State-Sponsored Unhomeliness: Struggle for Certainty and Privacy in Serbian Social Housing

SARA NIKOLIĆ, IGOR IŠPANOVIĆ, DUŠANKA MILOSAVLJEVIĆ

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Sara Nikolić, University of Belgrade, Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory, Kraljice Natalje 45, 11000 Belgrade, Serbia; e-mail: sara.nikolic@ifdt.bg.ac.rs
Igor Išpanović, University of Belgrade, Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory, Kraljice Natalje 45, 11000 Belgrade, Serbia; e-mail: igor.ispanovic@ifdt.bg.ac.rs
Dušanka Milosavljević, University of Belgrade, Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory, Kraljice Natalje 45, 11000 Belgrade, Serbia; e-mail: dusanka.milosavljevic@ifdt.bg.ac.rs

This paper examines the lived realities of housing precarity within Serbia's social housing estates, focusing on the concept of *unhomeliness*. Drawing on multimodal fieldwork conducted in two Serbian social housing estates, it explores how marginalized inhabitants navigate the erosion of stability, privacy, and living conditions. The findings reveal how systemic neglect and institutional failures compound vulnerabilities, fostering pervasive instability and alienation. Social housing, intended as a solution to housing needs, emerges as a paradoxical site where shelter is provided yet insecurity, unhomeliness and marginalization persist. Through the lens of *unhomeliness*, the analysis reveals the emotional and material toll of precarious housing, such as utility disconnections, overcrowding, and structural neglect. The article situates *unhomeliness* as both a structural and experiential phenomenon, emphasizing how the erosion of welfare housing policies and lack of privacy undermine the basic functions of a "home" and shedding the light on the tension between inhabitants' efforts to create autonomy and dignity, and the challenges they face. This analysis advances understanding of housing inequality and resilience among marginalized communities in post-socialist contexts, offering a critical perspective on the interplay between systemic neglect, individual agency, and the contested meanings of home.

Keywords: Serbia, social housing, housing precarity, unhomeliness, privacy

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Introduction

September 15 had dawned with a glimmer of hope. Slavica had left her doctor's office in silence. The laryngeal cancer, as well as her voice, was gone. She walked home with relief, hand in hand with Strahinja.[1] As they walked into Akrobate Aleksića Street, her steps faltered. There was a gathering ahead, neighbours clustered around the building's entrance, eyes lowered to a scene on the ground. Spread across the asphalt was a scattering of objects she knew too well: their couch, her chipped cabinets, an assortment of pots and pillows, her granddaughters' brightly coloured toys. All her life, splayed out in the open. Each piece seemed more exposed than the last, small fragments of life now scattered on the pavement like debris.

Beside her, Strahinja was already moving, his jaw clenched, his hand firm on her shoulder as they climbed the stairs. Step by step, they absorbed the sight, an impossible unravelling of their home and their privacy. The eviction notice had, once again, arrived days ago. A familiar threat, yet one they hoped they could negotiate. They had tried, time and again, to renew their contract, navigating the maze of bureaucratic dead-ends. When they reached the apartment, a stranger's voice broke the silence. The eviction officer stood inside their emptied living room, accompanied by two uniformed policemen and a locksmith. The officer barely glanced at them, his gaze resting for just a moment on Slavica, his expression cold and impersonal. Strahinja's face tightened as he stepped forward, shielding her. His voice cut through the room. "This is our home. You have no right to do this." The eviction officer looked up, unfazed. "Who are you? The contract is in her name, and it's expired. We're here just to enforce the order."

Slavica moved beside him, her dark green eyes wide, pleading, silently searching their faces for some hint of mercy. The police officer barely looked at her. His words, almost mocking, were directed at the window behind her. "Well, you could always jump. Maybe that way, your kids could keep the apartment." Then, with chilling determination, he took one of the few remaining chairs in the apartment and carried it to the balcony, setting it down as if arranging a seat – making it clear, with silent menace, that the choice to jump was hers to consider. The gesture hit her like a sudden gust, hollowing her out. Her granddaughters, ages two and six, had been sitting by the wall. They were looked after by a neighbour while Slavica was at the doctor's and flew to meet her, mistaking the eviction delegation for their grandmother. Now, they were caught in the thick silence that blanketed the room. The younger let out a cry, rising in a panicked pitch. "No, Grandma!"

The air thickened. Slavica's vision blurred. Her body felt suspended between impulse and paralysis, the officer's words echoing in her mind. The world seemed to

1 Slavica and Strahinja are long-term partners. All names of our interlocutors used in this article are pseudonyms to protect their privacy and confidentiality. A list of research participants, including details of their living conditions, can be found in Appendix 1: Participant Profiles at the very end of the article.

spin. In a haze, she turned and stumbled into the kitchen, finding the familiar metal cylinder under the counter. The gas tank, worn and rusted, had been their constant in a life fractured by years of disconnection from the power grid, a stubborn remnant of their independence and resourcefulness. She took the lighter and lifted the gas cylinder, cradling it as if it held her voice. Anger was vibrating through her bones.

For a brief, tense moment, time seemed to stop. The room charged with unspoken threats, no one daring to breathe. But then they moved. In swift, brutal movements, they descended on her, wrestling the cylinder from her hands, stepping on her fingers to release the lighter. Slavica felt the sharp pain of fists and boots meeting flesh, her body battered, Strahinja's shouts barely reaching her as they held him back, forcing him to watch. Children shouted, their voices cracking, but their protests were drowned by the heavy boots moving over the floor, the quiet machinery of eviction. After this incident she spent two days in custody and is currently charged with assault on an official. For now, Slavica and her family are still in their apartment in Akrobate Aleksića.

The story of Slavica and Strahinja[2] encapsulates the stark reality faced by many inhabitants of social housing estates in Serbia – a reality defined by what might best be described as *unhomeliness*, a term that captures the deep sense of instability and alienation within what should be their own homes. We apply this framework within a Serbian social housing context that is marked by state neglect, segregation and racialised welfare policies. Through the lens of unhomeliness, this study aims to understand the material and affective impact of systematic abandonment as felt by those who live with the daily precarity of forced evictions, bureaucratic hurdles, and deteriorating living conditions. This exploration reveals how, in the context of social housing in Serbia, unhomeliness is both a lived experience and a structural phenomenon.

Drawing on fieldwork in two social housing estates, we trace how residents resist, adapt to, and endure these conditions. The article is organised into four sections. The first offers an outline of the conceptual framework. The second situates the research within the broader context of the two studied social housing estates and briefly examines the country's social housing policies. The third provides an account of the qualitative research methods employed. Finally, the fourth section presents findings structured around key dimensions of unhomeliness as experienced by those who generously allowed us into their lives and spaces. By centring on inhabitants' narratives, the article illustrates how housing precarity, substandard conditions and a lack of privacy undermine their sense of home and belonging.

2 The story of this attempted eviction is based on in-depth interviews conducted with the couple, combined with insights from the official police report and statements made by the eviction and police officers involved. Additionally, details were corroborated through conversations with Slavica's lawyer, (pro bono) representing her in the ongoing legal case concerning her alleged assault on an official.

Conceptual framing: unhomeliness

Slavica's attempted forced eviction and the state's indifference to her family's pleas for a secure tenancy underscore the profound lack of care exhibited by institutions supposedly designed to support vulnerable citizens, revealing the pervasiveness of housing precarity in Serbia's social housing system. Recent scholarship has expanded the notion of housing precarity to encompass the interplay between affordability, security, housing quality and access to services (Clair, Reeves, McKee, Stuckler, 2019; Debrunner, Hofer, Wicki, Kauer, Kaufmann, 2024). Affordability pertains to the share of income consumed by housing costs, while security relates to control over housing, with evictions and short-term contracts being key risks. Housing quality encompasses infrastructure and living conditions, with issues such as poor ventilation and overcrowding affecting health. Access to essential services considers mobility and safety, emphasizing infrastructure such as roads, street lighting, and proximity to schools or hospitals. Social housing is designed to alleviate these very insecurities. Its purpose is to provide long-term, affordable solutions for low-income individuals to ease their housing burden without undermining access to other necessities or opportunities (Hansson, Lundgren, 2019; Priemus, 2013; Whitehead, 2017). However, as our research shows, precariousness "inhabits the microspaces of everyday life" of our participants and manifests itself in unpredictable ways (Ettlinger, 2007: 319).

For that reason, insecure and inadequate housing has also become integral to the contemporary understanding of homelessness, as showcased by the ETHOS typology.[3] This has led numerous authors to develop the idea of "homelessness at home", suggesting that that the experience of homelessness can also occur even within a domestic setting (Bennett, 2011; Blunt, Dowling, 2006; McCarthy, 2017). Simultaneously, people can engage in homemaking and create "home environments" even in public spaces, challenging the notion that a house automatically equates to a sense of home (Gurney, 1997; Lancione, 2019a, 2020; Pleace, O'Sullivan, Johnson, 2021).

And while having a place to live is not the same as having a home, forced eviction and displacement can profoundly disrupt individuals' sense of home, requiring a re-creation of this affective and socio-spatial attachment (Aman, Dahlstedt, 2023; Hoellerer, 2017). Research on precarious housing conditions has highlighted how systemic neglect and institutional failures exacerbate housing inequalities, leaving marginalised communities particularly vulnerable to unhomeliness – an acute experience of insecurity and alienation within one's living space (Desmond, 2017; Miller, 1988, 2001; Navaro-Yashin, 2012).

Bhabha importantly distinguishes unhomeliness from homelessness, noting that it does not signify the absence of a home but rather spaces where "the private and the

3 ETHOS – European Typology of Homelessness and Housing Exclusion, available at: https://www.feantsa.org/download/en-16822651433655843804.pdf (accessed 2 June 2025)

public become part of each other" (Bhabha, 1994). Unhomeliness is characterised by instability and a profound uncertainty about one's sense of belonging and purpose. For Bhabha, the *unhomely* represents the estranging sense of relocation of the home and the world, "a place where borders between the home and the world become confused uncannily (...) forcing upon a vision that is as divided as it is disorienting" (Bhabha, 1994: 9). Vidler (1996) highlighted the connection between the Freudian concept of the *unheimlich* (from which the unhomely originates) and spatiality. He focuses on Freud's definition of unheimlich and its relationship to its opposite, *heimlich* (homelike), emphasizing the "disturbing affiliations" between the two (Vidler, 1996: 23).

Building on these perspectives, we adopt the concept of *unhomeliness* to explore the experiential dimension of housing precarity. Rather than focusing on shelter typologies or resorting to legal or bureaucratic category of homelessness, *unhomeliness* captures the affective, relational and symbolic ruptures that render a place uninhabitable or a person's dwelling unstable. Recent scholarship has shown that social housing often replicates conditions of homelessness through damp, infestations and neglect, despite formal tenure. Authors such as Kane (2023) and Shurety (2024) have built on Davies' (2022) concept of toxic geographies and Nixon's (2011) idea of "slow violence" to show how the gradual decay of austere housing conditions corrodes the boundaries that make a place feel like home. In our study, the conceptual shift towards unhomeliness emerged inductively, through participants' narratives, which revealed how individuals living under a legal roof nonetheless experience profound forms of alienation, marginality and anxiety linked to their housing situation. This concept resonates with postcolonial and feminist critiques of home as an ambivalent and contested space (Mallett, 2004; Brickell, 2011) and aligns with works that attend to the fractured experiences of domestic life under conditions of structural violence (Fadlalla, 2011; Lancione, 2020).

Finally, although social housing (e.g. Hegedüs, Lux, Teller, *Eds.*, 2013; Petrović, Timotijević, 2013; Stephens, Lux, Sunega, 2015; Turcu, 2017) and informal housing (e.g. Vuksanović-Macura, 2012; Bajić, Petrić, Nikolić, 2016; Pojani, 2019; Pojani, Baar, 2020), as well as debt and eviction (Doboš, Jamrichová, Mácha, Mohyla, Novotný, Růžičková, 2023; Vilenica, Škobić, Pantović, 2023), have been well researched in post-socialist contexts, the affective and experiential dimensions of home, and especially housing precarity, have only recently begun to attract academic attention in the region (e.g. Lancione, 2019b; Hoření Samec, Decker, Trlifajová, 2024; Lafazani, 2024; Hlinčíková, 2024). With this paper, we hope to contribute to these emerging discussions and encourage further qualitative research on these aspects.

Context: Social Housing in Serbia

In socialist Yugoslavia, housing was treated as a core component of social infrastructure, with institutional mechanisms that enabled relatively secure access to housing for a broad segment of the population. This system underwent a fundamental transformation beginning in 1990, when constitutional changes abolished the obligation for employers to contribute to housing construction. What followed was a rapid and comprehensive privatization of the publicly owned housing stock, commonly described as a "giveaway" (Lux, Sunega, 2014). Within just five years, 98% of public housing units were transferred into private ownership (Damjanović, 2010), marking a decisive turn toward neoliberal housing policy.

This transition radically altered the role of the state in housing provision. The widespread withdrawal of public investment led to the deterioration of housing estates and the erosion of support structures for vulnerable populations. Dependence on public housing increasingly became framed as a personal failure, aligning with neoliberal logics of individual responsibility and market-based welfare (Alexander, Brunn, Koch, 2018; Fennell, 2015; Puszka, 2020; Power, Bergan, 2019). The state's retreat from housing provision was especially detrimental in the aftermath of the 1990s wars, which brought approximately 700,000 refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia, as well as about 210,000 displaced persons from Kosovo, into Serbia (Petrović, Mežnar, Živković, 2015). By 2008, refugees made up around 10% of the country's population, significantly increasing the demand for affordable housing and further straining a system already in crisis.

The current framework for social housing in Serbia is primarily regulated by the Law on Housing and Building Maintenance (*Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia,* 104/2016, 9/2020). The law defines it as housing provided to socially vulnerable groups who cannot secure housing on the market. However, its implementation has been inconsistent, with municipalities bearing the main responsibility for provision and maintenance despite lacking the financial and institutional capacity to fulfil these duties. This has resulted in a fragmented and uneven system in which access to housing, eligibility procedures, and housing quality vary considerably across localities.

Article 92 of the same law defines five forms of housing support: (1) non-profit rental housing (*stanovanje u neprofitnom zakupu* in Serbian), (2) purchase or other acquisition of ownership rights over a dwelling or family house, (3) improvement of housing conditions, (4) assistance for the legalization of a dwelling or family house and (5) housing provision (*stambeno zbrinjavanje*). This study focuses on the lived experiences of the first and fifth measures, as they are commonly understood as forms of social housing. However, they operate under different financial arrangements. In *housing provision,* beneficiaries are allocated a public housing unit without paying rent, while in *non-profit rental housing* tenants are charged a subsidized, below-market rent. In both cases residents are responsible for covering utility bills

and property taxes – expenses that remain burdensome for many low-income households.

Formally, the law recognizes a range of categories – including persons without shelter, those displaced by natural disasters, victims of domestic violence, and others unable to meet their housing needs through market channels – as eligible for the housing provision. Yet in practice, homelessness in Serbia is not systematically monitored. This disconnect was underscored in May 2025, when the City of Belgrade demolished the only Shelter for Adults and Elderly Persons in the city, initiating a 500-day reconstruction project without a clear plan for the interim relocation of its beneficiaries.

Eligibility for non-profit rental housing is primarily determined by housing status, with priority given to individuals without housing or those residing in inadequate conditions. Additional criteria include household composition, disability status, health issues and the number of employed household members. Preference is formally granted to persons with prolonged housing insecurity, families with minor children, persons with disabilities, and social welfare beneficiaries. In theory, access is mediated through public calls issued by local housing commissions, which are responsible for creating a preliminary ranking of applicants subject to appeal before final approval by the local government. However, fieldwork suggests that the process is often opaque, with decisions perceived to be influenced more by local political discretion than by the legal criteria.

A related but distinct mechanism of housing support is the housing allowance (*stambeni dodatak*), intended to subsidize rent for low-income tenants in both public and private rental housing. For private rentals, eligibility depends on rent prices falling within the range of "non-profit rent" as defined by law. The subsidy is paid by the municipality to the landlord, who then reduces the tenant's rent accordingly. However, this measure remains largely inaccessible in practice. Due to the unregulated nature of Serbia's rental market, market rents regularly exceed the legal thresholds, rendering most eligible tenants effectively excluded.

Research Setting

Our research focuses on two examples of state-owned housing: Kamendin, an apartment complex designed for non-profit rental housing, and Uzun Mirkova, a purpose-built settlement allocated to internally displaced people from Kosovo. Despite their differing administrative statuses, both sites exemplify the segregated, material and symbolic marginality associated with contemporary social housing in Serbia. Situated, respectively, in the outlying areas of the capital city and a medium-sized town, they were built in the 2000s. These and other similar initiatives implemented between 2003 and 2010 attempted to address housing needs, including a series of social housing projects funded by the state and international organizations.

Thus, they marked the first construction of publicly owned rental housing since Yugoslavia's dissolution.

In the settlement on Uzun Mirkova Street in Požarevac, around twenty families live in severe conditions. Their attached houses are in disrepair, with leaking roofs and piles of garbage surrounding the estate. These problems are not of recent date; inhabitants have endured them for years, with the situation remaining unchanged even during the pandemic (A11, 2022). The settlement is home to internally displaced Roma families from Kosovo, who were – after eleven years spent in a collective centre and informal settlements on the outskirts of Požarevac – resettled into this social housing estate in 2010. The housing project was constructed through a collaborative effort involving the German welfare organisation ASB (*Arbeiter-Samariter-Bund*), the European Union, the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration of the Republic of Serbia and the local municipality of Požarevac. Most inhabitants are unemployed, relying on minimal social welfare benefits. Many have had their utilities disconnected due to unpaid bills, as limited resources force them to prioritise basic survival needs, such as food and medicine, over paying for water or electricity.

Kamendin, located on the northwestern outskirts of Belgrade, is one of the largest social housing projects in Serbia. The first housing block in Kamendin, colloquially known as the *žute zgrade* (yellow buildings), was initiated by the City of Belgrade Government in 2003. This project initially provided 300 non-profit rental apartments designated for socially vulnerable families. Subsequently, starting in 2007, an additional 200 apartments, known as *braon zgrade* (brown buildings), were constructed (Maksimović, 2019; Vesić, Kostić, Krstić-Furundžić, 2013). The final addition to the project, completed in 2019, comprised 160 apartments known as *bele zgrade* (white buildings), implemented by the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration of the Republic of Serbia. These units were immediately made available for purchase under favourable conditions to refugee families from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia.

The social and class hierarchy among the three types of buildings in Kamendin is clearly defined. At the top of the hierarchy are the homeowners of Serbian descent in the white buildings, who are not included in this research. They are followed by tenants of the yellow buildings, who belong to socially vulnerable Belgrade families, including both Serbian and Roma families. At the bottom of the social hierarchy are the inhabitants of the brown buildings. These buildings are characterized by poorer construction quality, the lower social status of their tenants, and higher crime rates. The inhabitants are predominantly Roma families displaced from Kosovo, which has led to these buildings being colloquially referred to as "Albania".

4 These figures are based on 2019 data obtained through A11 Initiative contacts, sourced from the EPS Distribution (Electric Power Industry of Serbia), Infostan Technologies (the public utility billing company), and the City of Belgrade's Secretariat for Property and Legal Affairs. In the absence of more recent data, it is reasonable to assume that these numbers are even higher in 2025.

Similarly to Uzun Mirkova, Kamendin is now emblematic of the systemic failings of Serbia's welfare and social housing policies. Many inhabitants who depend on minimal pensions or welfare face overwhelming housing costs that far exceed their incomes. This financial strain has left around 11% of Kamendin households without electricity due to unpaid bills, and over three hundred households embroiled in debt collection lawsuits.[4] The estate's social housing model, which offers a 30% rent subsidy contingent on regular monthly payments, often fails those it is meant to protect. For many, prioritising basic survival inevitably leads to mounting utility debts and the loss of subsidies. In extreme cases, inhabitants face the risk of forced eviction as the City of Belgrade, the legal owner of apartment units, pursues legal action to reclaim unpaid debts. As financial pressures intensify, families are being pushed further into poverty, with the looming threat of homelessness.

Methodology

In terms of empirical methods, this article draws upon qualitative research aimed at capturing homemaking practices and the emotional consequences of the intersection of political economy and home. The fieldwork was conducted from April to September 2024. Alongside at-home interviews, the data we collected included observations, sketches, photographs, and diary entries. We conducted a total of 20 in-depth, semi-structured interviews, each lasting approximately one hour.

We identified key themes according to the main research questions, following an inductive research approach. The interview guide was structured into three main sections. The first part focused on previous housing experiences, the process of applying for housing, moving in, and navigating institutional and bureaucratic procedures to obtain the right to housing. The central part covered questions about the meaning of home, the structure of the housing unit, and changes the space had undergone over the years, as well as homemaking practices, strategies for ensuring privacy, and strategies for meeting everyday needs under given conditions. The final section addressed interviewees' impressions of neighbourhood and experiences of local community relations, as well as communal infrastructure and its maintenance.

Although the interview guide was semi-structured, the interviews were conducted in a relatively open and flexible manner, adapting to each interlocutor, both to their individual communication styles and daily routines.

The research participants, aged between 18 and 65, were primarily of Roma origin, with a few of Serbian and Wallachian descent (Appendix 1: Participant profiles).[5]

5 The study was conducted in strict adherence to the Code of Ethics of the Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory, University of Belgrade. All research participants provided informed consent for both audio recordings of the interviews and visual documentation of their living conditions, including sketches and photographs.

We did not know any of the research participants prior to the research. The group came together with help from a contact at A11 – Initiative for Economic and Social Rights, an NGO that has been working with these communities for years, helping them exercise their rights. Recruitment followed a snowball sampling method, with A11 and local gatekeepers playing a key role in fostering trust and facilitating connections within the neighbourhoods. The interviewed group included a diverse range of individuals, such as those with long-term contracts, expired contracts, squatters, and unregistered household members. For this reason, throughout this article, we use the term "inhabitants" rather than "residents" to reflect our focus on people's lived experiences rather than their legal status or tenancy rights. Of the twenty participants, five were men and fifteen were women. The gender disparity of our sample is mainly due to the timing of the field visits, which took place during the day when women and children were more likely to be at home. Meanwhile, men were often engaged in informal and precarious work, including scavenging for metal and scrap, day labour, unregistered construction work or seasonal agriculture.

Although outsiders to participants' communities, two members of the research team have an activist background in struggles for the rights to food and shelter in Serbia, while the third researcher previously worked as a freelance investigative journalist. Explicating these engaged histories, especially when they are linked to the issue addressed in this paper, is paramount as they could, as with any other researcher's characteristics, significantly shape each step of the inquiry and its outcomes (Berger, 2015). For that reason, the interpretation of the data involved constant scrutiny of our own positionality to allow for a more trustworthy and honest account of the research process.

Thematic analysis of data proceeded through a process of data immersion and reflection on the initial research question: "What does home mean to social housing inhabitants?" Data was further categorised according to emergent themes such as housing precarity and conditions, neighbourhood relations, welfare dependency, privacy and the meaning of "home". This initial coding process allowed us to trace patterns in how participants negotiate the material, social and emotional dimensions of their living spaces.

Unhomeliness of Social Housing: A Structural and Experiential Phenomenon

Researchers often turned to the etymological analysis of the words "home" and "house" in order to trace their historical origin, while some of them explored the concept of home, questioning whether it should be understood as a space, a place, a practice, or an active state of being in the world (Blunt, Dowling, 2006; Douglas, 1991; Dupuis, Thorns, 1998; Easthope, 2004; Mallett, 2004; Somerville, 1992). Although in some languages these two terms often appear as synonyms, in the Serbian language, *kuća/кућа* (house) is more commonly used to refer both to

a dwelling unit and a warm place of family gathering to which we are emotionally attached through memories (Nikolić, 2024: 62). In contrast, the term *dom/дом* (home) is not commonly used in everyday speech. Furthermore, the concept of home, although widely used in academic discourse, eludes precise definitions due to its complexity, its multiple meanings, and its firm foundation in Western culture and social organisation (Cieraad, 1999, 2018). Such cultural bias, most obvious in the term "homeownership", implying that owning property is synonymous with having a home, is often critiqued among researchers (Kusenbach, Paulsen, 2013).

The question "What does home mean to you?" revealed a striking pattern among many research participants: confusion about the meaning of the concept. Rather than associating it with a personal or emotional sense of home, participants often equated it with institutional spaces such as an orphanage (*dom za nezbrinutu decu*), a health centre (*dom zdravlja*), or a retirement home (*starački dom*). For example, Jovana from Uzun Mirkova estate responded with laughter, humorously referencing the idea of moving to an institutional mental care facility. This misinterpretation underscores the negative associations tied to the term, shaped by inhabitants' experiences with institutional settings rather than a sense of warmth, safety, or belonging. Similarly, Milica from Kamendin responded fearfully, associating the word *dom* with an orphanage: "Home... Oh, it's terrifying and awful. Something you would never wish on anyone."

It is important to note, however, that this confusion could partly reflect the limitations of the interview design. As noted above, the word *dom* is rarely used in everyday speech to refer to a personal home. Although we conducted the interviews in a conversational style and sometimes used the terms "kuća", "dom" and "stan" (apartment) interchangeably, trying to translate and bring this abstract concept closer to our interlocutors, the linguistic nuances may have inadvertently led to misunderstandings during interviews. Since our research focus is on the material conditions and experiences of unhomeliness, as well as on the practices through which residents navigate the challenges of precarious living, we did not delve deeper into the conceptual meanings or linguistic analysis to explore the interpretations our respondents assign to these words. For most of our participants, Serbian is not their first language. For that reason, it would be valuable to explore the meanings of these concepts in a separate study, one that would include appropriate terminology in various dialects of the Romani language (Bakker, Kyuchukov, *Eds.*, 2000; Matras, 2002) spoken in the Balkans. Moreover, authors such as Duyvendak (2011) highlighted that the emotional dimensions of home are challenging to study empirically, as they are often taken for granted and overshadowed by more intense emotions. Nonetheless, the participants' associations with institutional settings reveal deeper layers of unhomeliness, where the idea of home is not tied to emotional attachment or belonging but rather evokes the impersonal and often stigmatised spaces of state institutions. This disconnect highlights the erosion of the notion of home as a site of stability, comfort and personal agency among inhabitants of social housing estates.

However, the tension between *having a house* and *feeling at home* is evident in many inhabitants' reflections. Home, as a source of ontological security, offers a sense of identity and meaning, providing a safe and secure retreat in an uncertain world (Dupuis, Thorns, 1998; Somerville, 1992). Moreover, it functions as a private space, shielding us from the unpredictability of public life and enabling us to feel in control, exercising autonomy over our living environment (Hiscock, Kearns, MacIntyre, Ellaway, 2001; Hoolachan, McKee, Moore, Soaita, 2016). Building on these insights, the following sections explore how housing precarity and the lack of privacy erode the sense of homeliness experienced by our research participants.

Just a Shelter: Housing Precarity and Unhomeliness

Initially, social housing offered much-needed relief to our interlocutors, many of whom endured severe poverty and precarious living conditions in squatted barracks or self-built shelters within informal settlements. The families from Uzun Mirkova complex, purpose-built for internally displaced Roma families from Kosovo, bypassed the typical bureaucratic hurdles of social housing applications. However, inhabitants of Kamendin faced varied outcomes; while some were denied accommodations after multiple attempts, others, driven by dire circumstances, occupied abandoned units before applying for non-profit rental housing.

Katarina escaped domestic violence but struggled to find permanent solution:

> *I used to have a place in Kotež, but at one point, the landlord told me he sold the house. I looked for a place for a month, roamed the streets, called numbers, and asked around. But I am a Roma woman with six kids, and one of them has Down's.*

Driven by necessity, she moved into an empty apartment in Akrobate Aleksića Street in Kamendin, but her situation remained precarious. Despite multiple applications and "turning herself in", she was denied the unit, officially for "not having enough points". Another Kamendin squatter, Sanja, described similar challenges: "They told us to move out as soon as possible, but my husband wrote to them and collected all the paperwork, promising we'd be able to pay for everything here. They denied us and wouldn't give us the contract." Although Sanja and her family had made several attempts to resolve their squatter status, they had still not received a response to their appeals. Legal experts for social housing from the A11 Initiative believe that the city is refusing to consider their requests, as doing so could be seen as the legalization of squatting.

The rental agreement between social housing beneficiaries and authorities defines their right to use the unit for a set period, ranging from five to ninety-nine years, depending on whether it falls under a non-profit rental or a housing provision

Figure 1: Small kitchen in disrepair with an orange gas cylinder, cluttered sink, and worn surfaces. Author: Sara Nikolić (2024).

arrangement. In Uzun Mirkova, contracts are often granted for ninety-nine years with inheritance rights, but in Kamendin, terms vary significantly. For many, this agreement symbolizes tenure security and proof of deservingness, but without it, inhabitants like Katarina and Sanja live in constant anxiety.

Even with a contract, precarity persists for many. As Marija put it, "This isn't ours, we are like guests here." Additionally, the definite nature of the agreements created uncertainty regarding renewal and included clauses that could result in termination. Many of our interlocutors, like Mira, were facing the expiration of their initial five-year contract. "No one comes to tell us anything. We heard they are supposed to come and evict us, but we don't know when. We don't know anything." As Clair et al. (2019) observe, uncertainty is an inherent aspect of precarious housing. To this definition, Listerborn (2021) adds the "embodied frustration of time", an experience widely shared among inhabitants of Kamendin with expired contracts, such as Mira.

Affordability is another key aspect of housing precarity, with the social housing system intended to offer below-market prices for low-income families (Yates, 2013). However, for many research participants, the issue is not so much the rent but the mounting utility bills, particularly for electricity, central heating and water. For that reason, choosing between paying high utility bills and food is a never-ending

dilemma. Some, like Sneža, do not hesitate in prioritizing the latter. "An eviction officer asked me why I'm not paying my bills, and I told him 'I don't have bread to eat, I have to search for it in the bins, and you ask me why I'm not paying the bills!'" Others, like Emir and Jasmina, who are not welfare dependent but manage to earn some money through precarious jobs and side hustles, try to set aside all their earnings for electricity, unsure where their next meal will come from.

For many social housing inhabitants in Serbia, access to electricity is essential; it is both a necessity and a source of immense pressure. Irregular electricity supply adds another layer of hardship, limiting inhabitants' ability to cook, bathe, heat their homes or even preserve food safely (Figure 1). In Serbian social housing estates, a working light bulb is a source of power and powerlessness; it can cause conflicts or foster solidarity. Access to electrical power encapsulates aspirations towards a "normal life", while lack of it restricts agency and amplifies feelings of shame. For many of our research participants, being disconnected from the power grid marks the start of a downward spiral. Without electricity, everything else follows – debt, penalties, stress, eviction notices, deteriorating health and a loss of dignity. As Sneža describes: "We live in fear due to our debts, and whenever we see a man in a suit and tie walking around, we think he is here to throw us out." The emotional toll of living in such conditions is profound. She continued:

> *It was nice here for the first five years while I had electricity. Now, I don't have the will to live. You go to bed in darkness, and you wake up in darkness. I go to bed at 9 pm and wake up at midnight, light a candle, and just sit there…*

Her words highlight how material deprivation translates into psychological despair, with a lack of basic utilities such as electricity symbolising the erosion of her apartment as a place of comfort.

Finally, the literature indicates that the more comfortable and convenient a dwelling is, the stronger the feelings of home an individual develops towards it (Bate, 2017; Blunt, Dowling, 2006; Mallett, 2004; Somerville, 1992). In that sense, inadequate housing significantly contributes to a pervasive sense of unhomeliness in material and social ways, shaping daily life and eroding inhabitants' well-being (Figure 2). Our fieldwork encounters revealed how substandard social housing fails to meet the dual dimensions of home comfort described by Johnson (2018). Socially, home comfort relies on a network of expectations and relationships – economic stability, legal security and familial or civic connections – that ensure access to the resources required to maintain a home. Materially, it depends on infrastructure such as plumbing, electrical systems and insulation to keep the house warm, well-lit and safe. The apartments we visited during this research consistently fell short of these criteria, offering neither stability nor comfort to their inhabitants.

Structural issues significantly contribute to inhabitants' feelings of alienation from their homes. Many dwellings suffer from mould, inadequate insulation, faulty

Figure 2: Room with open window, plastic bottles filled with water on the ledge outside. Author: Igor Išpanović (2024).

plumbing and frequent infestations. Bed bugs, scabies, rats and lice not only pose serious health risks but also carry psychological and social consequences, particularly for school-aged children, whose well-being and access to education are directly impacted. In many of the apartments we visited, broken windows and ill-fitting doors failed to keep out the cold in winter or the heat in summer, while poor ventilation and faulty plumbing contributed to persistent dampness and mould, exacerbating respiratory problems among children and the elderly.

This accumulation of everyday toxicity reveals deeply embedded inequalities in housing provision and underscores the moral and political failure of institutions to uphold basic standards of habitability. The lingering presence of uncollected trash, vermin, snakes and broken streetlights; the lack of urban furniture; and an unpaved road in the case of Uzun Mirkova estate are all features that symbolize a broader institutional abandonment.

As Shurety (2024) argues, such toxic conditions, including mould and other infestations, constitute a form of *slow violence*: ordinary yet enduring harms disproportionately borne by marginalized communities. These are not merely physical threats but politically charged markers of neglect. By framing these "biological issues" as toxic, Shurety demonstrates how certain homes and bodies are rendered more disposable than others, exposing the racialized and class-based logics of housing injustice.

Poor maintenance of shared spaces further contributes to a collective sense of despair, invisibility, and unhomeliness. Yet, despite this persistent experience of abandonment, residents did not describe their environment as entirely neutral or detached. Some interlocutors used terms such as lack of care (*baš ih briga*) or lack of interest (*ne zanima ih*) when referring to neglect and the absence of services. These expressions point to a deeper, affective connection to their neighbourhoods and suggest that the estate remained situated within the moral framework of the local and political community, rather than outside of it (Koch, 2014).

These conditions are not abstract or exceptional. They manifest in the everyday realities of those living in social housing. Jasmina's experience with water damage in her apartment offers a vivid illustration of how such structural neglect translates into daily discomfort, exposure, and a sense of powerlessness: "Water drips constantly from her place, smelly, dirty… You need an umbrella in the bathroom", she explained, referencing her upstairs neighbour's leaking plumbing. In Jasmina's view, the right to enjoy her home is linked to the idea that it should be a space of comfort, where one can relax without compromising the comfort of others or facing threats from them (Johnson, 2018). The intrusion of "smelly, dirty" water into her space is both physical and symbolic, representing the porousness of boundaries in social housing. The relentless dripping and the resulting mould and water damage to Jasmina's bathroom ceiling have created an environment where even basic needs are marked by discomfort and humiliation. Her words, tinged with exhaustion, "I keep complaining about it… But nothing changes", underscore the futility many inhabitants feel when confronting systemic deficits.

Going back to the etymological roots of the concept found in Latin, precarity refers to the right to use an object or land which can be repealed at any time. As Zaharijević argues, something is "precarious" if there are no reliable guarantees that the right to possess, access or use it is secure in any substantive way (Zaharijević, 2023: 41). When it comes to the social housing system in Serbia, this meaning of the word can be applied in a literal sense to the experience of inhabitants in Uzun Mirkova and Kamendin. Instead of reducing the impact of structural failures on the position of the inhabitants, the material conditions these people live in further undermine the purpose of the social housing mechanism to provide them with a place of comfort and refuge. Temporariness, induced through the rental agreement, is not the quality they ascribe to home and homeliness. Not only does it deny them a sense of ownership, it also leaves them subject to the constant fear and uncertainty of being evicted, eroding the perception that a home is somewhere you cannot be kicked out from. Thus, the structural constraints originating in the state's negligence and animosity towards the inhabitants limit their agency and freedom to create and make these spaces feel like home.

Moreover, precarity underscores the dual nature of *unhomeliness*, rooted in the blurred boundaries between the private and public spheres. This interplay is most evident in the contractual relationships governing apartment spaces, which reflect

Figure 3: Aged interior with wall clock, curtain-covered doorway, and decorative elements. Author: Sara Nikolić (2024).

the dual status of social housing as both public and private. This duality is further expressed spatially through physical deficiencies, such as a lack of windows, doors and adequate insulation, as well as the intrusion of external elements and hazards from the immediate environment, including mould, adverse weather conditions, animals, insects and sometimes even overly curious neighbours. These deficiencies tangibly erode the division between private and public spaces. In the following section, we delve into how this erosion of privacy intensifies the experience of *unhomeliness*.

"I'd rather live in a desert": lack of privacy in social housing

In the context of social housing in Serbia, the idea of home as a private sanctuary clashes with reality. The spatial and material limitations frequently undermine privacy, creating living conditions that are far removed from the middle-class notion of a home as a personal refuge. Instead, social housing inhabitants often experience their homes as spaces marked by collective constraints, overcrowding and the ever-present pressures of precarious living discussed above. For many of our research participants, the small, overcrowded apartments fail to provide the spatial and emotional boundaries essential for a sense of autonomy and well-being (Figure 3). They often described their living environments as spaces of constant intrusion, where

the lack of private rooms, thin walls and shared spaces eroded personal boundaries. This subchapter explores how inhabitants navigate these conditions, highlighting their strategies, frustrations and aspirations for more dignified living arrangements.

Although dedication to the family and focus on the private sphere are not new, the high valuation of the home as a *fortress* or, rather, a *sanctuary* is inseparable from the contemporary neoliberal fetishization of individuality. Concepts such as privacy, domesticity, comfort and the pursuit of homeownership associated with the notion of home are relatively recent developments in Western history (Rybczynski, 1986; Somerville, 1992). This idea emerged as a product of the reorganisation of economic, political, moral and spatial orders in the late eighteenth century (Davidoff, Hall, 1987; Green, 2010). The economic class that controlled the new systems of production in capitalism constructed a "compensatory world of intimacy, comfort, and warmth" (Löfgren, 1984: 47) as a counterbalance to the growing anonymity, rationality and efficiency of the external world. However, framing homeliness as primarily a middle-class phenomenon risks reinforcing assumptions about the numbing effects of material deprivation (Green, 2010: 69). Emerging in the late eighteenth century, such "notions of the homely comfort versus unhomely squalor" still reinforce normative perceptions of impoverished domesticity (ibid.: 71). While it is crucial not to underestimate the hardships and suffering faced by poor households, it is equally important to avoid presuming that they are incapable of finding solace, comfort or emotional refuge within their own homes.

Jovana expressed the impact of overcrowding on her daily life. "The first thing I'd do is leave. There's too many of us," she said, emphasising how the lack of space undermined her ability to rest or care for her family. Her son agreed poignantly, "I'd rather live in a desert. At least there, no one is around". The overcrowding and lack of privacy in social housing not only impacts daily routines but also creates tension and conflict within families. Living in cramped apartments with multiple generations, families are forced to share spaces that blur the boundaries between individual needs and collective demands. Similarly, Marija shared her frustration of being physically together yet deprived of personal autonomy. Her observation that such circumstances often lead to petty arguments points to how constrained living arrangements exacerbate conflicts.

Others, like Ibrahim, emphasised the difficulty of maintaining familial dignity in cramped spaces, saying, "My daughter needs her own room. She's growing up, and it's not right for her to share a room with parents." His neighbour Maida, a mother raising three adolescent daughters alongside two younger children in a 35m² apartment, also highlighted the developmental needs of children, particularly teenage girls. She recalls the struggle to create a space where her daughters could sleep and dress without feeling exposed. "They were ashamed to undress and sleep properly in front of their father," she admits, acknowledging the symbolic and practical importance of privacy for her daughters' sense of independence and self-esteem. The spatial constraints of her home – marked by overcrowding and lack of privacy – mean

Figure 4: Improvised wooden partition made from closed accordion doors, repurposed as a permanent wall between rooms and outlined with LED lights. Author: Sara Nikolić (2024).

that even everyday activities are fraught with anxiety, shame and discomfort. Aware of the situation, Maida persuaded her husband to replace the previously demolished partition, which had been temporarily enclosed with a curtain, with a drywall.

Many of their neighbours from Uzun Mirkova also recognized the thin walls, almost non-existent doors and window shades, as well as the noise and the constant intrusive presence of others, as disturbances that make it challenging to create a homely and peaceful environment. Ibrahim's insistence on keeping his door closed and resisting a popular DIY solution among his neighbours – demolishing the wall between the hallway and the living room to create a sense of visual spaciousness – underscored the significance of privacy. For him, keeping the door closed and preserving the wall were acts of reclaiming personal space, shielding him from the constant awareness of others' activities, such as using the bathroom. These choices reflect his profound yearning for dignity, privacy and a sense of control within an otherwise intrusive living environment. His statement "I'd rather be thrown into a meadow" encapsulates the exhaustion that comes from navigating a life without private spaces.

In Kamendin, inhabitants echoed similar frustrations. Jasmina lamented the absence of separate bedrooms, explaining how the lack of partitioned spaces complicated family dynamics (Figure 4). When asked about the first thing she would do if her financial constraints were lifted, without hesitation she said, "I'd build dividing

walls so the children could have their own rooms," illustrating how privacy was essential not only for physical comfort but also for fostering independence among adolescents.

Rada's account vividly illustrates how inadequate housing conditions define life in social housing. The absence of bathroom doors and other critical features in their apartment amplifies the lack of autonomy and dignity. Her attempts to improvise solutions, such as using makeshift curtains and ill-fitting scavenged doors, speak to the constant negotiation required to adapt to these conditions. Yet, these efforts are ultimately inadequate and exhausting, as she admits they can no longer afford even temporary fixes. We visited Rada and her family multiple times during our fieldwork in Kamendin, learning that her desire for a functional private space where she could at least "get naked in her own bathroom" encapsulates the unfulfilled promise of home as a sanctuary.

Yearning for privacy and autonomy resonates deeply among many of our research participants, who often feel constrained by their cramped living conditions and lack of control over their surroundings. Katarina's heartfelt vision of a home captures this shared aspiration:

> *If I had a plot of land, my own land, registered in my name, I would call it "The House from the Heart" and start building a little house. Even if I had to collect bricks one by one, I'd build a small room. Just to know it's mine, and then slowly, brick by brick, I'd make my own house. If I only had a plot, I'd build just one room, and I'd leave this place immediately. But the land would need to have a nearby utility pole for electricity and a water connection, all legal and proper... I'd leave this apartment behind without hesitation. Honestly, I never even wanted to live in an apartment. Truly, never. I've always preferred having my own house with a yard. A place where my children can play without bothering anyone. Without hearing, "Move that ball, I'm trying to sleep."*

Similarly, many of our research participants articulated an understanding that homeownership is a key site of inequality within capitalist systems. The distinctions between those who own property and those relegated to rental, social or informal housing reflect deeper class divides that shape access to stability, autonomy and social power. Additionally, the greater the autonomy and control an individual has over their dwelling, the stronger their sense of home (Bate, 2018; Easthope, 2014; Hiscock et al., 2001; Hoolachan et al., 2016; Parsell, 2012). In such a context, the participants' yearning for homeownership is not just a personal or cultural preference but a response to structural conditions that render the rented and state-provided housing they inhabit as sites of precarity and unhomeliness. For many of us, the aspiration of homeownership still serves as a powerful symbol of upward mobility. For our research participants, owning a home or a piece of land represents more than just economic security – it signifies independence from welfare systems and the ability to forge a life outside the precarious structures of state support. Among our Roma

participants, who occupy some of the most marginalized positions in Serbian society, this aspiration carries additional weight. For them, homeownership intertwines with a broader sense of citizenship in a society that has historically excluded them (Várady, Vuksanović-Macura, *Eds*., 2017).

Katarina's dream of building a house "brick by brick" adds another layer of meaning to homeownership: establishing a space of her own. In this refuge, her family could live freely and without interference. A yearning for "a house with a yard" echoes a recurring theme among many research participants, who often prioritised privacy and control over their environment above all else. Mallet (2004) highlighted this widespread preference for freestanding single-family homes, a trend influenced by Romantic ideals of balancing civilization with nature and valuing autonomy and self-sufficiency (Després, 1991). Although the dream of a private house surrounded by a lawn or garden as the ideal dwelling is a relatively recent development (Jackson, 1995), it has become so ingrained that it now appears "traditional" and universally appealing. This is particularly relevant considering that Serbian society, like many in Central and Eastern Europe, was rapidly transitioned into a system of "super-homeownership" through mass privatization of the public housing stock (Stephens, 2005; Hegedüs, Teller, 2006), resulting in over 98% of housing being privately owned (Damjanović, 2010; Nikolić, Timotijević, Ćurčić, 2022). In such a context, the norm of homeownership leads to the stigmatization of tenants and individuals who do not own their homes (Marcuse, 1980) and especially residents of social and transitional housing (Hlinčíková, 2024).

This desire for "a house with a yard" stems not only from the discomfort of living in cramped shared spaces but also from the social tensions and constant negotiations that such conditions demand. Privacy, as Somerville puts it, arises when "each household makes its own world within boundaries which it erects against the world outside" (Somerville, 1997: 233). The boundaries, shaped by economic resources and legal frameworks, strengthen internal bonds while distancing the household from external connections, fostering both the familial and the familiar (Somerville, 1997). For inhabitants like Katarina, the ability to retreat into one's own space where children can play freely and neighbours' habits do not dictate daily life is the essence of a dignified life. Her vision of the "House from the Heart" encapsulates this aspiration, illustrating that what social housing inhabitants seek is not necessarily the accumulation of wealth but the reclamation of agency, privacy and a sense of home.

As Kusenbach and Paulsen (2013: 11) argue, "privacy and familiarity hinge upon control: without the ability to control space, one cannot draw physical or conceptual boundaries between oneself and others, or develop predictable routines." These notions reflect a broader cultural imaginary in which single-family suburban homes are seen to guarantee privacy, hygiene and responsible parenting (Bullock, Reppond, Truong, Singh, 2020; Lutherová, Zaharijević, 2024; Nicolaides, Wiese, 2006), while cities, and particularly social housing estates, are viewed as lacking in these qualities. However, such imaginaries both reveal and obscure deeper structural inequalities.

In our research, we found that while the ideal of homeownership retains symbolic power, its practical realisation remains distant for most interlocutors. The aspiration for a "house with a yard" does not always signify a clear route out of precarity, but rather a culturally sedimented narrative through which housing inequalities are simultaneously articulated and naturalised.

At the same time, inhabitants' everyday practices often challenge these dominant narratives. Collective caregiving arrangements, where grandparents, extended family and neighbours offer substantial support, reveal alternative models of domestic life and kinship that complicate normative ideals of the self-contained nuclear household. In this context, the desire for homeownership emerges not as a rejection of collectivity but as a longing for stability, autonomy and dignity within a housing system that consistently undermines our ability to control our environments and futures.

Conclusion

This article sought to shed light on a marginalized social position by documenting *unhomeliness* among inhabitants of social housing estates in Serbia. Utilizing the concept of the unhomeliness, it highlights the everyday survival strategies employed in precarious and inadequate housing, under the pressures of neoliberal welfare and housing policies. It situates the concept of unhomeliness within the socio-political realities of Serbian social housing, illuminating the ways housing precarity erodes the boundaries between home and homelessness. The fieldwork insights illuminate how systemic neglect and institutional failures compound the vulnerabilities of marginalized groups, producing a pervasive sense of instability.

By framing unhomeliness as both a structural and experiential phenomenon, the paper highlights the erosion of private space and security within the context of social housing, particularly when the boundaries between public and private spaces become increasingly blurred due increasing housing precarity. This captures the experience of inhabitants who, while technically living in a private home, face constant insecurity, inadequate living conditions and a lack of control over their environment. More precisely, many of our research participants experience social housing apartments as spaces that do not fulfil the basic functions of a "home" due to issues such as overcrowding, poor maintenance and a constant threat of eviction. This creates a paradox where they live in spaces that should offer privacy and security but are instead marked by instability and alienation.

Relying on deteriorated material conditions and unreliable institutional support, our interlocutors did not relate to homeownership as a clear or coherent strategy but as a distant and ambivalent horizon. The attachment to the idea of "a house of one's own" does not reflect a fully coherent aspiration but rather emerges from a context of deep structural deprivation, where few alternatives are visible or viable. We argue that their responses should not be read as expressions of the neoliberal homeownership

ideology but as situated efforts to endure and make sense of life in a housing system that consistently fails to meet even the most basic standards of dignity and care.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that the choice of a qualitative approach and the decision to focus on two estates restrict broader generalizations. Additionally, this study does not fully address the intersectionality of gender, ethnicity and age in shaping housing experiences, which remains a critical gap. These limitations of our research invite further exploration.

In conclusion, the unhomeliness of social housing opens new avenues for future research. The nexus of precariousness could be further explored in relation to how inhabitants negotiate their private spaces under these harsh conditions, and how their efforts to create a home (through communal support, squatting and DIY repairs) reflect both resistance and resignation within the broader political and economic system that neglects them. Further research could delve deeper into how the need for privacy in social housing is related to the perception of (in)security of the immediate surroundings, regarding both social relations within the community and the condition, maintenance, and equipping of communal infrastructure.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

SARA NIKOLIĆ (ORCID: 0000-0001-6478-7680) – is an anthropologist and Research Fellow at the Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory, University of Belgrade. Her current research focuses on social housing, homemaking and urban self-management in post-socialist cities, employing critical and visual ethnography. She holds a PhD in anthropology (2024); her thesis examined urban dwelling and commons in New Belgrade's large housing estates. Since 2025, she has been a member of the editorial collective of the *Radical Housing Journal*. Through her work, Sara aims to reveal the complex ways people create meaning and community amid rapid urban change.

IGOR IŠPANOVIĆ (ORCID: 0009-0001-0350-7718) – is a Research Assistant at the Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory, University of Belgrade. He is a third-year PhD student in the Cultural Studies program at the Faculty of Political Sciences, University of Belgrade. His areas of interest include journalism and cultural studies, the political economy of media and communication, and media ethnography. Igor holds an MA in Communication Studies (2021) and a BA in Journalism (2020).

DUŠANKA MILOSAVLJEVIĆ (ORCID: 0000-0003-3140-9709) – is a PhD candidate at the Faculty of Philosophy and a Research Associate at the Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory, University of Belgrade. She holds a BA in sociology and an MA in Integral Urbanism. Her research focuses on urban sociology, sociology of culture and critical theory.

Table 1: Participant profiles

Bane	In his fourties at the time of the interview. He lives alone in a 46m² apartment in Kamendin.
Dragan	A widow in his late fourties at the time of the interview. His household consists of 12 members, most of whom are underage. Their 54m² unit in Uzun Mirkova ncludes a living room with a kitchen, one bedroom and a bathroom.
Emir	In his fifties at the time of the interview. Together with his wife and adult son he lives in a 24m² apartment in Uzun Mirkova, one of the smallest in the estate. The family recently expanded the house with a backyard porch and a tool shed.
Erna	In her early fourties at the time of the interview. For the past 12 years, she has been living in Kamendin in a multigenerational household consisting of herself and her husband, five children, mother-in-law, and an additional family member who moved in after divorce. Given the extremely poor living conditions and overcrowding in the apartment, the interview was conducted outdoors so the exact structure of the apartment remains unknown.
Fadil	In his late thirties at the time of the interview, he is a father of seven minor children. His 9 member family lives in a a 38m² apartment in Uzun Mirkova, comprising a living room with a kitchen, one bedroom, and a bathroom.
Ibrahim	A father of six children aged between 4 and 23 supporting his family with adisability pension. The family occupies two housing units in Uzun Mirkova, each 47m² in size. Both consist of a living room with a kitchen and dining area, a bathroom, and two small bedrooms.
Jasmina	In her late thirties at the time of the interview. The household currently consists of Jasmina, her two high-school-aged children, and her partner. The 35m² in Kamendin apartment includes a living room that doubles as the children's bedroom, a bathroom, and a kitchen with a dining area, repurposed as the main bedroom.
Jelica	In her early twenties at the time of the interview. Seeking more space after living in an overcrowded apartment shared by 13 people, Jelica and her husband occupied an abandoned 66m² apartment in the same building in Kamendin. The apartment consists of two bedrooms, two bathrooms and a larger living room connected to the kitchen. Their new household consists of herself and her husband, two young children and a dog.
Jovana	In her fourties at the time of the interview. The 50m² apartment in Uzun Mirkova consists of mixed use kitchen-living room, two small bedrooms and a bathroom. Their multigenerational household consists of 11 members, mostly young adolescents and children.
Katarina	In her fourties at the time of the interview. Together with her 6 minor children she occupies a 70m² apartment in Kamendin consisting of kitchen with a dining nook, living room, toilet, bathroom and two bedrooms.
Lela	In her late fourties at the time of the interview. After her eldest son moved to another unit in the building, the householed consists of herself, husband and their four children. Their Kamendin apartment consists of a living room with an adjacent kitchen, bathroom and two bedrooms.
Maida	In her mid thirties at the time of the interview. Their household currently consists of herself and her husband, and their four children, aged 3 to 17. The 35m² apartment in Uzun Mirkova includes a living room with a kitchenette, a bathroom, and one bedroom.
Marija	In her late twenties at the time of interviewing. The household currently consists of six members. In addition to Marija and her partner, it includes his mother, two brothers, and a sister. This Uzun Mirkova apartment is 54m² and consists of a living room with a kitchen and dining area, a bathroom, and three small bedrooms.

Milica	In her fifties at the time of interviewing. The multigeneraltional household curently consists of eight members: Milica, her son and daughter in law and their five children, age 3 to 14. Their 66m² apartment in Kamendin consists of a living room with an adjacent kitchen, two bedrooms, bathroom and a pantry.
Mira	In her mid fourties at the time of the interview. Her 66m² apartment in Kamendin consists of a kitchen, a toilet, a bathroom, a dining room that has been converted into a bedroom, a living room, and two bedrooms. The household consists of 15 people including seven children.
Rada	In her late fifties at the time of the interview. Her 64m² apartment in Kamendin, initially housed eight members. The apartment consists of a kitchen, bathroom, living and dining room that doubles as a bedroom, and two bedrooms, one of which is uninhabitable. The household currently includes four adults and two toddlers.
Sanja	Eighteen at the time of the interview. The single-room apartment in Kamendin with a kitchenette and a bathroom is used by herself, her husband and their newborn.
Sneža	In her late fifties at the time of the interview. The household currently consists of herself and her husband, their daughter in her late twenties, and two grandsons aged 2 and 5. Their 50m² apartment in Kamendin consists of a kitchen, a living room that the entire family uses as a bedroom, a bathroom, and a bedroom that is not in use due to infestation.
Strahinja	In his fifties at the time of the interview. He lives with his wife in a 84m² apartment in Kamendin, consists of a kitchen, a living room with a dining area, a toilet, a bathroom, two terraces, and two bedrooms. Over the years, their three children have grown up and moved away, so the apartment became too big and unafordable.
Teodora	In her mid twenties at the time of the interview. She lives with her husband and their two young children in a 46 m² unit in Uzun Mirkova, consisting of a living room with kitchen, a bathroom, and two small rooms one of whitch is unused due to a collapsed ceiling.