussion inspired me to seek for a mirror image or an analogy in Western societies. Rosalie Stolz's contribution on the changing communities of sounds in northern Laos changed my perspective on the background of the popularity of camping in the West. Her article made me realize that the attraction of camping also has to do with being part of a temporary community of sounds, but most of all that camping is a summerly ritual of reversal of the normal housing situation in which privacy, security and climate control are all-important. While Jonathan Alderman's contribution on the bloody libation rituals performed in the patio of rural houses in Andean Bolivia made me realize that there is a heightened sensitivity in the West towards blood, and more in particular visible blood spatters, be it animal or human blood. The affective relations between humans and animals, more in particular pets, explain why Westerners are as sensitive to animal blood as they are to human blood, especially when it concerns their own pet.



Although blood lines have become the all-pervasive genetic kinship structure from a medical point of view, they have lost their primal importance within present-day nuclear kinship structures which are primarily based on affection between parents and children, and not necessarily or only partially based on biological kinship. The legal claims of divorced parents on the continuation of the affective relationships with their under-aged children has resulted on the part of their children into a doubling of material houses and childhood homes in which they participate and have a room<sup>7</sup>. It warrants in my view an update and reinterpretation of Lévi-Strauss's concept of *société à maisons* describing the different affective, and often only semi-biological kinship circles as "the houses," in which today's children participate. Also, when parents stay together the only one childhood home will most probably be located in different material houses on different locations, for moving to a bigger house in a better neighborhood is an aspiration of many parents. The next stage is when adolescent children leave the parental home to have a place of their own within the vicinity of their university, they are also effectively doubling houses. A room in a student house represents the hope to participate in a new affective circle of peers as a kind of semi-family. In a successful student career the house of peers should become more important than the parental home, but it will always serve as a safe back-up home.

The cultural dead-lock between home-ownership and manhood in southern Tunisia, as described by Pontiggia, points to a relation between the material home and the male self. Like the many half-finished houses, which often have dilapidated due to the extended intervals in its construction, quite obviously illustrate the man's impotency in creating a family. He is in fact only half a man. Carsten and Hugh-Jones (1995: 3) initial observation of the seemingly self-evident relation between the house and the self in Western societies, was far more difficult to establish. The only link between the house and the body I could find was the ideal of a smooth human skin which covers and conceals the blood-vessels mirrored in the ideal of smooth interior walls invisibly covering a maze of electricity cables, piping and gas conducts. In old houses where cables and piping are still in plain view a renovation is warranted to get rid of these 'varicose veins' on the walls. The similarity between the surface of the interior walls of the house and the human skin is an illustration of Carsten and Hugh-Jones's quote "[t]he house

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7. The multiplication of houses is also evident on the level of grandparents, who multiply in number when each of the divorcees start a new relation. Instead of the potential two couples of grandparents a child may have to deal with four couples of so-called grandparents. Mutual affection more than biology will determine the relationship between grandparent and child.

is an extension of the person like an extra skin, carapace or second layer of clothes, it serves as much to reveal and display as it does to hide and protect” (1995: 2). The autonomous human body sealed by its skin is a perfect parallel to the celebrated home ideal of autarky in Western societies (Cieraad 2020b).

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