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NEGOTIATING THE LIMITS OF CARE. MORALISED CONSTRUCTIONS OF (UN)DESERVINGNESS IN RURAL UKRAINE.

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Abstract

This Working Paper discusses moralised distribution of care and social assistance for senior citizens in the context of female migration from rural Ukraine. I suggest that the ability to mobilise care during old age depends to a large degree on moral views about deservingness. While reciprocity is at the heart of practices that maintain different forms of *relatedness*, it is primarily idealised concepts of self-sufficiency that corroborate local judgements and discourses of (un)deservingness. Care by kin, friends and neighbours and care by the state are both shaped by the same moral understandings of how care and support are provided for the elderly. Although often presented as separate domains, state/institutional and ‘private’/kin care are inevitably interwoven and even mutually reinforce each other. By uncovering moral hierarchies of (un)deservingness, this Working Paper shows how poverty is moralised and ultimately attributed to individual failure. I argue that by portraying poverty as self-inflicted, disregard for someone’s neediness can be depicted as morally proper conduct that obstructs neither the realisation of the moral self nor the maintenance of the ideal of (unconditional) mutual support and social cohesion.

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Introduction

On a sunny spring day in May 2018, my hostess Halyna (aged sixty-nine), her aunt Anna (seventy-nine), one of her friends and I are chatting in her kitchen in the village of Horishnyak while preparing lunch.² The front door opens and Halyna's maternal cousin, Vasyl' (also sixty-nine) enters, shuffles bent over down the hallway and, before even sitting down on the kitchen bench, tells us, eyes sunken and voice faint, that he feels very ill. He has serious health problems, he claims, and no money for bread or medicine; it has been a long time since he received money from his daughters and he is indebted to both his neighbours and the nearby shop. Vasyl' has just gone to the village hall because he had not received his welfare payment³ in two months. He says the deputy mayor put him off: the money will come soon but since he is 'virtually single', he can apply for additional social assistance for his medical bills and prescriptions. He just needs a medical certificate that he has been ill and needs help. At this point, Halyna interjects that this is ridiculous, and somewhat hyperbolically adds that Vasyl' is the shame (*nozop*) of all Europe. After all, he has two daughters and a wife⁴ in the United States and is by no means single – why should he, of all people, apply for additional social assistance? She then explains that, although her husband died several years ago and she has no children, she would never apply for welfare: indeed, she would be ashamed to do so! Anna next asks Vasyl' what he did with his pension this time. He looks at her blankly, snorts and shrugs his shoulders. Halyna intervenes, admitting that it is hard to make ends meet with a Ukrainian pension but that, unlike Vasyl', she still works on the side and earns a little extra money embroidering shirts and blouses.

The women then begin to talk about their own illnesses and physical ailments and eventually a competition develops between them about who is worse off and at the same time more capable of self-help and bearing suffering. To prove her capacity to endure suffering, Halyna goes to her bedroom to get her medical reports. Proudly, she displays a stack of paper and claims that despite her many documented symptoms she never takes any medication or complains about pain. She hands the pile of paper to Vasyl' so he can read everything carefully. After skimming the papers, Vasyl' puts the pile on the table in front of him, gets up

² All names and geographical designations are pseudonyms.

³ Certain categories of people (including invalids, those receiving only the minimum pension, war veterans and needy families) whose family income or pension payments are below the statutory minimum subsistence level are granted monthly social assistance. At the time of my research, this amounted to 650 UAH (about 21 euros) for minimum pensioners. As Vasyl's wife divorced him, he is considered 'single' and is thus eligible for a monthly supplementary social assistance payment. If he were still married, he would not be granted this welfare payment.

⁴ Although Vasyl' and his wife are divorced, Halyna here still refers to her as his wife.

and says goodbye. When he is gone, the women become upset with him. In their view, he always expresses far too much resentment but has no reason to complain. He should just learn to handle his money better instead of spending everything on cigarettes and alcohol.

Throughout my fieldwork, villagers and local administrators assured me that the people of Horishnyak would ‘never let anyone down’. Especially when someone was ill, relatives, friends and neighbours would not hesitate to help, collecting money to pay for medical costs or offering other kinds of assistance. If necessary, the municipality would provide money from a supplementary social assistance fund. What social scientific language might call cohesion is locally an important marker of self-identification and self-representation, based mainly on structural explanations of rural regions’ marginality and Ukraine’s supposed ‘backwardness’ relative to ‘civilised’, ‘Western’ countries (see also Kay 2011 for Russia). It is therefore remarkable that Vasyl’s claim of neediness, which was based on poverty, physical infirmity and lack of support from his children, was increasingly rejected. Despite the local discourse of social cohesion, mutual aid and support, he was increasingly seen as undeserving.

In the scene recounted above, the women implicitly referred to a common discourse of a ‘traditional’ Ukrainian familialism in which kin – specifically children – are most responsible for the care and well-being of frail and needy elders. In order to portray Vasyl’s display of neediness and his request for additional social assistance as immoral and shame him before an ‘outsider’, the women invoked ‘traditional’ Ukrainian values that expected his children to take care of him. At the same time, in asking where his pension had gone and accusing him of not knowing how to budget, they referred to an ethos of self-sufficiency and individual responsibility that somehow contradicted the discourse of familialism and according to which people should live largely autonomously and as frugally as possible and be capable of bearing suffering and taking care of themselves, even in old age.

In contrast to Vasyl’, Halyna is both materially secure and well integrated into different support relationships. But although she claimed to be largely self-sufficient and to not (yet) need anyone’s help, it is interesting that only two weeks before the conversation described above she had made arrangements for her future care with a state-funded home care worker in the village. Nevertheless, she insisted that she would feel embarrassed to use any kind of state support, rendering this state-provided care invisible by not mentioning it.

Whereas most of the research on care in relation to migration has focused on the maintenance of relatedness through different forms of exchange (see for instance Baldassar 2007; Karl and Torres 2016; Merla 2012)⁵, in this paper I discuss the moralised distribution of care and social assistance for ‘left behind’ senior citizens by kin, friends, neighbours and the state in a setting of material deprivation.⁶ I ask how it happened that Vasyl’, who claims to be needy, was less and less supported over time despite his increasing impoverishment and the local ideal of social cohesion while Halyna, who claims to be self-sufficient and not in need of help from others, has recently begun to receive support in the form of a state-funded caregiver for the elderly. In the following, I refer to events and observations that have taken place over a longer period. This is important both to account for the complexity of relationships and the corresponding care networks and to point out that caring relationships are anything but stable, since the quality of relationships can change significantly over time. By following and juxtaposing the two aged cousins Vasyl’ and Halyna, I explore the complexities, nuances and contradictions that come with negotiations about how care is performed for/by whom and on what grounds. I also reveal the uncertainties that elders living alone must deal with and which strategies they employ to prove themselves worthy of support from others. Above all, these include soliciting help from others and claiming resources in order to ensure their survival and maintain their social position. As ethnographies from other formerly socialist and post-industrial low-income communities indicate (see e.g. Kay 2011; Gudeman and Hann 2014; Goodwin-Hawkins and Dawson 2018), economic hardship and the constraints of the labour market become moralised through the creation of a hierarchy of deservingness and the division of the population into ‘deserving working’ and ‘undeserving lazy’ (Howe 1998). This also holds true for Horishnyak since the pressing issues of un(der)employment and out-migration fundamentally condition the distribution of care and other resources.

By uncovering moral hierarchies of (un)deservingness, this paper aims at advancing our understanding of how and by means of which criteria local notions of (un)deservingness are constructed and substantiated, and what the actual consequences are for those involved. Taking concrete caring practices as a starting point for my analysis, as suggested by Tatjana

⁵ The studies of Vullnetari and King (2008) and of Conkova et al. (2018) on ‘left behind’ senior citizens in Albania and Bulgaria are an exception, which explicitly address the issue of the impact on and the challenges for elderly people when family members living abroad are not able to provide help and support in the form of physical presence.

⁶ Of course, kin and state are not the only providers of various kinds of care in Horishnyak. To include others, such as NGOs and the church, would go beyond the scope of this article, so I will focus on the distribution of care between relatives, neighbors and state institutions.

Thelen (2015), will allow me not only to address questions of personal responsibility in caring for oneself and others, but also to look at who is granted care and who is not, regardless of idealised local discourses of social cohesion.

This working paper builds on data collected during a total of fourteen months of fieldwork in Horishnyak, a village in Western Ukraine in the northern foothills of the Carpathian Mountains with an official population of about 4000. It is estimated that at least a quarter of the population is permanently or temporarily living abroad, mostly in the United States, Poland, the Czech Republic, Italy, and Belgium. While out-migration – by women, especially – has substantially increased since the late 1990s due to the soaring unemployment rates that followed the breakdown of state socialism and the opening of borders with ‘the West’, people were already leaving to seek work in Soviet times. From the 1950s, people from Horishnyak travelled to Latvia, Russia, and Estonia and to other regions in Ukraine for better-paid seasonal work on collective farms. Unemployment in Horishnyak is high and some of the people ‘left behind’ make ends meet running small businesses at home and the majority also have gardens they rely on for food. The average net monthly income in the region is about 4500 Hryvna (about 150 euros), while the minimum pension is only slightly over forty euros.

In the first section, I will set out the theoretical framework and briefly introduce the main protagonists before looking more closely at how care between relatives, friends and neighbours is distributed to whom, who is excluded from this distribution, and how this is justified. In the second section, I explore the entanglement of kinship and state care.

Negotiating the limits of care at the intersection of kinship and the state

My argument builds on current debates within anthropology, which propose to not only transcend the analytical separation of kinship and the state but also examine the mutual constitution of these two realms in depth (McKinnon and Canell 2013; Thelen and Alber 2017). As McKinnon and Canell (2013, 6) argue, the concept of ‘modernity’ is largely based upon a supposed knowledge of the past that has implications for understanding present configurations of the ‘modern’ family. Accordingly, the ‘South’ and ‘East’ (in contrast to ‘the West’), are often assumed to be (radically) culturally different and people ‘there’ assumed to be able to largely rely on kinship support, a stereotype which also influences state social policy. In Ukraine, for instance, the ‘family’ and ‘traditional values’ are presumed ‘still’ to play a central role, despite efforts towards modernisation and ‘Europeanisation’ in other areas

(Zhurzhenko 2004). Even though narratives about ‘modernity’ circulate globally as powerful ideologies that influence national and individual ideas and aspirations (McKinnon and Canell 2013, 4), neither the extended family associations which are regarded as ‘typical’ for the ‘East’ (see e.g. Todorova 2006 for the Balkans) nor the widespread narrative about a decline in kinship since the onset of modernity in the ‘West’ can be conclusively historically proven and they are vehemently questioned by anthropologists (see e.g. Herzfeld 1992; McKinnon and Canell 2013; Thelen and Alber 2017).⁷ Still, ideals of (unconditional) mutual support between kin are central to not only political decisions but also the self-images of many of my interlocutors, and particularly to their self-identification as rural people. People often emphasised, especially when addressing me as a ‘European’, that ‘modern’ life in the city and my life in the Austrian capital might be materially better and less arduous, but that ‘traditional’ life in the Ukrainian village, was characterised by social cohesion and mutual support among kin, neighbours and friends. Thus, discourses on care in Ukraine largely follow the dichotomy between the ‘modern’ state and the ‘traditional’ family. Yet, in their actual attempts of mitigating risks, people seek to mobilise both state and non-state resources of support, a fact all too easily obscured through idealising care provided by the family.

The emphasis on an ideal of care by children and the family and the accompanied discursive demarcation from the sphere of the political are not specific to Ukraine.⁸ However, as Francis Pine (2017) shows in Poland and Willemijn de Jong (2005) in India, an idealised language of kinship makes it difficult to examine violent, neglectful, ambivalent or exclusionary practices within families. According to de Jong (2005, 30), this is mainly because most social scientists refer more to the cultural ideal of support for elders by children and relatives than to actual practices.⁹ De Jong describes impoverished elderly widows in Kerala, India who are particularly affected by poverty and who easily fall out of local support networks because they lack the necessary resources to reciprocate. Her approach is useful for my subsequent analysis as it shows that the distribution of care among kinship and closely related persons, although discursively often claimed to be unconditional, is indeed very much

⁷ Sociologists have also questioned this assumption. For example, Heady & Kohli (2010) show with a comparative study in Europe that even in states with a well-developed welfare state, kinship continues to play an important role for different forms of social security. Janet Finch (1989) shows that in England liberal welfare policies have by no means led to an erosion of kinship obligations and support.

⁸ See for instance von Benda-Beckmann 1988 for Indonesia; Häberlein 2016 for Togo; Lammer 2018 for China; Pine 2017 for Poland; de Jong 2005 for India.

⁹ In the context of India and Asia, de Jong (2005) speaks of the cultural ideal of *filial piety*. Yet, I assume that not only in social scientific discourses, but also in wider social, cultural and political discourses, which also circulate within the places under scrutiny, sociocultural norms are often presented as practices.

contingent with reciprocity and the ability to return past support in an appropriate time and manner as key conditions.

Authors such as Tatjana Thelen (2015), Rebecca Kay (2011) and Goodwin-Hawkins and Dawson (2018) have highlighted that families, neighbourhoods and communities have moral boundaries and that care is not given ‘automatically’ due to need but always responds to *socially legitimised* needs. In her research in a village in western Siberia, Kay (2011) demonstrates that it is predominantly contradictory moralised discourses of individual and structural causes of marginalisation that determinate whether people can claim to belong to the moral centre and gain access to formal and informal networks of mutual support or are relegated to the ‘moral periphery’ and no longer receive support from others. By emphasising both self-sufficiency and reciprocal care as key virtues for belonging, they “drew simultaneously on Soviet ideologies of entitlement through work and positive contribution to the collective, long standing rural realities of collective self-sufficiency, and newer, ‘neoliberal’, calls for a reduction in state ‘paternalism’ and increased personal responsibility” (Kay 2011, 50). Similarly, Goodwin-Hawkins and Dawson’s (2018) comparison of two different forms of work organisation – milling and mining – in post-industrial Northern England, examines how different economic practices lead to contrasting moralities of care of and for senior citizens. They observe that former textile workers are expected to be resilient, autonomous and to take care of themselves in order to be socially accepted, while among former miners solidarity and mutual care are the guiding values for social acceptance and inclusion. Still, they emphasise that what ultimately matters is continually convincing others of one’s ability of ‘being good at being a carer’ (2018, 228).

Similarly, my data shows that people are not consistent in their moral reasoning and that morality is not something ‘fixed’; instead moral judgements should be understood as shifting features of situations through which people (constantly) craft their moral selves. I follow authors such as Carlo Caduff (2011), Veena Das (2012) and Michael Lambek (2010) and propose focussing not on the structures and discourses that people invoke in negotiating ‘moral boundaries’ but on concrete caring practices and then analysing how these practices are discursively explained and justified. Attending to these practices as well as to their accompanying discursive constructions of (un)deservingness will allow me to explore how moral boundaries are drawn or blurred situationally and how people constantly balance care for themselves and for others as they negotiate (un)deservingness.

In contrast to political scientist Joan Tronto (1987; 2013) – who argues that

evaluations of care are or should be primarily guided by positively connoted considerations of moral responsibility for one another, I assume that they may also be guided by selfish motives (Hann 2011, 34) and by indifference and disregard (Biehl 2012). Yet, people do have to find ways to justify their actions by means of discursive strategies. This applies to supposedly 'private' relationships of mutual care and state institutions alike (Herzfeld 1992).

As Franz and Keebet von Benda-Beckmann (1988) suggest, understanding the allocation of social benefits requires viewing local state officials as social actors integrated into both the bureaucratic apparatus and the society surrounding it. This confronts them with a variety of challenges because they are not only subject to structural constraints and imperatives but also face different demands put on them. Often, 'street-level bureaucrats' (Lipsky 1980) have a certain leeway, for example in granting or withdrawing social benefits. As members of the society in which they operate, bureaucrats may have different conceptions of need than official policy prescribes (von Benda-Beckmann 2007). Thus, it is not only the 'distant', central state that sets the boundaries of what is acceptable, but they are negotiated and revised in everyday interactions between citizens and local state officials (Herzfeld 1992, 15; see also Lipsky 1980). As I will demonstrate in the last section of this paper, the assessment of supposedly 'private' relationships and characteristics of a person by local civil servants also plays a decisive role in the allocation of state benefits. Since those who are unable to mobilise support from relatives and neighbours are also excluded from the distribution of state benefits, 'private' kinship and institutional state care are inevitably interwoven and may even mutually reinforce each other, even though they are often presented as separate areas.

Ultimately, I argue that analysing the co-constitution of kinship and the state through concrete caring practices and their accompanying discursive constructions of (un)deservingness can help to better understand (newly emerging) processes of marginalisation in a rural area of high unemployment, material deprivation and massive out-migration.

Between neediness and (un)deservingness: Vasyl' and Halyna

By juxtaposing Vasyl' and Halyna's cases, I will now look more closely at discursive constructions of (un)deservingness and how through Vasyl's progressive impoverishment he was increasingly seen as undeserving even as Halyna successfully managed to present herself as a person of moral integrity and was thus seen as deserving.

Needy but undeserving: Vasyl'

Vasyl' was born in Horishnyak in 1949, an only child of parents who separated when he was one year old. He was raised by his mother and lived with her until her death in 1992. Before marrying at the age of 27, he helped his mother breed sheep and, after completing vocational training in agriculture, worked seasonally on collective farms in other parts of the Soviet Union. Later, he was mainly employed as a technical worker on a collective farm in the district centre, where he says he made a fairly good living. His wife ran a small farm at home and wove carpets to sell to dealers, significantly contributing to the family income. His two daughters were born in 1978 and 1983. The older, Ivana, received a scholarship, went to the United States in the late 1990s and had only returned once for a brief visit about eight years ago. His wife, their younger daughter Ljuba, and Ljuba's husband (who moved in with Vasyl's family after their marriage) also moved to the United States about fourteen years ago, leaving Vasyl' alone in the village. For a while, he believed that his family would return someday. At first, his children called regularly, and his elder daughter (especially) sent money on Christmas and his birthday, as well as occasional extra money that he could invest in maintaining the house. Although he claims to have worked enough years to retire, he receives only the minimum pension of 1372 UAH (about 45 euros) per month, supposedly because his working years were credited improperly. Since his wife divorced him a few years ago and his pension is below the minimum subsistence level, he has received a monthly supplementary social assistance payment of 650 UAH (about 21 euros) for the last two years.¹⁰ Until about five years ago, he worked as a security guard at a military base in the neighbouring village to earn some extra money. He was still able to mostly support himself then and, in his opinion, was doing reasonably well financially. He also felt valued and respected by his colleagues, by neighbours and other villagers. But over time, he increasingly felt lonely. This was very hard for him to endure, and he says he would repeatedly fall into depression, with only alcohol helping him to 'survive the worst'.

After experiencing serious health problems, Vasyl' had to quit his job and sporadically rely on the help of others to survive. Especially in cold weather, he often got sick and would stay at the hospital in a neighbouring village. To pay for this, he repeatedly asked his daughters for financial support. After his health worsened a few years ago, he began to

¹⁰ At the time of my research in 2017 and 2018, half a litre of cheap vodka cost about 60 UAH (2 euros), a kilogram of bread about 15 UAH (0.50 euros) and a pack of cigarettes about 36 hrivnja (1.2 euros). If Vasyl' smoked half a pack of cigarettes a day, he spent almost a third of his monthly income on it.

establish a closer relationship with his cousins Halyna and her sister Paraska and along with friends and neighbours they gave him a lot of support, providing food, medication and shopping for him. Initially, he reciprocated with smaller amounts of money or with presents. He also gave his bicycle to a great-niece who visited him regularly and helped care for him when he was in hospital. At that time, his cousin Paraska was still in regular phone contact with his daughters, who sent her money to pay his medical bills. At some point, however, the money stopped coming and his daughters stopped calling and could no longer be reached. This was around the time when I first heard about Vasyl'.

Halyna and Paraska had told me about their cousin, whom they felt obliged to support because his children supposedly refused to care for him. This sparked my interest, and I kept asking Halyna and Paraska, whom I already knew well, if they could introduce me to him. Halyna and her sister (as she explained to me some time later) were at first embarrassed to show me Vasyl's house. This situation changed when the sisters made up their minds that my being foreign and from outside the village might encourage his daughters to help him. One day, just after Paraska had hung up the phone after talking to Vasyl', I inquired again whether I could possibly meet him. To my delight, Paraska said yes. Feeling that they had done enough for their cousin, Halyna and Paraska had already considered contacting his daughters to tell them to finally take responsibility for their father and threatening to inform the media if they continued to refuse to support him. The television station would then film their father in his poor living conditions and also try to track down his daughters through the Ukrainian embassy to the United States. Somewhat apologetically, Paraska explained to me: 'Well, we did what we could, and you know that me and Halyna aren't young anymore, and we have a lot of work to do, ourselves. Now it's really time for his children to take care of him!' Although Halyna had remarked on another occasion that she probably would not actually 'go so far' as to track down the daughters, this episode shows that public shame can be used as a sanction or at least a threat when people do not live up to certain moral expectations. It also shows that Vasyl' was, even then, still considered to deserve help and support from others.

Vasyl's living conditions had deteriorated dramatically in recent years. His house was at the edge of the village, the second last on the street. One wall had almost entirely collapsed, one could see inside, and part of the roof was gone. It was cold, damp and dark and only a few temporary wooden posts resting on the tile stove kept what was left of the roof from finally collapsing. These poor living conditions exacerbated his reputation as a 'strange other' within the village. For instance, Oksana, the local postmaster, once casually told me that she

considered it a disgrace that people like Vasyl' lived in such a beautiful and rich village. With noticeable indignation she commented: 'How is it possible that someone lives in such a dilapidated house? In a village as rich as ours. This is embarrassing for everyone! And he has relatives in America!' She added that he had once been a handsome, respected man. 'But he's very lazy, you know, and he drinks a lot!' I repeatedly encountered similar assessments of Vasyl's situation, which was often a subject of conversation. I even heard several people taunt him, as his situation seemed extremely strange to many villagers. Vasyl's living conditions suggested neediness but at the same time were regarded as visible proof that something must be 'wrong' with him. By adding that he was 'very lazy' and that he 'drinks a lot', Oksana also implied that he was not considered capable of taking good care of himself. Other villagers also occasionally referred to his laziness by pointing out that he could at least grow his own vegetables, which would provide him with something to eat. This not only pointed to the normative local construction of how people should (or should not) live in a supposedly beautiful and rich village in order to be able to claim membership in the moral centre and consequently receive assistance from others. It also constructed other villagers as diligent, hard-working, 'decent' citizens, able to take care of themselves in the first place but also maintaining stable social relations that guaranteed support would be offered when needed.

When I asked Svitlana, the deputy mayor responsible for social affairs, what the local government could do for Vasyl' she answered, nothing. Initially, she had helped him by suggesting that he could apply for additional social assistance because he was 'virtually single'. Yet despite the fact that she had stressed on several occasions that villagers as well as the local government would not 'let anybody down' and would provide help for people in need, she finally maintained in the course of events described below that the legal situation prevented the local government from doing anything for Vasyl'.

Vasyl' himself insisted that he had always been a 'decent' citizen and had never done anything wrong. He had worked hard, got along well with his children and cared for them, never had any problems with the police and also cared for his mother until her death. In accordance with an ethos of work and care, he thus proclaimed himself a 'worthy' member of the village community and thereby asserted a claim for assistance from others. Nevertheless, he was not only increasingly denied support by his children, more distant relatives and neighbours but also by the local state, as I will describe towards the end of this paper. He himself used structural explanations to account for his predicament, and primarily blamed the 'uncivilised' Ukrainian state, charging it with failing in its reciprocal responsibilities towards

someone who had previously worked for the state and thus (in his view) always met the requirements of being a ‘good citizen’. Thereby he implicitly referred to universal social rights that were supposedly guaranteed to all citizens in the time of state socialism (see also Mataradze 2011 for Georgia).

Not needy, but deserving: Halyna

Halyna, Vasyl’s cousin, was also born in Horishnyak in 1949, the third of six children. Her father died at forty-two, when she was seventeen. She graduated from secondary school and from then on worked in the local *sovkhos* (state-owned farm) to support her mother and younger siblings. At the age of twenty-two, she married. She and her husband built the house where she still lives but had no children. Halyna later worked in various state-owned enterprises in Horishnyak and neighbouring villages, seasonally in other parts of the Soviet Union, and bought and sold clothes and other products with her husband, so that the couple achieved relative prosperity. They were among the first in the village to have their own car in the early 1970s. Her husband ran a sewing workshop at the *sovkhos* and had once been a member of the Communist Party but was later expelled and served three years in prison for illegal trading in the late 1970s. Afterwards, he and Halyna both continued working at the same enterprise. After retiring in 2002, Halyna moved to Italy and worked as a nursing assistant for a year. However, her husband started drinking heavily while she was away and became ill, so she returned to Ukraine and, with neighbours, started sewing blankets at home. These were sold all over Ukraine and brought her a fairly good living.

As she and her husband had no children of their own, they decided about ten years ago to bequeath their house to Halyna’s niece Maria, who would in turn care for them if they needed someone around.¹¹ By this time, Halyna’s husband had been paralysed after a car accident and she was caring for him at home; Maria, who lived with her son Boris in a separate house on the same property, also helped occasionally. After Halyna’s husband died six years later, she initially lived with Maria and her son. The two women took turns cooking and, Halyna thought, supported each other quite well. Maria is a trained pharmacist: she worked in a pharmacy for a while and later, with Halyna’s help, opened a small grocery store.

¹¹ This form of exchanging property for care, between parents and their children as well as between people who are only distantly or not at all related, is common not only in Horishnyak, but also in the rest of Ukraine and in other countries such as Romania (see e.g. Popa 2016). In Ukraine, when this arrangement is between parents and their children it is regulated by the inheritance laws; for others it takes the form of a ‘contract of donation’, the so-called ‘dohovir dovichnoho utrimannja’.

A few years later, shortly after the death of Halyna's husband, Maria went to live and work in the United States, leaving Boris with her parents, and began to send Halyna about one hundred dollars a month, as well as some extra money on her birthday and special holidays. Halyna had a monthly pension of 1800 UAH (about sixty euros) and earned some extra money embroidering shirts and blouses, which she mainly sold to former villagers who live abroad. She also grew her own potatoes and other vegetables and seasonally rented out her kitchen and a storage room to two grandnieces who produced jams and juices for a local entrepreneur. Her house was in very good condition, and she invested a lot of time and energy, as well as a large portion of the money Maria sent in maintaining and renovating it. 'First and foremost', Halyna explained to me, she did this 'because people need to care and have something for themselves so that they can survive.'

While Vasyl' believed himself to be in need because of poverty and illness and to deserve support from relatives, neighbours and the state, Halyna proudly claimed that she did not need help from others because, as befits a 'decent' citizen, she was able to take care of herself. She did not, like Vasyl', 'let herself go' or allow herself to show any weakness. Endurance, autonomy and the ability to suffer are thus at the forefront of Halyna's narrative, which recalls the 'hierarchies of suffering' in Nancy Ries's (1997) research in Russia during perestroika. Halyna not only kept up her house and garden, but also started preparing for her old age in time. Also, she is both supported financially by her niece Maria and recently started receiving visits from a state-funded homecare assistant. Halyna had agreed with the social worker Elvira that the latter would care for her: as she told me, she did not receive this help because she had applied for it or because she actually needed it. Instead, Elvira, who was Halyna's third cousin, had approached her and asked her whether she could take her on as a client: each of the three social workers in the village needed at least six to maintain her employment and one of hers had recently died. Halyna explained to me that the social worker was herself very ill with diabetes but needed at least one more year of work to receive a full pension. Although Halyna claimed not to have high expectations for this arrangement, she stressed that Elvira had a car and could do shopping for her and come by occasionally to check up on her or bring homemade milk and sour cream. She also admitted that it would at least give her a good feeling to know that someone would be taking care of her in case of an emergency. Still, she presented this arrangement primarily as if she were helping Elvira keep her job and pension. To enable this arrangement, they were concealing the fact that she was not actually ill or in need of help (as the law required) and Halyna kept asserting that she had

no expectation of support from anyone – neither relatives nor anybody else and certainly not the state.

Both the lack of support from children and receiving state benefits are presented as shameful and the second as something that only those generally considered ‘failures’ take advantage of. Embarrassment on the part of those who claim state care is often associated with kinship practices classified as ‘bad’ because such people are supposedly not supported well enough by their family members and thus assumed to have ‘morally questionable’ personalities. Halyna therefore had to repeatedly perform the self-sufficiency she claimed and have it confirmed by others. Since the ideal of self-sufficiency can never be perfectly attained, repeated performances and discursive claims thereof and (general) autonomy are central to one’s ability to present oneself as a person of moral integrity and, ultimately, to be socially accepted (Goodwin-Hawkins and Dawson 2018). As in Leo Howe’s (1998) depictions of the ‘deserving working’ and the ‘undeserving lazy’ in Northern Ireland, ideas about (un)deservingness are used in Horishnyak to express differences between diligent, hard-working, frugal and supposedly self-sufficient people like Halyna, and supposedly lazy ones like Vasyl’. Yet here self-sufficiency is discursively not only a prerequisite for receiving support *from* others, but also for attaining the ideal of social cohesion: giving care *to* others as well as the ability to claim full membership to the moral centre of the local community. This is important since it is assumed that only those who can give ‘good’ care to themselves can likewise give ‘good’ care to others.

Reciprocity as a key condition for maintaining different forms of relatedness

In Horishnyak, it is commonly emphasised that providing well for one’s old age consists, essentially, of starting a family, taking care of one’s own children, and building and maintaining a house that can later be exchanged for care. A house with a plot of land is often an older person’s most important material resource as well as an important means for parents to exert authority in relationships with their children. Usually, the youngest daughter (or son if there is no daughter) inherits the family house, in exchange for providing care to the parents. Children are obligated to support their parents not only morally but also legally, a situation very familiar to the villagers.¹² In Vasyl’s case, his younger daughter Ljuba was destined to

¹² Article 51 of the Constitution of Ukraine states that ‘[...] adult children are legally obliged to care for their parents who are in need of care or unable to work. This care can be expressed in personal care, or by providing material support for additional treatment costs in case of illness, disability or infirmity, representation, protection

inherit the house in exchange for caring for her parents, but so far no formal transfer of ownership has taken place and it is very unlikely that she will ever return to Ukraine. Since the value of real estate, especially in rural areas, is significantly decreasing due to high out-migration among younger generations, exchanging property for care has become increasingly difficult and today seniors tend to have less bargaining power in relations with their children.¹³ Moreover, senior citizens' pensions are now barely sufficient for them to survive, so they often depend on additional (financial) support from children or other relatives.

Vasyl's house was in dire condition and he had no money, a drinking problem and chronic illnesses. When he could no longer work, and stopped receiving money from his daughters, he increasingly fell into debt to neighbours, relatives and the nearby shop. As he was no longer able to repay his debts, he received less help in various forms and could no longer rely on it. He told me that relatives or neighbours still helped for a while, 'but if you have nothing (left) to pay them back with, [...] everyone will tell you at some point that they have to look after themselves and also that their money does not grow on trees.' This statement is interesting in that it reflects Vasyl's concept of support among closely related persons, according to which people should take help from others only as long as they can return the favour at some point – this most likely also included his daughters (see de Jong 2005). It also highlights that kin and friends depend on the same set of economic constraints and can therefore only support each other to a certain extent.

When I asked Vasyl's neighbours about what they thought had led to his children breaking off contact, most said that something must have happened between them: 'in a normal, well-functioning family, it is unthinkable that children would not support their parents', even if they have already lived abroad for some time. One of Vasyl's neighbours told me that, when his daughter Ivana returned for a visit eight years ago, she had originally planned to stay at the house where she had grown up. However, it even then was in such bad condition that she chose to stay with the neighbour. Because her father was unable to keep up the house, Ivana, who had been regularly sending him money for repairs, was obviously very upset. Apparently, this incident significantly contributed to the deterioration of the

of parents' rights and interests in various institutions, etc. In the event of non-compliance by children, the parents can take legal action against them.'

See: <http://www.desn.gov.ua/index.php?option=comcontent&view=article&id=3550%3A2013-02-26-13-13-47&catid=353%3A2012-03-22-14-34-14&Itemid=3172&lang=ua>.

¹³ Although many migrants working abroad still invest considerable money and energy in building new houses in their hometowns, more than one hundred houses in Horishnyak are currently for sale. However, apartments in newly built blocks in the larger cities (such as Ivano-Frankivsk and L'viv) are particularly popular with migrant workers, unlike village houses.

relationship between Ivana and her father, but even after that his children continued to send him money for a while. However, after learning from neighbours that their father was drinking regularly (and sometimes heavily), they stopped sending him money directly, instead sending it to his cousin Paraska to pay his medical expenses. His younger daughter Ljuba also sent a schoolfriend some money so the friend's father would make some repairs to Vasyl's house. Yet despite this financial support from his children, and even though they kept sending money, his house began to fall apart.

Halyna was, in contrast to Vasyl, very well integrated into kinship and neighbour support relations. Neighbours and relatives came to her place regularly for a visit, to gossip, borrow something or to consult with her. She was well known as an energetic businessperson and neighbours often brought her clothes, electrical devices or other goods, which she then sold to other villagers in exchange for a small commission. Even though she asserted that she didn't (yet) need anybody to help her, she still needed assistance to cultivate her vegetable plot and make repairs on her house. One of her neighbours often helped in the garden, for which Halyna paid a small amount of money. Additionally, she could turn to her sister Paraska, as well as a range of relatives and neighbours, to borrow money, and she herself regularly lent money to them. For home repairs, she mainly hired unemployed men from her neighbourhood, well known alcoholics. These men were very unreliable, she said, but they were the only ones who would work for her for small cash payments along with cooked food and groceries. Conflicts often arose between her and these men, as when (for instance) they demanded an advance or did not show up for work as agreed. Even though Halyna complained passionately about them, she still depended on their help to maintain the ideal of self-sufficiency and autonomy and to continue to invest in the house. Since she had the resources to reimburse this assistance, it could be construed as 'transactions' instead of 'dependency', once again underlining her alleged 'autonomy'.

About a year ago, Halyna fell out with Maria's mother over the lack of rental income for the shop that Maria had previously run and that had later been let to a neighbour. This incident supposedly led to Maria's parents breaking off contact with Halyna and Paraska. In addition, Maria, who had previously called her aunt regularly, stopped shortly after. However, even though their relationship has deteriorated considerably, Halyna could still rely on Maria's support in the form of money sent to her. She also assumed that even if Maria

decided not to return to Ukraine she would still hire home care for Halyna if necessary: by taking the house, Maria had made a final commitment to take care of her.¹⁴

After Maria broke off contact too, Halyna began to develop closer relationships with her other two nieces in the United States. She had had internet access at home, and one of her great-nephews sold her a tablet. This gave her the opportunity to talk to her nieces more frequently, often daily. She embroidered a blouse for one of her nieces, which took her at least two months, and sometimes she supported her three great-nephews (aged between seventeen and twenty-five) by preparing food for them. While this was certainly an act of caring on her part, Halyna also saw it as a form of retirement provision. The young men already sometimes helped her around the house, went shopping for her or drove her when she had to go somewhere by car. ‘Who knows how things will go – maybe I’ll need help one day and one of the boys will be there for me’, she explained to me. As in Ssorin-Chaikov’s (2012) work on ‘the performativity of gift and commodity distinctions’, Halyna, unlike Vasyl’, invests in many different kinds of exchange with her relatives and neighbours, but these cannot be reduced to one single logic or intent. Nevertheless, these investments are decisive for Halyna’s old age provision and hence for securing her survival, particularly because the breakoff of contact with Vasyl’s children and the conflict between Maria and Halyna point to the fragility of kinship relations and show that certain arrangements – such as exchanging property for care – can fail.

Arguments for inclusion and internal criticism

As Vasyl’s neighbour Darija has pointed out, in addition to the reasons already mentioned above, also a lack of financial resources on part of his daughters may have led them to stop supporting their father. Darija told me that when Vasyl’s daughter Ivana came to visit about eight years ago, his children actually wanted to take him back to the United States. This plan supposedly failed because his wife had a new partner there and the daughters feared a big mess if their father met their mother’s new boyfriend. Darija saw Vasyl’ as generally a ‘good guy’, and she also never had problems with his children when they still lived here. ‘But from what I’ve heard, his younger daughter Ljuba is out of work right now, and Ivana’s older daughter is having an operation. You know yourself that life in America is not easy, too. Everything’s expensive there and you have to work very hard’, she explained to me.

¹⁴ Even if the agreement between the two is so far only verbal with no signed legal documents, Halyna assumes that Maria will still keep it.

According to her, Vasyl's daughters own possible economic and health problems were mainly responsible for the fact that they no longer supported him financially.

Darija was seventy-eight years old and, like Vasyl', received the minimum pension of 1373 UAH (about 45 euros) and a monthly supplemental social assistance payment of 650 UAH (about 21 euros). Two children and her grandson lived with her until a few years ago before moving to Poland and leaving her alone in her simple little dwelling on the very edge of the village. Still, she said she had nothing to complain about: she managed quite well on her pension due to her thrifty lifestyle, had a roof over her head, and could also buy some food: that was all she needed. From Darija's point of view, Vasyl' had nothing to complain about either: he just had to learn to accept his fate of having been abandoned by his family. She explained to me: 'Look, they left him here, and he won't go there (to America) either. Therefore, he'll stay alone until the end. No one will be here with him anymore. They won't come back, neither his wife nor his daughters.'

In the case of Vasyl' and Darija, balanced reciprocity (Sahlins 1972) still largely worked. When his health allowed, he helped her by shovelling snow in winter and with small jobs around the house, while she occasionally brought him food when she had leftovers or he was ill and could not cook for himself. Vasyl' also maintained good neighbourly relations with eighty-five-year-old Ruslana and her sixty-ish daughter Kristina, who lived in a simple little house across from his. Each received a pension and an annual allowance for firewood and together they had a monthly income of about 3500 UAH (about 117 euros). Vasyl' regularly visited them in the evenings to watch television and they did small favours for each other. Like Darija, Ruslana and Kristina also cited possible financial and health problems of Vasyl's daughters as reasons why they no longer supported him financially. 'His children are not to blame for anything,' Ruslana said, and Kristina reaffirmed it. They also vehemently defended him against the charge that he was 'lazy', because, for example, he did not grow his own vegetables. They thought that the soil in his yard was not fertile and nothing would grow there. They also told me that, contrary to popular opinion, they thought Vasyl' was quite capable of looking after himself, mainly because he had worked until recently and already cooked for himself before his wife left.

Vira expressed a similar view. She had moved to Horishnyak only two years before to cook and care for her grandsons while their mother worked in the United States. Her grandchildren were also the grandnephews of Halyna and Paraska, so she knew all about Vasyl's plight: the women often talked intensively about what to do for him. Unlike many

other villagers, Vira pitied Vasyl' and thought that he should be able to live in a retirement home where he could be cared for permanently. While she did not understand his daughters' behaviour or how they could 'let him down like this', she argued that in any case the local government should be held responsible. In the village she originally came from, no one would have been abandoned like that: if someone there had been abandoned by his family and was living in such poor conditions, the villagers would have reported the case to the village authorities, who would either have placed the person in a retirement home or paid for repairs to the house.

Different levels of knowledge about Vasyl's material circumstances had a decisive influence on people's willingness to support him and the interactions of Vasyl' and his neighbours point to people's different capacities to cope with poverty in the village. As these depictions also show, local moral conceptions are by no means fully hegemonic (see also Goodwin-Hawkins and Dawson 2018, 234) and new caring communities emerge around the edges. The alternative assessments of his situation by some of his neighbours, however, ultimately found no entry into the hegemonic discourse. This was, I believe, mainly due to his neighbours having similarly marginal geographic and socio-economic positions to Vasyl'.

Justifying marginalisation by portraying poverty as self-inflicted

In the course of negotiating care responsibilities for Vasyl', the view that he no longer deserved other people's help due to his behaviour began to take hold. For instance, the deputy mayor Svitlana asserted that his poverty and isolation were his own fault. 'He has been drinking all his life, and his wife and daughters left because he did not take proper care of them.' The accusation that Vasyl' had been a 'bad' husband and a 'bad' father was here taken as evidence that his family had no choice but to leave and to build a life elsewhere. This accusation was also used by other villagers to explain why his daughters no longer financially supported him from abroad.

Some of Vasyl's neighbours shared this view, and commented with unmistakable mockery that, on top of it, he had been quite a 'mama's boy' in the past. According to this narrative, his mother had done everything for him until he married at twenty-seven and this was one of the reasons why he had such difficulty taking care of himself. Somehow paradoxically, Vasyl' was accused of lacking independence in connection with and even contradiction to an otherwise highly-valued ideal of motherhood in which 'good' mothers are characterised by actively supporting their children in all aspects of life for as long as they can.

In order to maintain idealised notions of social cohesion and (unconditional) support among kin, a lack of support from children was ultimately interpreted as indicating that a parent had failed to support their children sufficiently in the past and thus did not contribute sufficiently to their side of the exchange.

Vasyl' was also perceived as wasteful and lazy, as shown in the introduction where one of the women asked him where his pension was. Like Halyna and many others, he could have continued to work and earned something on top of his pension instead of indulging himself and worsening his situation by drinking and spending money on alcohol and cigarettes. This had the implication that Vasyl' was not a 'real' man, but a 'whiner', even though drinking alcohol and smoking is also seen as an expression of masculinity in other contexts. His begging for help and showing weakness and neediness were also regarded as 'unmanly' and sanctioned by shame and ridicule. As in Goodwin-Hawkins and Dawson's (2018, 227) description of formerly industrial areas in Northern England where hardship, deprivation and persistence dominate living memory, in Horishnyak the display of weakness and neediness is seen as an individual failure by those who do not fully belong and who therefore do not deserve help from others.

Some also explained the differences in care that Vasyl' and Halyna had received through gender differences since Vasyl's predicament was perceived as partly due to the absence of his wife. His cousin Paraska, for example, believed that he would be much better off with a wife looking after him. A widespread discourse in Ukraine (which according to Riabchuk (2014, 206f.) has existed at least since the 1960s) contrasts 'failed masculinity' with ideal images of autonomy and personal responsibility. These are rather seen as 'female' qualities and associated above all with the ability and willingness to work hard and to live frugally while men are, as in the local discourse, discursively denied both the ability to provide 'good' care for themselves and also someone else. Accordingly, many women, especially emigrants, have blamed 'weak' and 'lazy' men like Vasyl' for the fact that more and more women have had to leave Ukraine to take over the tasks of men. While exploring the full implications of these gendered differences lies beyond the scope of this article, there is a tendency to portray men as inherently lacking in independence and thus as needy, which suggests that it is potentially more difficult for them than for women to claim membership in the moral centre. Yet at the same time, the competition between Halyna and the other women to demonstrate which of them was most self-sufficient, as well as Halyna's hiding that she

had arranged for state-funded home care, suggests that Vasyl's display of neediness would just be as problematic for a woman.

While Vasyl's case could have subverted the prevalent notion that migrant workers inevitably succeeded economically, the possibility that his children working abroad might themselves have economic difficulties that prevented them from supporting him (as suggested by some of his neighbours) was ultimately left out of the general community's view of his situation. Thus, dominant notions of 'the migrants' (inevitably thought to be wealthy) have been stabilised. Moreover, that Vasyl's children no longer supported him did not lead to a revision of idealised notions of 'traditional' familialism and cohesion. Rather, the family's behaviour was brought into line with these ideals by blaming Vasyl' for his family's departure and his living alone in poverty. As in many other low-income communities the moralisation of self-reliance and the stigmatisation of poverty as laziness (Howe 1998) implies that people who live in the village must either not really be poor or be 'really, really lazy'. Although Vasyl's difficult living conditions brought him solidarity and support from *some* of his neighbours, it was widely accepted that if people are poor it is their own fault and therefore they ultimately cannot (and should not) be helped.

If people like Vasyl' are not (or are no longer) considered worthy of support, they are relegated to the moral periphery and blamed for their own fate. In this context, it is not only the different levels of knowledge mentioned above, but also different economic positions that have had a decisive influence on the willingness to support Vasyl'. Halyna and Svitlana hold positions of relative wealth and stability within the village. The former is a small independent entrepreneur engaged in handcraft and petty trade activities. Her prosperity is visible through her well-cared-for house and garden. The latter is the village's deputy mayor with a respectable job and a stable income (something most of Horishnyak's inhabitants cannot expect as a matter of course) and her husband is a very well paid railroad employee. Halyna's and Svitlana's judgement of Vasyl's situation is very different from that of his neighbours: while they consider him worthy of their help, they also have worked in relatively low-paid jobs and occupy similarly low positions in the social hierarchy of the village. The assessment of (un)deservingness thus also depends to a large extent on the economic position of the actors and it seems as if the moral judgement of the most secure social group ultimately prevailed. With their social position and economic or bureaucratic ability to manoeuvre, they imposed their moral interpretations of (un)deservingness on those who were at the lower end of the social hierarchy.

However, to stabilise these moralised constructions of (un)deservingness, and at the same time being able to hold on to the ideal of mutual support also requires the persons concerned to be prepared to help others in need if necessary. One day, Halyna told me that some time ago she had started to clear out a room in her house for Vasyl' to live if necessary. While she kept complaining that his neediness was increasingly getting on her nerves and that she didn't even like him, she continued to worry about what would become of him. Even though Vasyl' never actually moved in with her, this was an important aspect of performing her willingness to care for others. I assume that if Halyna, – whom other villagers generally considered wealthy – had refused to stand by her cousin in an emergency, this would likely have hurt her own reputation and, consequently, her ability to mobilise help and support *from* others. However, since she did not publicise the preparation of the room very much, this could also be interpreted as an act of compassion for Vasyl', whom she wanted to prevent from ending up on the street. Whatever the case, this ambiguity indicates that morality is not something 'fixed', but rather that moral boundaries are drawn or blurred situationally.

Legitimations of the (un)deservingness of a person can thus not be taken for granted. Rather, they are established based on concurrently existing logics, in which (normative) notions of care for oneself and others, kinship, and personality/life course are used as discursive strategies to legitimise the marginalisation of people deemed undeserving of care. At the same time, through marginalisation and moral defamation of others, people can claim and affirm their own inclusion, which gives them advantages in gaining access to scarce resources. However, as Sandra Calkins (2016, 99) shows, it is not enough to invest in social norms and conventions through discursive strategies: they must also be consolidated and institutionalised to withstand criticism. As I will elaborate in the final section below, bureaucratic classifications of citizens have a decisive influence on the categorisation of persons as (un)deserving (Nieswand 2017) but cannot, especially in rather small settings, be considered independently of the local context described so far (see also Lipsky 1980; von Benda-Beckmann 1988).

The institutionalisation of dominant representations

Since Vasyl's relatives and neighbours increasingly felt that they had reached the limits of their care obligations, Halyna turned to the local government authorities and asked if they could do anything for him. She was supposedly told that they would soon send someone to help Vasyl' repair the house or at least winterise it, but nobody came. As will be elaborated

below, local state officials in their assessment of Vasyl's situation referred to similar discursive strategies to those I described in the previous section, even though the law would have permitted granting him support from the local budget for social assistance. To describe how local state officials in Horishnyak interpreted the law on social assistance relatively flexibly, I refer to André Thiemann's (2018) terminology of over- and under-implementation. Using the example of the local state in Serbia, he shows how social workers there situationally make use of their discretionary power either to interpret the law on social assistance more leniently to help people deemed deserving (under-implementation), or interpreting it overly strictly to exclude those considered undeserving from various forms of government assistance (over-implementation).¹⁵

As mentioned above, the deputy mayor Svitlana had, like many other villagers, concluded that Vasyl' was responsible for his own predicament and thus did not deserve help from the local government. She told me some people in the village did deserve and receive help from local authorities but those were ill, disabled or childless. In any case, someone who was physically or mentally ill deserved support, which she assured me would be provided by the state (the local authorities and the local community).

The amalgamated territorial municipality's ordinance on 'Social Protection of the Population', which was adopted in February 2018, provides for the provision of 'social assistance to low-income pensioners, people with disabilities, single-income persons/families, and persons/families in difficult life circumstances' from the municipal budget. Even though it is primarily considered the responsibility of children to care for and financially support parents in need (as Svitlana expressed vehemently), Vasyl' could have also fallen into one of these categories and thus been entitled to payments from this local welfare budget.¹⁶

¹⁵ By adopting Thiemann's (2018) terminology of over- and under-implementation of the law I do not, however, mean to suggest that there is a fundamentally 'correct' or 'appropriate' way in which laws are to be interpreted. Rather, I assume that a certain scope for interpretation is inherent in laws: otherwise, professional groups such as lawyers or judges would probably be superfluous. Still, his terminology is helpful in showing how laws can either be interpreted in someone's favour or to someone else's disadvantage.

¹⁶ In 2018, before the consolidation of four neighbouring municipalities, Horishnyak's total annual budget for supplemental social assistance was only 15,000 UAH (about 500 euros). After an amalgamation of municipalities during a decentralisation reform, on December 21 in 2018 a draft law for additional social assistance for people in difficult life situations was presented at a municipal meeting. This allocated a total of 407,000 UAH (about 13,600 euros) for 2019, which increased to 700,000 UAH (about 23,400 euros) in 2020 and 900,000 UAH (about 30,000 euros) in 2021. The same draft law also envisaged a survey of the concrete living conditions of people with disabilities, war and work veterans, families of fallen soldiers and single seniors to identify their needs and provide concrete assistance. (<https://delyatynska-gromada.gov.ua/pro-zatverdzhennya-programi-socialnogo-zahistu-naselennya-na-20192021-roki-16-38-20-26-12-2018/>). In the course of decentralisation, the allocation of social benefits was thus made even more dependent on local concepts of deservingness and need than before.

However, the local government maintained that nothing could be done for him. That he had children who were legally obligated to care for him but lived alone in poverty was, in the end, taken as proving that he had failed to care properly for his children. The responsibility for his care thus could not simply be transferred to the state. Svitlana even suspected that if Vasyl' had been less lazy and sloppy, drank less, and proved to his children that he was willing to work, they would have taken him back to the United States, thus suggesting a link between work and deservingness.

Although Svitlana argued that it was the government's moral responsibility to support people in emergency situations and not 'let anybody down', the negative assessment of Vasyl's kinship relations and the 'dubious' personality attributed to him contributed significantly to his classification as one of the undeserving poor, which disqualified him for additional support by the local government. The assessment of kinship practices can thus also lead to the exclusion of certain claims for care, which shows that 'private' kinship and institutional state care are inevitably interwoven and in this case even mutually reinforced each other.

The invocation of 'tradition' regarding mutual obligations between parents and children was an important element of the justification for excluding Vasyl' from additional state support. In this context, the Social Assistance Act, which actually aims at protecting the least secure groups of the population, functions as a mechanism of exclusion by means of over-implementation (Thiemann 2018) and is to a certain extent also used as a means of exercising power to reprimand people if they do not meet certain (moral) expectations. By means of moral claims, local civil servants can play an important role in making decisions about the belonging and (un)deservingness of individuals.

Still, the discretionary power of local state actors can not only be used as a mechanism of exclusion, but through under-implementation of the law for social assistance can also contribute to the inclusion of less needy citizens who are nevertheless deemed more deserving. Although, as I already mentioned, Halyna vehemently affirmed that she expected no care from the state, she had recently started receiving visits from one of the three home care workers assigned to Horishnyak under a 1993 law ('Basic Principles of Social Protection of Veterans of Labour and Other Senior Citizens in Ukraine') providing that single (i.e. childless) seniors who 'according to the findings of medical institutions require constant

external care can receive either monthly financial support or assistance in the form of social and home care services'.¹⁷

When I asked Halyna how she would get the required medical documents, she said it would not be a problem: she had already been diagnosed with several minor conditions and was sure that some doctor would be willing to help. Unlike Vasyl', Halyna was granted state support. Although the formal application for assistance by a social worker should have been based on medical necessity, in Halyna's case the Social Assistance Act was under-implemented. Achieving this required making state care invisible by presenting it as an intensification of kinship ties and a form of mutual aid between Halyna and her third cousin. Even though the home care support Elvira provided clearly exceeded Halyna's expectations from the state, it was justified by kinship in order to maintain and even harden the boundaries between kinship and state.

Thiemann (2018) shows how social workers employed by the local state in Serbia, situationally make use of their discretionary power to help people who are considered needy by means of under-implementing the law. Thus, for instance, they conceal their clients' ownership of land and do not record their additional income in order to meet the formal requirements. In the case of Horishnyak, it seems rather that the law was not under-implemented to include those who are materially needy in the distribution of state resources, but to include those who are considered deserving – regardless of their (actual) need.

As the comparison of Vasyl' and Halyna has shown, neither ideas of 'good' kinship practices nor of what defines a 'good' and deserving citizen are unequivocally clear or uncontroversial. Both everyday and state care practices are largely based on symbolic processes of situationally drawing moral boundaries between the deserving and the undeserving. This shows that belonging is neither negotiated in entirely 'private' nor exclusively 'public' political domains (Thelen and Alber 2017, 24), especially since bureaucrats and their clients cannot be assigned to fundamentally different categories of persons (Herzfeld 1992, 5). Instead, both are subject to shared social conventions, related in many ways – as neighbours, relatives and friends – and often share ideas about the state, responsibility, character, and social relations.

Even if the local distributional logic favours persons with 'moral integrity' like Halyna and disadvantages 'morally-questionable' individuals like Vasyl', both criticised the state mainly in reference to unfulfilled care expectations. Vasyl' blamed his dilemma primarily on

¹⁷ <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/3721-12>.

a deficient welfare state and global inequalities. One day when I visited him, he pointed to a pile of old newspapers lying on the floor next to his tile stove. ‘Look, abroad, where you live, everything is very different’, he told me. ‘And here? What do you get here? All the government gives me is an annual subsidy for firewood.’¹⁸ And look how much money people earn abroad, for example in Poland’, he adds. ‘They had a socialist government too but look how well people live there now. And our women there take care of their old people, and they can build new houses here and buy cars for their children with the money they earn there. But here in Ukraine [...] absolutely nobody helps you. Our government doesn’t do anything!’ Halyna largely shared this criticism. As she reiterated as we sat with her neighbour Camilla in her living room and talked about possible arrangements for her care in old age, she had no expectations of the state. ‘What expectations should I have of this state? I have no expectations at all, because what would they do for me? The state cares for children, if anyone at all, but just about no one else.’

In the case of Vasyl’, Svitlana assigned responsibility for denying his state benefits to a higher authority, the ‘law’, which contributed significantly to making the bureaucratic process appear predetermined to him and citizens in general (Herzfeld 1992). The conditions under which bureaucracy is considered necessary are thus no longer questioned. One must consider, as already mentioned above, that Svitlana clearly argues from a position of privilege since she belongs to the group of the economically well off within the village. As such, in exercising her responsibilities as a state agent she contributes to the reproduction of a certain moral order that favors the wealthy and disadvantages the poor.

Nevertheless, Vasyl’s case was not yet a matter of complete neglect and exclusion. His last option was to move into a retirement home in one of the neighbouring villages, which the Red Cross has run since 2003. The five men living there at the time of my research receive three meals a day, and once a week a Red Cross volunteer comes by to clean, to do the laundry and bring medicine or other goods for the residents. Officially, only single people with no children can apply to this home, but others are admitted in exceptional cases, such as when children are unwilling or unable to meet the care obligations to their parents. This applied to Vasyl’, but for a long time he refused to go there. He confessed to me that he didn’t want to go there because it would embarrass not only himself but also his daughters – and that was what he wanted to avoid at all costs. The fact that he cared not only about his own but also about his daughter’s reputation once again points to the normative connection of caring

¹⁸ This subsidy was 3500 UAH (about 120 euros) per year.

for others and for oneself. Moreover, the physical act of moving to the retirement home would most probably finally prove to the public that his children had abandoned him and this really would signify his complete social exclusion. However, Vasyl' apparently finally did move to the retirement home, as I learned in a telephone conversation with Halyna in early 2020. When I last heard from her, in 2021, he had died.

Conclusion

By juxtaposing Vasyl' and Halyna's cases, this working paper has demonstrated how issues regarding need and deservingness of different forms of care are negotiated between kinship, neighbours, and state actors. Due to the economic hardship and un(der)employment affecting most parts of the population, support relationships are negotiated and situationally revised based on various moral assessments of what it means to be a 'good person' and a 'good citizen' – evaluations in which (ideal) notions of reciprocity, kinship, as well as personality, character and life course, play a crucial role.

Discursively, ideals of mutual support and social cohesion, as well as self-sufficiency and autonomy are foregrounded when it comes to claiming belonging to the 'moral centre'. Practically, however, reciprocity lies at the heart of maintaining different forms of relationships. Since care through kinship relations comes with restrictions and only under certain conditions, relying solely on support from family members can be a problematic strategy for senior citizens. There is thus good reason to question the ideal of unconditional support within families, as they can indeed represent a place of uncertainty and neglect, both because of a lack of economic resources and because of ambivalences in family relationships. Support from friends and the extended neighbourhood is likewise often of great importance for security in old age – especially for the satisfaction of everyday needs – although this is rarely mentioned in public debates.

Yet as the cases of Vasyl' and Halyna demonstrate, relationships with relatives and neighbours can only be maintained if the help received is reciprocated within a reasonable time and in an appropriate form (see also de Jong 2005; Dawson and Goodwin-Hawkins 2018). In kinship, friendships and neighbourhood relations, persons must therefore not only demonstrate their ability and willingness to care for themselves as long as they are able to but must also be able to offer an appropriate exchange for help. In the long term, the mobilisation of care thus depends on people's ability to negotiate relationships with other people, and the limits of mutual support are situationally negotiated and revised by means of various

investments in social relations (de Jong 2005; Calkins 2016). If a person like Vasyl' has nothing left to reciprocate for care and assistance, he can no longer be part of an economy of care and is consequently increasingly marginalised and perceived as not deserving care from others. His marginal social position due to a decline in pension payments, inflation and a scattering of kinship relationships through migration, as well as the corresponding de-institutionalisation of care relationships, make it increasingly difficult for him to mobilise care and claim resources from relatives, neighbours and the state. The ideal of mutual support, however, makes it virtually impossible to marginalise someone so openly and also blocks realising oneself as a person of moral integrity. People must therefore find other ways to discursively justify the marginalisation of people deemed undeserving.

Negative assessments of a person's character traits consequently become central in creating a hierarchy of (un)deservingness (Howe 1998). When poverty is represented as self-inflicted, neglecting the care of others not necessarily poses an obstacle to either the realisation of the moral self or maintaining the ideal of (unconditional) mutual support. In the case at hand, the allocation of resources for social support is primarily linked to the reproduction of moralised ideas of need and (un)deservingness in an unfavourable way for the poor (those who do not have the necessary resources to participate in an economy of care) and for those unable to present themselves as having moral integrity. Depending on the resources available, people have access to different cycles of reciprocity, which induces the reproduction of inequalities and symbolic hierarchies not only between rural dwellers, but also between different kinds of care.

In negotiating care responsibilities, different state and non-state actors situationally and sometimes even contradictorily claim idealised notions of care for oneself and care for others to enforce certain interests or assert entitlements, with ideas of mutual support and self-care normalising each other. 'Private' relationships and characteristics are taken into consideration by local government officials when they allocate government funds and grants, ultimately solidifying the boundaries between kinship and the state by contrasting, consolidating and reproducing ideas about the 'caring family' and an 'uncaring state'. It is not only discourses on 'good kinship care' that seem to make it difficult to formulate a critique of family care practices (Thelen et al. 2014): discourses of a 'caring community' likewise prevent criticism of the established distributional logic in Horishnyak. It is thus not only the 'distant', central state that determines the limits of what is acceptable and appropriate: these

are negotiated and revised in everyday interactions between citizens and local civil servants at the local level (Herzfeld 1992, 15; see also Lipsky 1980).

As I have shown, evaluations about care are not guided exclusively by idealised notions of mutual support within families and the kin group (Geschiere 2012) or positively connoted considerations of moral responsibility for one another (Tronto 1987). By revising ideas of who is considered deserving and who is not, people do not necessarily base their actions on predefined social conventions or notions of what is considered to be morally ‘right’ behaviour. Rather, what is deemed morally ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ behaviour is situationally revised in the retrospective assessment and justification of concrete caring practices, through which people, in thoughtfully balancing the care for themselves and others, simultaneously reproduce the moral order as such.

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Zusammenfassung

Dieses Arbeitspapier befasst sich mit der moralisierten Distribution von Sorge und sozialer Unterstützung für Senior*innen im Kontext weiblicher Arbeitsmigration aus der ländlichen Ukraine. Ich zeige dabei, dass die Fähigkeit, im Alter Sorge zu mobilisieren, weniger von tatsächlicher Bedürftigkeit oder formalen Ansprüchen abhängt, sondern vielmehr moralische Ansichten über den „Verdienst“ von Sorge entscheidend sind. Reziprozität steht im Mittelpunkt jener Praktiken, die darauf abzielen, verschiedene Arten von Beziehungen aufrechtzuerhalten. Im Gegensatz dazu sind es in erster Linie idealisierte Konzepte von Autonomie und Selbstgenügsamkeit, die lokale Beurteilungen von und Diskurse über *(un)deservingness* untermauern. Die Sorge durch Verwandte, Freund*innen und Nachbar*innen sowie Care durch den Staat sind dabei von ebendiesen moralischen Vorstellungen geprägt und beeinflussen, welche Unterstützung älteren Menschen zugänglich gemacht wird. Obwohl sie oft als getrennte Bereiche dargestellt werden, sind staatliche/institutionelle und ‘private’/familiäre Sorge unweigerlich miteinander verwoben und verstärken sich sogar wechselseitig. Durch die Aufdeckung moralischer Hierarchien von *(un)deservingness* veranschaulicht dieses Arbeitspapier, wie Armut moralisiert und letztlich auf individuelles Versagen zurückgeführt wird. Schließlich argumentiere ich, dass durch die Vorstellung selbstverschuldeter Armut die Bedürftigkeit anderer übergangen werden kann, während sie zeitgleich als moralisch ‘richtiges’ Verhalten gilt. Auf diese Weise wird weder die Realisierung des moralischen Selbst behindert noch die Aufrechterhaltung des Ideals der (bedingungslosen) gegenseitigen Unterstützung und des sozialen Zusammenhalts gefährdet.

Biographical Note

Ilona Grabmaier is a doctoral candidate at the Institute for Social and Cultural Anthropology at the University of Vienna. Her current research interests concern questions of social (in)equality and security at the intersection of politics, gender relations, care practices, morality and post-socialist transformation. Prior to being a research fellow at the interdisciplinary doctoral programme ‘Austrian Galicia and its Multicultural Heritage’ from March 2016 to December 2019, she worked as a lecturer and research assistant at the Institute for Social and Cultural Anthropology at the University of Vienna. A subsequent Marietta-Blau-stipend, funded by the OeAD and graduation stipend of the Schroubek-Fonds Östliches Europa enabled visiting scholar positions at the Centre for East European and International Studies in Berlin and the Max Planck-Institute for Social Anthropology in Halle/Saale.

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Ilona Grabmaier ist Doktorandin am Institut für Kultur- und Sozialanthropologie der Universität Wien. Fragen nach sozialer (Un)-Gleichheit und sozialer Sicherung im Spannungsfeld von Politik, Geschlechterverhältnissen, Sorgepraktiken, Moral und post-sozialistischer Transformation stehen im Zentrum ihres aktuellen Forschungsinteresses. Bevor sie von März 2016 bis Dezember 2019 Kollegiatin im vom FWF geförderten interdisziplinären Doktoratskolleg „Das österreichische Galizien und sein multikulturelles Erbe“ war, arbeitete sie u.a. als freie Projektmitarbeiterin und als Lehrbeauftragte am Institut für Kultur- und Sozialanthropologie der Universität Wien. Anschließend ermöglichten ihr ein Marietta Blau-Stipendium des OeAD sowie ein Abschlussstipendium des Schroubek-Fonds Östliches Europa Aufenthalte als Gastwissenschaftlerin am Zentrum für Osteuropa und internationale Studien in Berlin sowie am Max-Planck-Institut für Ethnologische Forschung in Halle/Saale.

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