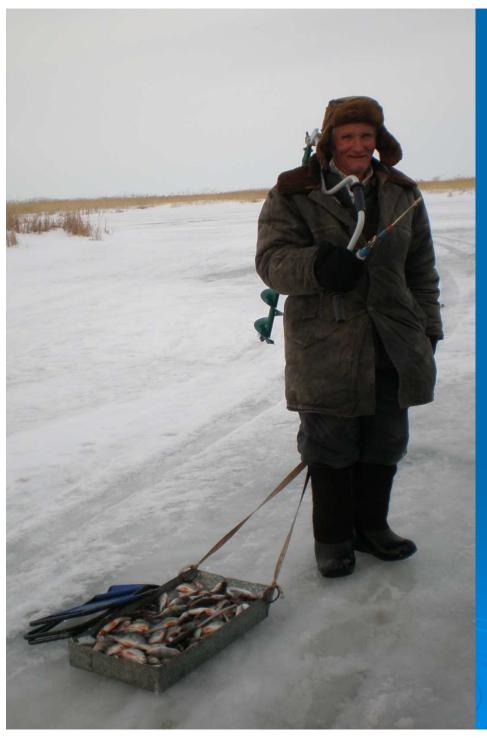# *The production of Social Security in a Rural Russian Context: an agenda for Research*

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Structure of the paper

➢ **Aims:** to present the development of ideas for research into the ways in which social security is produced and experienced in rural Russia.

➢ Introduce Burla – the field site

➢ Explore theoretical frameworks for
- Understanding 'social security'
- Rethinking the state
- Incorporating care and emotional aspects of security

➢ Discuss early findings from initial fieldwork in Burla
- Formal provisions
- Informal networks, charismatic leaders and access to resources
- Emotional support and integration into (exclusion from) 'caring communities'
- Duties of care – gender and family dimensions

Burla Village

- Centre of Burlinskii raion – north-west of Altai Krai
- Population 5000 (district 14000)
- District economy almost exclusively agricultural: livestock, wheat and rye, and fishing.
- Recent efforts to develop small-scale tourism.
- Some economic revival in recent years after decade of decline
- Administration claims some capacity for inward investment in social service provision and infrastructural development.
- Household economies still heavily reliant on subsidiary agriculture, fishing and foraging.

Burla Village

➢ As district centre Burla accommodates the majority of social services and administrative structures

➢ High percentage of the population is employed in the public-sector.

➢ Standard of living somewhat higher than across the district as a whole

➢ Burla considerably larger than most villages in the district (village populations in the district range from 1000 – 17)

Understanding 'social security' after welfare

➤ In many countries, neoliberal reforms, processes of retrenchment and privatisation of welfare services have impacted on the distribution of responsibilities between states, markets, families and communities for the provision of care and access to material support (Kingfisher 2002; Pierson 2006).

➤ The foci of responsibility for ensuring against risk and securing people's present and future well-being has shifted away from the realm of 'the state' and 'society' in general, towards more individualised communities, families and individuals, whose needs and entitlements are assessed against various 'moral' criteria including the obligation to look after 'their own' (Rose 1996: 327-331).

➤ Different ways of conceptualising social security and understanding its relationship to 'welfare' and other forms of social provisioning are required as a result

Understanding 'social security' after welfare

➢ Anthropological understandings of 'social security' have focused on the ways in which people mitigate risk and produce securities (social, economic, personal and cultural) by creatively drawing on public and private resources and relationships, formal and informal networks and practices, state and non-state institutions and structures (F. v. Benda-Beckmann et al. 1988).

➢ These theories were originally developed to explain the ways in which people in 'developing' countries with little or no access to state 'welfare' nonetheless achieved forms of social security

➢ The more recent developments affecting 'advanced industrialised countries', have demonstrated their wider relevance, including for the 'postsocialist' region where such reform processes have been especially rapid and intense (R. Read and T. Thelen 2007).

➢ Thinking about social security in these ways is also useful in helping us to 'rethink' the state, and explore the relationship between material and emotional security.

Rethinking the State

➤ States as multi-layered and multi-faceted entities which interact with other public and private sphere agents in complex and sometimes contradictory ways.

The conceptual separation of state and people, so pervasive in academic and popular writings alike, [is] a symbolic construct, since states are in fact, integral to rather than separate from or outside of social life

(Herzfeld 1997: 5).

Moreover, 'politicians, civil servants, professionals and intellectuals are 'ordinary people' too … the tribe of politicians is a collectivity that consists of different people doing a variety of things. Similarly, the state is not a monolithic, autonomous agent'

(Herzfeld 1997: 11-12)

Rethinking the State

➤ The boundaries between state and non-state entities and activities are blurred, permeable and spanned in the strategies and networks of individuals, groups and organisations.

Local state actors [have] utilized the period of accelerated change to construct a safety net of wealth and power for themselves and their families, and at the same time created patronage networks that constitute the social security arrangements for villagers. If their future plans and caring obligations for family members include further access to local productive resources, it is likely that a number of these instances and structures will shape local social security arrangements for some time to come. (Thelen, Cartwright and Sikor 2008: 11)

Incorporating care and emotional aspects of security

➢ Feelings of trust, integration into communities of care and informal networks of support are crucial aspects of social security

Often it is not simply access to material resources that makes people feel secure, but a network of social relations to which they can appeal in times of crisis and need'
(Thelen and Read 2007: 6).

➢ In many postsocialist contexts, informal networks of reciprocal support and care which enabled people to navigate the shortcomings of the planned economy have played an even more crucial role in overcoming the challenges and insecurities of socio-economic, political and cultural transformations

Producing Social Security in Burla : Important actors

- Representatives of district and village administrations
  - Heads of administration; deputy head with responsibility for social protection; heads of sections for education, culture, youth and sport
- The Centre for Social Assistance to Families and Children (est 2001)
  - programmes for children with psychological or behavioural problems and for children with disabilities;
  - non-residential summer camps for children from deprived families;
  - social work division providing home care for the elderly and infirm;
  - clubs for pensioners and for young families
- Schools
  - Teachers; school psychologists
- Non Governmental Associations
  - Veterans councils; women's councils; clubs

Formal Provisions

We have some settlements where there are only 17 people living. And even there we have cultural facilities. That is they combine the activities of a clubhouse and a library in one. Well can you imagine what that's like – 17 people? … Of course it is difficult to maintain, you can imagine the burden it places on the social sector. But all the same, the district administration is prepared to support this, so that there are cultural facilities even in these tiny settlements.

[Head of section for culture, Burlinskii District Administration, 2008]

Funding Social Services

It's like the programme for information-technology exists right. And within the framework of this programme there's a system of co-financing. So there is a portion of federal financing, a portion from the territorial [kraevoi] budget, a portion from interested organisations and political parties, of which today, well United Russia is the main thing right? And we have also got our respected partners from the Foundation for the support of Russian Germans in Altai involved. They've also chipped in. … Well and of course there is the portion from the municipal budget!

[Head of section for culture, Burlinskii District Administration, 2008]

Informal networks, charismatic leaders and access to resources

➤ Charismatic leadership and informal networks play an important role in the successes and constraints of social provision

➤ Convincing those in positions of authority is a vital step in establishing new programmes and projects

Not everyone, how can I put it, responded positively straight away ... many leaders said that all the same there's no need for work on men's health. Men are the strong sex. That it's all very far fetched.

[Director of The Centre for Social Assistance to Families and Children, Burla, 2006]

➤ Networking processes can also be a drain on resources and raise questions about in/exclusion and access to services

Emotional Support and Integration into 'Caring Communities'

➢ The pensioners' club 'учимся стареть' as one big family.

➢ A way of overcoming loneliness and isolation

➢ Literally a life line:

I would long since have died myself without this club

[Retired school teacher, widower, 78 years old]

'Inclusive' and 'exclusive' networks

The most important things is to have the right kind of propaganda. People hear. They find out. But then the most important propaganda of all is when even just one person from the village has been and talks about it … Oh-ho. Then they all come! So that's how we do it.

[Deputy head, with responsibility for social protection, Burlinskii District Administration, 2008]

It feels like there is an undercurrent in a lot of what is being said about deserving and undeserving need. I can see how this would fit in easily with personal networks and (perhaps) services being offered to others who are 'like us' (e.g. members of the rural intelligentsia, social sector workers and their families) and not to those who are 'not like us'. Certainly several times the idea was mentioned that some people just drink and don't want to work and want everything handed to them on a plate, and that there's nothing you can do for them.

[Research diary extract, Burla, March 2008]

Gender, ethnicity, work and 'deserving' needs

We had really a lot of Russian Germans here. … They were wonderful people! Real hard workers. But ... bit by bit they began to leave to Germany. And then they left practically en masse … and you know it was, well for the most part those who left were really not bad people but those who had worked hard for many years and helped to build up material wealth. So we really lost out in this. And in their place came refugees [ethnic Russians]… from Kazakhstan and so on. And it was far from the best who came! So the district got like a whole new wave of people who were not that, well they weren't needed in those other countries. And where could they find an easy life? Well let's go to Russia. It's our home station. Russia won't throw us out, she'll help us.

[Deputy head, with responsibility for social protection, Burlinskii District Administration, 2008]

Duties of Care – Gender and Family

➢ 'Weaning' people off 'dependence' on the state feeds into gendered inequalities in both caring responsibilities and access to care

We've spent a lot of time this year removing people with family in the same or neighbouring villages from our roll. This is in accordance with family law which states that children are responsible for the care of their parents as well as vice versa [Head of section for homecare, Centre for Social Assistance, Burla 2008]

'Women take care of your men and children'

[Headline of an article in the Men's health column, Burla local newspaper]

In Conclusion: Emerging themes and research questions

➤ The shifting role of the state in the production of social security and access to social assistance in rural areas.

➤ The relationship between state / non-state systems of support and provision

➤ The emphasis placed on material / emotional forms of support by local people and the extent of their interdependence

➤ Tensions between collectivist traditions and trends towards the promotion of neo-liberal 'self-sufficient' individuals

➤ Processes of in/exclusion as these relate to hierarchies of power and authority, understandings of (deserving) need, and divisions of class, ethnicity and gender.