

**(Un)caring communities: moral economies of care, (un)deservingness and the reproduction of centres and peripheries in a ‘marginal’ place.**



Rebecca Kay  
University of Glasgow

# Paper aims

- To explore the ways in which marginality is constructed and understood by rural people and how these relate to notions of deserving and undeserving need and integration into or exclusion from 'caring' and 'moral' communities.
- To consider the emotional and 'moral' benefits of and prerequisites for belonging to informal/semi-formal networks and communities with a focus on care and emotional or existential forms of security.
- To examine the ways in which practices and relationships of care, affection and social intimacy relate to locally-inflected, moral and ideological definitions and constructions of need, deservingness and entitlement.



# Fieldwork, Burla

- March 2008: 3 days
- April 2009: 4 weeks
- Jan-Feb 2010: 4 weeks
- District Centre for Social Assistance to Families and Children as main focus
- Interviews
- Participant observation
- Visiting and making friends
- Discourse analysis of local media 2008-09
- **Limited access to ‘undeserving’ poor.**





# Burlinskii District Centre for Social Assistance to Families and Children

- State institution, established 2001
- Focus on provision of services to improve psychological, emotional and physical well-being
- Services for children, families, women and pensioners
- Home care provision for the elderly and infirm
- **Exercise clubs and support groups, linked to development of 'caring communities'**



# Theoretical frameworks: social security and care

- Social security as the complex range of ways in which people mitigate risk and produce securities (social, economic, personal and cultural) (Benda-Beckmann et al, 1988)
- Feelings of trust and emotional or existential forms of security also significant (Benda-Beckmann and Benda-Beckmann, 2000, p. 7).
- Care as a 'dimension of social security, which consists of practices that address socially constructed needs' (Thelen and Read, 2007, p. 7)

# Theoretical frameworks: Care and '(un)deserving' needs

- Feminist scholars warn against idealisation or romanticising of care (Tronto 1993; Kittay and Feder 2002)
- Caring relationships inevitably characterised by inequalities of power and resource and involve conflict
- Care and the relationships, structures and policies which provide and facilitate caring are never value-free or morally neutral
- Socially and culturally constructed notions of mutual obligation, rights and responsibilities, dependency and self-sufficiency create categories of deserving and undeserving need, and determine whether 'caring' or 'punitive' responses to needs are considered appropriate (Fraser and Gordon 2002; Mendes 2009)

# Theoretical frameworks: community, morality and marginality

- Moral divisions help to construct ‘moral communities’ bound by shared allegiances and values and within which forms of care, support and mutual assistance circulate
- These moral communities also, re-cod[e] dividing practices, revising the distinctions between the *affiliated* ... those who are considered ‘included’: the individuals and families who have the financial, educational and moral means to ‘pass’ in their role as active citizens in responsible communities ... [And] the *marginal*: those who cannot be considered affiliated to such sanctioned and civilized cultural communities. (Rose, 1996, p. 340)
- Moral categories are often shared by both the affiliated and the marginalised (Howe, 1998), and as such legitimise the exclusion of undeserving ‘others’ from the ‘moral communities’ of the ‘centre’

# **Soviet legacies or neoliberal influences? understandings of entitlement, self-sufficiency and the undeserving poor in rural Russia**

- The pathologisation of dependency (Solinger, 2002), revived enthusiasm for mutual obligation (Mendes, 2009) and emphasis on individual rather than structural causes of inequality and poverty have been described as part of a 'shift within knowledge itself' (Rose 1996: 328) associated with post-modernism, neoconservatism and neoliberalism.
- Yet, in rural Russia these resonate with legacies of the Soviet system which also:
  - identified labour and contribution to the collective as the basis for entitlements to social assistance,
  - emphasised self-sufficiency and household responsibility for subsistence,
  - selectively applied structural and individualised explanations of poverty and marginality.



# The undeserving poor in Burla: Parasitism (*tuneiadstvo*), laziness (*lentiañ*) and pathological dependency (*izdivenchestvo*)

‘It’s parasitism, they  
just don’t want to work!’

‘Homelessness in the  
countryside isn’t the same  
as homelessness in the city.  
In the countryside it is only  
those who are lazy who are  
really poor’



‘Their children have almost nothing to eat except flour  
and they don’t want to do anything about it’

# Burlinskii district as a marginal place

- ‘Generalised’ processes of political, economic and geographical marginalisation called upon to explain the impoverishment of the district as a whole in terms of **structural** disadvantage
- Marginality not fixed or inevitable but reshaped and compounded by processes of social economic and political transformation

‘There used to be carrousels and summer discos in the park, but it’s all broken down now’



# Marginality: uneven, layered and relative

- Abundance of state and administrative structures in the central village provides better employment opportunities, higher standard of living, better access to facilities and services than in the smaller, outlying villages:



‘Today a woman came from Ustyanka. She says to me “I had to pay 110 roubles to get here”. She’s disabled ... She says, ‘Well, I won’t be able to come here for physiotherapy’, although this is what she needs’.

- Practical issues of physical distance and financial resource are not the only sources of uneven marginality. Centres and peripheries are also rhetorically and discursively constructed communities, relationships, individuals and places



# Caring communities, deserving needs and the reproduction of 'moral centres' within the margin

- 'Care' for the local area, the district, the village as well as between people within it as a way of reproducing moral centres by through feelings of belonging and affinity, emotional as well as material security and hope for the future.



It's materially better there, but we have a more human (*chelovecheskii*) way of life



# Caring communities and deserving needs

- Alongside its more formalised services, the CSA also provides spaces for the development of semi-formal or informal caring communities through the establishment of clubs, support groups and interest circles.
- These groups also cater for 'deserving' needs through their emphasis on 'activeness', self-improvement, thrift and traditional skills



'They are a great group, always laughing, always positive. There's always a good atmosphere when they are here'

# Caring communities and emotional support

- For those involved, the clubs and support groups provide access to a community which was explicitly talked about in terms of care, emotional interaction and support available

‘I’d be long dead if I didn’t have the club to look forward to’



‘It’s so good to come and talk and laugh like that. Sometimes when I’m just at home I can get to feeling so down’





# Exclusive communities and the (re)production of marginality

- There is a noticeable socio-cultural similarity amongst the members of the CSA's support groups
- The very closeness of the groups and communities which develop encourage the inclusion of others who 'fit', whilst 'others' may be discouraged in quite subtle and sub-conscious ways.

'They see the kinds of people who come and they say, oh they all have fine clothes and fine manners. I have nothing like that to wear. It doesn't make any difference that we tell them it doesn't matter what they wear, still they feel ashamed and won't come.'

- The potential for exclusion can be exacerbated by mediation of access to the CSA and its services through informal networks, personal knowledge of and judgements about the circumstances of potential clients.

# Conclusions

- Marginality, disadvantage and poverty are invoked in diverse ways by people in Burla.
- These apparently contradictory understandings of marginality are in fact mutually interdependent and reinforcing.
- A uniting feature in local understandings of marginality is a strong binary division between 'us' and 'them'.
- These binary divisions help to define the 'emotional bonds of affinity' which 'tie' people to 'a particular moral community' (Rose, 1996, p. 334). In other words they help to define whom it is necessary to care about and for, and whom it is not.

