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**MUTUAL AID AND OTHER FORMS OF JOINT WORK AS
MANIFESTATIONS OF SOLIDARITY IN THE MACEDONIAN
TRADITIONAL VILLAGE CULTURE**

Abstract: “Mutual help” is a folk custom of joint voluntary work representing an important feature of the village as a social and economic community in Macedonia. The mutual aid was voluntary and was based on the principle of mutual help of labor services. This paper presents traditional forms of customary assistance and dynamics of change through data obtained from field research.¹, and data already exists in the ethnographic literature.

Keywords: mutual aid, solidarity, *argati* (workers) who came to help,

Solidarity refers to unity and mutual support or help between individuals and groups, especially in difficult situations. Social relations can be defined as a feeling of reciprocity and the basis of mutual help between people. This is why solidarity is considered one of the fundamental values of well-functioning societies.

Social sciences, especially sociology, deal with solidarity, where Emile Durkheim put forward the fundamental theories of solidarity. According to Durkheim, solidarity is a moral phenomenon (Dirkem 1972, 105), which expresses the general attitude of humanity, and the various forms of solidarity on which individual societies are based are related to various forms of social consciousness. Durkheim contrasts mechanical with organic solidarity. Mechanical solidarity directly connects the individual to society, where that society is a set of organized beliefs and feelings common to all group members. This type of solidarity corresponds to societies with homogeneous and similar segments. In the organic solidarity that creates the division of labor, individuals are distinguished by their field of action. With the increase in the division of labor in society, individuals differ in their common field of action. However, on the other hand, everyone’s activity is even

1 The research was conducted in 1998 and 2023.

more personal if it is more specialized. (Dirkem 1972: 160-161) “In a society dominated by organic solidarity, individuals are not grouped by their relationships with offspring, but by the distinctive nature of the social activities to which they are devoted.” (Dirkem 1972: 203) Lafazanovska-Stojanović interprets Durkheim’s formulation of mechanical and organic solidarity: “Village life represents a unity of values and visions, people live in a collective consciousness and mechanical solidarity, a community that is differentiated into segments composed of kin groups, which is not characteristic of the city, where the density of the population requires specialized activities, which changes the unity created by common experience and in its place builds a functional independence between people engaged in specialized activities.” (Stojanović, 2012: 291)

Solidarity as a social practice was one of the fundamental factors of social cohesion in the Macedonian villages. The strong spirit of togetherness guaranteed the Macedonian villagers security and solidarity in difficult situations.

One of the village’s most widespread traditional forms of solidarity as an economic, social, and ritual community of villagers was “common work and mutual help.” Villagers were called “to kuluk” (tur. kulluk)² to carry out everyday village work. At the kuluk, the elder called the village assembly to dig ditches for irrigation, mowing of common meadows, and repairing roads and buildings from the typical village property. In this paper, I focus on mutual aid as a form of solidarity among Macedonians.

Mutual aid terminology

The folk custom of joint voluntary work was found among several Balkan peoples, often under the name *moba* (from St. Sl. *molba*, from the root *moliti*³). *Moba* represented “a gathering of people who voluntarily come together to help someone in doing individual tasks, free of charge and without obligatory compensation.” (Vlajinac 1929: 21). In Macedonia, this type of folk custom of helping each other in work was simply called “pomosh” (*pomoć* – Skopje region,⁴ *pumagaine* - Gevgelija region⁵), “on spmok” in

2 According to Tole Belchev’s interpretation, kuluk is forced to free, hard, tedious work for another. (in Rechnik na turcizmi..., 2016, 101)

3 Interpretation from the Dictionary of the Croatian Language (F. Iveković, I.Broz, 1901, 699); Prvoslav Radih interprets the word plea with *moba* in a dictionary of the speech of the village of Mrce in the district of Kurshumlja, Serbia. (1990, 54); Vlajinac points out that the name *moba* is largely preserved in its original form as a plea, especially in Timochki, Niški, and Kruševac areas. The original title (*molba*) also corresponds to the title *molba*, about that custom preserved in the oldest written monuments, as a poem from 1720. (1929, 19-20)

4 For the *moba* custom, it is usually called *pomoć*, i.e., for help (in Taor, Ibrahimovo, Blace, Aleksandovo, Bujkovci, Chucher, Ljubanci, Romanovce), *argati na pomoć* (In Gluovo, Brezica, Kuchkovo). In Katlanovo, Gradomancyi, they say *umolba*, *molbay* (plea). (Filipoviĥ.M., 1939: 341). The same notion of help was used by informants in the villages of Tekia, Ajvatovce, and Creshevo (Skopje), their own field research from 15 and 30.09. 1998.

5 During his research in Gevgelija Region, Stevan Tanoviĥ noticed that “*pumagaine*” went to help the poor only on holidays or Sundays, for which the host rewarded them with lunch and dinner. In the

Struski Drimkol⁶, angaria in Maleshevo, tloka in Porechie (Obremski J., 2002:25), or as noted by M. Konstantinov, “descriptively and more specifically, ‘picking hay’, ‘winding tobacco’, ‘cutting a vineyard’... (Konstantinov M. , 1992:539)

In the villages in the Skopje valley, the same terminology was used for the people who participated in aid as for wage earners, that is, argat, argat na pomoc. (Filipoviĥ.M., 1939: 341)

When help is called, basic principles

Help was given to those who could not do urgent work by themselves due to a lack of labor in the family. Relatives and neighbors went to help the person asking for it. Participation in this type of custom was voluntary, and it was based on the principle of reciprocity of work services⁷, those who did not respond to the call had no right to ask for help from the one they refused. The poor, the widowed, the sick, and those who found themselves in trouble (for example, their property burned down) were not obliged to return their work⁸. The help was agreed in advance. An informant says that in the Skopje village of Gorno Sonje, “in the evening, a man called protuger went from house to house to collect enough workers.”⁹

Each participant who called for help came to the agreed place on time, bringing his tools to perform the work. The participants came in “formal clothes” (in the villages of the Skopje Valley.¹⁰) and were usually in a good mood because they knew they could do things easier with good company and songs, and the host would entertain them with a good meal.

rest, mutual help is found in the form of borrowing work (loan). The host was obliged to return the help to everyone, and if he could not pay him in money in the amount of the usual wage... This collection of owed wages in money does not at all correspond to the spirit of the loan (loan) because loans were made precisely because of the need to avoid payments to hirelings.

6 Data obtained from Prof. Dr. Mirjana Mirchevska in 2023.

7 Milan Vlajinac writes about the principle of reciprocity of work in the moba community among other Balkan nations, points out: “When it comes to the moba custom in general, it can be said that it rests on mutual work services. As a general rule, it applies: to whom work is done with moba, he should also work with moba.” (Vlajinac, 1929: 306)

8 In Malesevo, the poor and foreigners received “angaria” help, which was merciful, and they helped with harvesting, digging, pulling for building a house (this was also done to the rich), mowing, etc. The laborers were given dinner because they (participants) came to work from noon (after finishing their work m.z.). For this see: Pavlović 1928:269

9 Informant Ivanovski Ivan, born in 1930 in Gorno Sonje. Own field research from September 15, 1998

10 This is how Filipoviĥ Milenko described the participants who go “to help” in the villages of the Skopje Valley (Filipoviĥ, 1939: 341)

Operations that were processed with mutual help

Help was requested for the completion of fieldwork, where the number of participants was the greatest, such as harvesting grain, mowing the meadow, digging, picking and husking corn, but also for other more complex tasks - cutting trees, digging and picking grapes, stringing tobacco, building a house and similar operations. It depended on the nature of the work, whether only men would go to help or they would finish the work together with the wives.

Harvesting, as a more extensive work, was usually completed with the help of the villagers (“with *argati*” in Skopje region) where they gathered many male and female harvesters of different ages. The harvest took place in a cheerful atmosphere, as evidenced by the harvest songs sung during the work. M.Filipović pointed out that in the villages in the Skopje Valley, there was also a competition in the speed of harvesting so that “whoever reaches the end of the field first is called a *postadji*, and he is usually a man, and *on the tail* is an older woman.” The argats were given a decadent dinner. Honoring the workers played an important role in confirming the host’s hospitality and strengthening the mutual bond between him and those who came to his aid. How important it was to feed the targets well can be seen from the statement of an informant from the village of Aivatovci – Skopje region: “A group of 5-6 women slaughtered a sheep and prepared lunch for the harvesters that were brought to them in the field.¹¹ During the harvest, a series of customs were observed that ensured successful work, protection of the harvested crop, and a good crop the following year. Some of the common customs were that the householder was the first to start the harvest, the sickle was not passed from hand to hand so as not to pass “*mrza*”(laziness), and before the end of the harvest, a “beard.”¹² was always made from the last bunch of ears of corn. The “beard” was decorated with basil and flowers, the sickles were placed around it, and the spike was tied and cut.¹³ An informant from the village of Tekia–Skopje region says that that one of the families whose field was harvested takes the “beard” and carries it home, not speaking to anyone along the way. When he entered the yard, he left his beard with the sickles in the barn.¹⁴

The threshing was also completed with mutual help. Our field research shows that in the past, before the socialist period, in addition to the help of labor, the neighbors lent horses to those whose grain was threshed (village Ajvatovci – Skopje region)¹⁵. An

11 Informant born in 1930 in the village of Ajvatovce. Own field research on September 30, 1998; in Gorno Sonje, lunch was usually taken to the field, and roasted cabbage and cakes for dinner. Informant born in 1942 from Gorno Sonje. Own field research from September 15, 1998

12 Informant born in 1942 from Gorno Sonje. Own field research from September 15, 1998. In Skopje Crna Gora, from the ears of corn that remained in the field, the youngest harvester weaves a “*lesarka*,” which was kept hanging on the veranda of the house of the field owner for up to three years. More about this in: Petrović, 1907: 432

13 More about harvest customs in Filipović, 1939: 492-493

14 Informant born in 1925 in the village of Tekia (Skopje). Own field research from September 30, 1998

15 Informant born in 1930 in the village of Ajvatovci (Skopje). Own field research from September 30, 1998

informant from the village of Tekia in Skopje says that for the threshing, people went from house to house to collect “argati” for *pomokj* (help) during the threshing process. The threshing was performed in turn at each household with help. After the Second World War, with the establishment of cooperatives, threshers were hired from the agricultural cooperatives, which made their work more accessible. However, the solidarity of the villagers in keeping the established order was not disturbed. Under the new conditions, the ceremony was performed in turn in each house in the village. “The threshing machine (vršilica) was decorated with flowers when they went to the season’s first performance. The villagers went with a song:

My sun has stopped in the middle of the sky
 So, he sees a strange miracle after the *argat*
 As a sister resells her brother,
 Shiny watcher,
 She was selling him by noon
 And from noon, she invited him to visit.
 And the brother quietly answers the sister:
 “I’m not coming sister.”
 Until a willow tree bears no grapes.”¹⁶

The digging of corn fields in the Skopje Valley (Skopska Kotlina)¹⁷, picking and husking (in Ohrid, Gevgelija region¹⁸) were processed by mutual help.

In cultivating the vineyards, “help” was agreed upon for all phases of the work: digging the vineyards (in the villages of the Skopje region).¹⁹, for planting new vineyards²⁰, for picking grapes. The grape harvest used to be executed with mutual help among those

16 Informant born in the village of Tekija. Own field research from September 30, 1998

17 Filipović, 1939: 341; During field research in the Skopje villages in the fall of 1998, I obtained data on corn digging with the help of neighbors and relatives: in the village of Gomo Sonje, informant born in 1942; in the village of Creshevo, informant originally from Radishani, married in Creshevo in 1938—own field research from September 15, 1998.

18 In Ohrid, the husking of corn (whitening of corn) was completed in the fall with women’s mutual help. According to Shapkarev, “...in the evening, girls gather to whiten corn and sing songs all night long”. The hostess treats everyone with dinner, boiled corn, grapes and whatever other fruits she has” (Shapkarev, 1976: 140) We learn more detailed information about help with picking and husking corn in Gevgelisko from S. Tanović (1927: 347)

19 See Filipović 1939: 341; In the village of Bulachani (Skopje), they called “argats for help” for digging a vineyard, who came with their own tools, and they were returned with help when they needed it for work. Informant born in Bulachani. Own field research from September 15, 1998.

20 Shapkarev, about the mutual help of a vessel in Ohrid, noted, “..When a householder has to plant a new vineyard, he gathers workers, not with wages, but calls his relatives and friends, who plant him for free. However, they feast and sing all day long with abundant drinks, and at dinner, they give them a feast, with merrymaking and songs, playing and dancing, as at a wedding. (Shapkarev K. 1976: 141).

who had a more extensive vineyard and could not harvest the grapes themselves. Men and women, neighbors and relatives of the vineyard owner, voluntarily went to the Skopje village of Tekija to harvest grapes. The host provided a good lunch for the pickers, usually stew, roast meat, and drink. After completion of the work, the pickers received a basket of grapes as a reward.²¹ The reward type depended on the host's will and was not established as an agreed compensation for the harvest participants. Grapes, the primary raw material for making wine, were an essential segment of the rural economy. The custom of paying day laborers with wine in rural Moldova also speaks of the important role of wine, which is present both in the every day and in the ritual life of Orthodox Christians. The custom was revived in the early 2000s in response to the economic difficulties of the privatization of agricultural land. The revitalization of traditional forms of labor exchange, where the worker can expect to receive equivalent help in the future, is less common than the form of paid labor "with wine." Paying with wine symbolizes household interdependence rooted in mutual respect. Individuals or households in villages who "work for wine" are socially and economically marginal, but they create and maintain social relationships with the houses they work for. The rural economy of Moldova is the "house economy," in which one of the primary markers of the social standing of each house is the household wine reserve, which can be used both as a commodity and a currency. Paying laborers in wine who lack material well-being enhances their sense of equality in village life.²² (Cash, 2015: 37-40)

Only men participated in performing the more difficult works with mutual help, including collecting firewood. In Maleshevo, men went "on angaria" all day only when they went to the mountains for wood. (Pavlović, 1928:269) In Skopje's Ajvatovci, the neighbors usually came to help collect wood with their own oxes and carts for hauling wood "from the *korjia* (wood)".²³ It was considered an exceptional "help" when a "beech" - a large hollowed-out log used to carry water to a mill—was dragged. A cart pulled the beech, but the villagers were called for help loading, unloading, and setting up the "beech."²⁴

In livestock activities, help is called for shearing the sheep. In Maleshevo, sheep shearing is done before Savior's Day, when two or three neighbors gathered the sheep at the sheepfold and called shearers for help, who were then treated with a rich dinner for their work²⁵. In the Kumanovo region, shearers were called in order: "one day at one

21 Informant born in the village of Tekija. Own field research from September 30, 1998.

22 Kesh conducted research in the village of Raschajeci from 2009 to 2010. She points out that: "Wine payments" introduce the extraordinary meanings of wine and its use in other ritual settings into the realm of the economy, and such payments are made possible by equations of equivalences between labor, cash, and wine. See: Cash, J. 2015 'Economy as Ritual: The Problems of Paying in Wine', in S. Gudeman and C. Hann (eds.), *Economy and Ritual: Studies of Postsocialist Transformations*, New York: Berghahn Books, 31-51.

23 Informant born in 1930 in the village of Ajvatovci—Skopje. My field research began on September 30, 1998.

24 More about this in Filipović, 1939: p. 341

25 J. Pavlović describes the process of shearing the sheep, where apart from the men who come to help with the shearing, the women of the herdsmen also participated in order to collect the wool

house, the next day at another house". (Vlajinac, 1929: 37) In the villages of the Skopje Valley, "the shearers are neighbors and friends who come to each other alternately" (Filipović, 1939:487).

In addition to the numerous examples that highlight the solidarity in the village as an economic community during the completion of agricultural work, according to examples in the literature and knowledge from field research, mutual help is most often represented for house building.²⁶ In this regard, Milosh Konstantinov points out that "several buildings in the villages were the result of joint work" (Konstantinov, 1992: 540). The help primarily consisted of collecting and hauling lumber for the house, such as stones, beams, etc. An informant from the village of Creshevo remembers that for the construction of their house in the 1950s, they received 12 wagons with beams for the house.²⁷ Helping to build a house as a form of traditional solidarity has survived the longest. Thus, in the village of Tekia-Skopje, in the second half of the 20th century, *argats* helped during certain stages of construction by "pouring the floor concrete slab" and raising the roof. When "pouring" a slab, the *argates* would add a whole bucket of concrete from hand to hand, thus completing the work in one day. They received a "meal" three times per day from the landlord for the work. During the roof construction, the neighbors brought gifts of "bakshish" to the *argats*. When the roof was raised, the headmaster would climb to the top and shout blessings for the host and all who brought gifts.²⁸ An informant from village Ljubanci says that houses were built in the village with the help of "*argats* on loan." They helped in the construction, from digging the foundation to covering the house with shingles. This type of mutual assistance lasted until the end of the 20th century when private entrepreneurs with modern construction machinery began to engage.²⁹ Mutual help in building a house is also found in modern conditions, not only in villages but also in urban areas.³⁰ The use of unpaid collective labor for house building, provided by relatives,

in sacks immediately after the shearing and took it home where they distributed it as needed. All the family took part in the lunch, and "there can be up to 50 people", after which it ended with rejoicing and shooting "through the barnyard". More about this in Pavlović, 1928: 83-85.

26 During the research on the social culture of the village of Oreshe in Veles, Svetieva states that "mutual help came to the fore during the construction of a house" (Svetieva, 2015: 34)

27 Informant was originally from Radishani (Skopsko) and married in Creshevo (Skopsko) in 1948. My field research started on September 15, 1998. During the construction the house in Bulacani (Skopsko) village, the neighbors brought cartloads of stones for the building. Informant born in Bulalacani. My field research is from September 15, 1998.

28 Informant from the village of Tekija remembers that during the construction of their house in 1963, 15 "*argats*" of their neighbors participated, for whom, after raising the roof, the neighbors brought 15 pairs of socks and other gifts. The "*Argats*" helped until the house was covered with roof tiles, "everyone with what they could do: someone was a bricklayer, someone was a blacksmith...". My field research is from September 30, 1998.

29 Informant born in 1968 in the village of Ljubanci, has been doing field research since September 2023.

30 During the 2007 extension of the floor of the house, intended for the informant's son and daughter-in-law, they called relatives and friends to help raise the roof. After finishing the work, everyone was treated to lunch. Relatives worked during all construction phases. Informant born in 1980 in Skopje and works at the Museum of the City of Skopje.

friends, and colleagues, was widespread in Eastern Europe during the socialist period. “The provision of such support was a common type of mutual obligation...when most had no alternatives to building a house except with unpaid collective labor...at a time when “shortages of professional masons and other construction workers were a stable feature of the socialist economy in Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, and Yugoslavia” (Tocheva 2022, 166). Tocheva noticed great changes about the meaning of unpaid collective work for building houses from the late-socialist economy to the market economy, where this type of labor “as a moral, economic activity defined in terms of mutual obligations and expectations, fell,” but forms of mutuality are still present, despite that there are increased market transactions of personal interest. (Tocheva, 2022, 171)

According to the traditional division of labor by gender, women were put in charge of the domestic work in the household and traditional textile production. There were women’s associations for the completion of domestic women’s work. However, in contrast with the agricultural work completed with mutual help, where women also participated, women’s handcraft was organized with fewer participants due to the limited space in the houses and the volume of work, which was not to such an extent as to require many workers. Thus, in the villages of Skopska Crna Gora, women from the same neighborhood gathered and first went to dig the ground, which they then prepared by trampling, which used to be considered one of the most challenging women’s jobs. The pots were made on the feast of the saint St. Jeremiah. When they were finished, they were divided equally among all those who participated according to the number of houses or according to the number of female workers.

When 5-6 women and girls got together for this work near Veles, they jokingly called themselves “guild.” In Prilep, the tiring work of making tiles was made more accessible by a particular organization: women gathered in neighborhoods and divided into two groups, “so while some work, the others sing in shifts...” (Filipović, 1951:114 -115).

There were also women’s associations for joint work in domestic textile production. In Ohrid, when linen was worked in households, 5-10 related women joined together to do the work without compensation, mutually one day in one house, another day in another” until everyone’s linen was produced. (Shapkarev, 1976): 140) In the 19th century, silk production, which was in the hands of women, flourished in Skopje. During the spinning phase of the silk, women spinners were called to help if necessary.³¹ In the Skopje village of Tekia, the neighboring women were called “to help” when combing wool (*on combing*) and when spinning wool (*on spinning*). The work starts either on Saturday or Sunday evening. Depending on the amount of wool, if the work lasted until late at night, the hostess prepared them a dinner of “zeljanci” (cabbage pie) or “poparnica” (bread with cottage cheese and cheese).³² In the village of Gorno Sonje, in the fall, after completing the threshing, 5-6 women would gather to help a housewife who had hemp for spinning.

31 Hadji-Vasiljević noticed that it was customary for the invited tocharkas to feast on a lunch of greasy pie. (Hadji-Vasiljević, 1930: 103)

32 Informant born in 1923 in the village of Tekia, Skopje. My field research is from September 30, 1998.

They spun in the evening “on moonlight,” and the host woman entertained them with “sukano” (pie). Songs always accompanied work.³³

Within customary help, assistance at weddings and funerals is included. Analyzing the customary help at a wedding in Poreche, Obremski points out that it “is not limited only to material fees, but it is about the ritual, social and social function.” (Obremski, 2002: 24). The participation of relatives and neighbors was very important even in the pre-wedding rites, such as on the day of giving the word, (in Skopje, Montenegro), when girls from the neighborhood participated in the act of traditionally changing the proposed girl “*zagovorka*,” and then the inviters at the wedding (*zdravicarki* in Skopje, *zovaci* at the Mijaci), as well as the boys and girls (*pobratimi* – groom’s best friends and *posestrimi* – bride’s best friends at the Mijacs -western Macedonian ethnic group) who helped to knead the bread for the wedding, weave *ruguzina*- a rug made of straw, weave the bridal wreath, carry wood and prepare the house for the wedding.³⁴ In the villages at Skopska Crna Gora mountain, neighbors tidy up the yard and bring chairs, benches, and dishes for lunch; the head chef and assistants for serving, washing dishes, etc., are appointed to prepare for the wedding festivity.³⁵ “The neighbors are entrusted with everything in the house, and they serve the guests.” (Petrović, 1907:377) Such neighborly help was maintained in some villages until the end of the 20th century. In the Skopje village of Gorno Sonje, weddings were held in the son-in-law’s house until the end of the 20th century.³⁶ From the Friday before the wedding, women from the neighborhood and relatives came to weave pies, and on Saturday, the neighbors gathered to bring and set tables and chairs and prepare dishes.

Neighborly solidarity was expressed in all stages of the funeral, from digging the grave to transporting and burying the deceased. Several men from the neighborhood were digging the grave the same day the burial took place³⁷. Burials of the deceased, “ground on the ground,” without a casket, were common in the past. The deceased was taken out of the home on a stretcher and carried in the arms of four men, who were replaced by others along the way so that everyone helped and thus paid respect to the deceased.³⁸ When the burial of the deceased in a coffin began, one of the villagers made a wooden coffin without compensation. From an informant’s statements, we learn that in the village of Ljubanci until the second half of the 20th century, the informant’s grandfather made coffins for all the deceased in the village. The villagers often asked him: “Who will forge

33 Informant born in 1942 from Gorno Sonje. My field research since September 1998.

34 More about this in Naumova, 1996: 209-210; Petrović, 1907: 462-465; Petreska, 2008: 94

35 For more on this, see: Trifunski, 1994:60

36 Informant born in 1942 in Gorno Sonje. Own field research since September 1998

37 Risteski noticed the process of digging a grave in Mariovo, where until the 30s of the 20th century, people were buried without a coffin, “... so “the people digging the grave went near the mountain to break large and wide stone slabs, with which formed the “*sqivur*” or “*qivur*,” that is, the inner part of the grave.” (Risteski, 1999: 79-80)

38 For funeral customs, see Konstantinov, 1992:531; Naumova, 1996: 214

a coffin for you when you die?” to which he answered: “We should be people for both joy and sorrow”.³⁹

In the spirit of the strong community of the Macedonian peasants, the voluntary cultivation of the church and monastery properties is included. The younger girls and boys usually gathered on Sundays or holidays and finished the work together. They were rewarded with food from the church but ate separately, first the girls and then the boys.⁴⁰

As a separate entity, the village community also functioned as a ritual-religious community through collective village rituals. The village community performed religious rituals in moments of crisis or to ask for a larger crop and/or the health of people and cattle. All the village members participated in the preparation of the village day of honor, baptisms, or rites for protection from infectious diseases. A certain group from the village community participated in ritual processions with masks, *lazarki*, and *dodolki* to protect the entire village community.

It is obvious from the previous text that the joint labor function, as a moral obligation to provide free labor and the expectation of its return, was an important component of traditional culture.

The social and economic changes in the country that occurred in the period after World War II, the industrialization and modernization, caused radical changes in the villages and the peasantry, the most important of which are the mass abandonment of the villages and agriculture as well as disintegration of the (until then) traditional way of life” (Petreska, 2008:17). Rural/urban migrations accelerated the disintegration of clan groups and the division of the common property, as well as the creation of non-local families. Immigrant families became the base of the industrial workforce in the cities. On the other hand, the modernization and application of new agricultural machines allowed those who remained in the villages to cultivate their land independently. Urbanization and modernization affect changes in the lives of migrants and those who remain in the villages, especially by emphasizing personal initiative and alienation. However, mutual assistance between close relatives and neighbors is still present and adapted to the needs of modern life. During the extensive rural/urban migration processes, for example, in Skopje in the 60s and 70s of the 20th century, good neighborly and kinship relations came forward in house building for the settlers.⁴¹

39 Informant born in 1968 in the village of Ljubanci. My field research, September 2023.

40 For this see: Petrović, 1907:433; Filipović, 1939: 342; Shapkarev, 1976:141

41 During the construction of the house in the Butel neighborhood, Skopje, which was built by his grandfather, originally from the village of Strupeno (Meglensko), all the brothers, the son, and other relatives who lived in the same street helped. Together, they participated in constructing the entire house, even making bricks from clay they dug on the house's plot. For the bricks, they made wooden molds in which the brick was dried, then the mold collapsed, and then they were baked in such a way that they stacked the bricks like an oven, put coal and wood between them, left a space in the middle like a chimney, and glued mud on the side—my field research from August 2023 in Skopje.

With mutual help, conserved food for the winter was prepared in city households. The most important element of the winter food supply is ajvar (red pepper spread), which supplements the vegetable needs during the winter. Help from the neighbors was welcome when preparing ajvar in the autumn months, on the typical terraces, or in the parks and front of the garages around the buildings. The neighbors helped each other in peeling the peppers. Researching the self-sufficiency (self-support) of households in postsocialist Macedonia, Miladina Monova (Monova 2015) highlights the making of ajvar in the modern household as a strategy of self-sufficiency and family autonomy, on examples from Prilep and Skopje. Making ajvar is laborious and time-consuming and includes a series of repetitive and strenuous work tasks that can be carried out by the joint work of a team “often based on the mutual help of neighbors.” (Monova, 2015,78) In Prilep, where houses with gardens that facilitate the activities of the domestic economy dominate, homemade ajvar is maintained even in single-member households where they “connect with others to share resources and labor.” In Skopje, on the other hand, the tradition of making ajvar in improvised outdoor kitchens with mutual help from friends and neighbors is slowly disappearing. According to Monova, the reasons for this are citizens’ lack of time, lack of sufficient labor force in small households as well as space for outside preparation, rising prices of resources, and finally, the ban on cooking ajvar in public areas, implemented in 2008.

Mutual help in modern conditions is found between close relatives in everyday life (babysitting, staying, family celebrations) and in crisis situations, but due to the dynamics of city life, people more often seek help from neighbors or friends with whom they communicate daily.⁴²

The tradition of mutual aid is found today in a modified version, and it is no longer limited to kinship, friendship, and neighborly ties. There are everyday examples when the media and social networks organize solidarity aid for poor families, emergency surgeries, blood donations, restoration of burnt houses, school equipping, etc.

All this confirms to us that the traditionally established mutual help and solidarity still exists and occurs in a modified form both in everyday life and in crisis situations.

42 For this see: Петреска, 2008: 31-32, 37

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