WORKINGS OF THE STATE
Administrative Lists, European Union Food Aid, and the
Local Practices of Distribution in Rural Romania

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Abstract: In this article we analyze local distribution practices within
an EU food aid program in Romania. We show that an understanding
of this program's implementation can contribute to our understanding
of how the state works in present-day Romania and, more generally, to
the anthropology of the state. We examine the ways in which local-level
bureaucrats gain discretion and exercise it when implementing the pro-
gram. By securing greater control over a scarce transnational resource,
local officials are able to shape national policy according to local dis-
tributive models. The described distribution process is conducive to
community building, although in very different ways in the two rural
settings being studied. We argue for a relational analysis of the workings
of the state that explores the embeddedness of local actors and their
participation in historically shaped power relations.

Keywords: administrative lists, discretion, double embeddedness, EU
food aid, local state officials, Romania, relational approach to the state

"I understand that the food aid comes from the European Union, but how does
the European Union know who has a small pension, or that I no longer have
unemployment benefits? The local government employees do all the shit." This
complaint, uttered by a villager and reproduced from field notes, contains *in
nuce* the argument that local bureaucrats play a prominent role in distributing
state resources. It also suggests that the relations existing between state offi-
cials and recipients of state welfare shape the workings of the state in locally
specific ways. How exactly this comes about is the topic of our study.

Since 1987, the European Union (at the time, the European Economic Com-
munity) has implemented an annual food aid program designed to help "the
Most Deprived Persons of the Community."[1] Predicated on the notions of respect
for human dignity and solidarity, this EU program is the only one of its kind.
Every year, funds and products from intervention stocks are directed to member
states participating in the scheme. According to EU regulations, each member

state formulates its criteria for establishing categories of beneficiaries and designates national institutions to manage the scheme.[2] According to the regulations issued by the central government in Romania (in force at the time of our fieldwork), the categories of recipients targeted within the scheme were welfare recipients, the unemployed, low-income pensioners, and the disabled.[3]

As the woman quoted above correctly suspected, the EU is not invested in determining the identities of the beneficiaries of the food aid in Romania. This is the task of the Romanian government, which sets the implementation norms. According to these norms, county-level offices are responsible for identifying eligible recipients. Unemployment, pension, and social assistance agencies, together with the County Councils, are entrusted with the task of compiling lists of beneficiaries. These administrative lists are to be transmitted to the local governments, which carry out the distribution of the food.

This article analyzes the implementation of this EU scheme in two village settings in order to answer the question, how does an analysis of the implementation of the EU food aid program contribute to our understanding of the workings of the state? We follow state officials' practices of distribution in two Romanian administrative units, called 'communes', and show how historically shaped local institutions and hierarchies influence a centralized scheme of social support.[4] To some extent, local state officials circulate resources made available through the support scheme in accordance with local distributive models. The use of such distributive models both serves diverse political ends and fosters community building.[5] In one of our field sites, the commune of Dragomirești, the EU humanitarian program contributes to community building, albeit by perpetuating historical ethnic hierarchies.[6] In Selo, the second field site, a portion of the EU food resources is directed to a community ritual while another portion is individually allocated according to local evaluations of need. Community building is a highly negotiated and contested process, full of contradictions and tensions among different social groups within each of the two field sites. By exploring foodstuff distribution, we show how it is possible for local state practices to differ even within the context of the same centralized social support program. We make two connected arguments: first, through the use of governmental technologies (exemplified here by administrative lists), discretion is unwittingly bestowed upon local officials; second, these officials, in turn, exercise discretion following local logics of distribution, in essence embedding the EU food support program in local power relations.

In this article, following Elias ([1984] 2005), we refer to power as the capacity of an individual or a group to withhold or monopolize what others need, ranging from food and love to security and knowledge. As Elias suggested, we need to focus our attention on power balances and power ratios in order to emphasize the relational aspect of power. As we point out throughout our analysis, our concern is with power imbalances: between different state offices located in Bucharest, in the county capitals, and in the villages; between the local bureaucrats and the villagers targeted by the program; and between villagers more generally, structured along ethnic lines.

Our analysis of the EU program's implementation demonstrates how the distribution practices of local state officials give a 'local flavor' to a centralized

policy that originates outside Romanian national boundaries and how these practices ultimately shape it. For the purposes of this study, policy established at higher levels of government, the laws and formal norms concerning food distribution, and the distribution practices of local officials are all encompassed under the heading 'workings of the state'. We thus analyze the 'state at work' (Bierschenk and Olivier de Sardan 2014) by bringing to the fore relations between state officials at different administrative levels and between state officials and citizens—in effect, relations mediated by knowledge, governmental technologies, and valuable resources. The remainder of this article unfolds as follows. First, we provide the theoretical background for our case studies. Then, we introduce the fieldwork sites and describe the formal criteria of food distribution. Next, we describe distribution practices and point to the significance of observed similarities and differences between the two field sites. Finally, we reflect on the implications of our research for an anthropological analysis of the state.

Bureaucratic Discretion, (Il)legibility, and Lists as Governmental Technology

Our analysis focuses on distributive practices of Romanian village officials, or what Lipsky (1980) calls 'street-level bureaucrats'. We describe the actions of both appointed and elected officials and, following the relational approach suggested in the introduction to this issue and specifically Benda-Beckmann and Benda-Beckmann (1998), analyze them from the perspective of their 'double embeddedness' in both hierarchical administrative structures and local face-to-face communities. We locate our disciplinary antecedents in the anthropological studies of inter-hierarchical agents, as we examine the practices of local state officials whose structural position resembles that of village headmen in Africa (Gluckman et al. 1949). In our analysis, nonetheless, we focus not so much on the fragility characteristic of village officials' position of double embeddedness, but on the ways in which these village officials manage to garner room for maneuver to broker resources—a point made by Kuper (1970) in relation to Gluckman et al.'s study. We first offer a more general explanation of the work conditions of Romanian rural bureaucrats, both elected and appointed, whose actions we analyze in this article.

In Romania, some state officials are appointed as part of various hierarchical administrative chains and are considered public servants. In rural areas, actors appointed in this capacity are, for instance, the local governments' secretaries, accountants, and agricultural officers. These bureaucrats are responsible solely for the administration of the commune and are prohibited from any direct involvement in politics. Other officials, such as the mayor and vice-mayor, are elected, and their authority and position derive from the votes of the villagers. Weber (1978) clearly distinguished between these two types of state officials and pointed out that the technical administrative efficiency of elected officials is not very high, given their primary interest in votes rather than in obtaining approval from superiors. In rural Romania, nevertheless, the distinction between the practices of elected and appointed officials is not as clear-cut as

in the Weberian definition, and public servants become involved in political struggles as well. Dorondel (2007a) has shown how appointed bureaucrats actively participate in village-level political campaigns, supporting one candidate while opposing others despite existing legal interdictions. Such involvement of local state officials in politics renders the power balance with citizens virtually unstable: the plebiscitary dimension of their office tenure makes local officials also 'servants' of those under their authority (Weber 1978: 268). As we show in our analysis, the power balance between villagers and local officials tilts toward the latter, but symbolic reversals of power imbalances (the 'servant' status) are performed situationally by the officials.

In present-day rural Romania, many local state officials, both elected and appointed, live and work in the village of their birth. This can be traced back to late socialism when locals were privileged for administrative tasks because of their presumed capacity to mobilize the local population for implementing state projects (Sampson 1984).[7] The local officials we depict here were born in the localities featured in our analysis and continue living there. As a result, they operate simultaneously as officials and as village dwellers belonging to different local social groups. Das's (2004: 236) remark about state actors in India being "members of local worlds with their own customs and habits" applies also to the cases we discuss here. As local community members, local Romanian state officials share the ideas and values of their co-villagers and are embedded in local social networks. This condition is akin to Kay's analysis (this issue) in which state actors' physical proximity to village inhabitants and their involvement in village life beyond the formal limits of their job is of crucial importance to how state policies are enacted at the village level.

According to Lipsky's (1980) seminal analysis, 'discretion' is one of the key terms for studying street-level bureaucracies. Discretion can have at least two sources: on the one hand, discretion is delegated by superiors to lower-level bureaucrats by virtue of their professional competence; on the other hand, street-level bureaucrats manifest discretion in their everyday activities due to the impossibility of a strict regulation of their work (ibid.). Building on Lipsky's insights, we show that one important source for local bureaucratic discretion is the inability of central state offices to govern remotely, which renders them dependent on local actors.

Scott (1998) has argued that modern centralized states use grids in order to simplify the complex realities that they want and need to 'see' in order to govern. More recently, authors such as Street (2012) and Jansen (2014) have shown that people themselves want to be 'seen' by the state and seek incorporation into state grids on their own terms as this serves their interests. Also, in our case, those villagers who are not legible to higher state offices try to make themselves visible to local bureaucrats and use the bureaucrats' discretion to access in-kind benefits. Our empirical examples, together with those presented by Street and Jansen, clearly show that people pro-actively engage with state agencies that represent the benevolent side of the state.

In the case of the program we analyze here, the Romanian government established eligibility criteria for European food aid and standardized categories of

beneficiaries. While specialized central and regional agencies 'read' the social landscape by employing bounded categories (e.g., unemployed, disabled, pensioner), local bureaucrats read the local social landscape based on direct knowledge of individual people. Even when local officials resort to the same categories as those at county or central governmental levels, they are better able to calibrate them to local and individual circumstances. Our examples show that legibility is lost when different state agencies overviewing distinct but overlapping sections of the social landscape collaborate. Like Forbess and James (this issue), we also observe that actions of different state agencies are not always coordinated, and it is the task of actors located at an intermediary level to fit together partial perspectives. In our case, administrative lists generated by state agencies at one governmental level had to be harmonized by local bureaucrats at another.

In the case of the policy we analyze, higher state offices materialize their standardized perspective in lists of names, an archetype of state administrative technology. As records of things that have been removed from their context and written down as facts (Rottenburg 2009), administrative lists and files are instruments of governmental technology (Hull 2008). Lists have a representational function in that they are meant to enable regional and central state offices to read local social realities. As powerful tools of government, lists can paradoxically work against their original purpose and render society illegible when they are modified and forged (Hull 2008), or when state agencies do not communicate effectively (Hoag 2010). For those who compile the lists, names are devoid of substance, standing as proof for abstract individuals. It is local state officials who have to identify the persons whose names are on the lists. As we show below, local officials do not operate merely as law enforcers or benevolent facilitators. They implement eligibility criteria, distribute or deny resources, and control information that induces and channels policies in multiple ways (Heyman 2004), thereby interfering with central state offices and affecting their ability to decipher the social landscape. Thus, when some of the needy remain beneath the central state's radar and are not identified as eligible for receiving the EU foodstuff, local bureaucrats 'fix' the problem by distributing food according to their own appraisal of the circumstances. On the one hand, in this way they can 'correct' a social policy. On the other hand, such instances of policy shaping are counterbalanced by situations in which local officials take direct advantage of the resources.

The Field Sites

In this section we introduce the two administrative communes where we carried out fieldwork. Dragomirești is located in the hilly region of Wallachia, the southern province of Romania.[8] It is composed of three villages (Dragomirești, the center of the commune, Vâlceni, and Costești) and is mainly inhabited by three ethnic groups: Romanians, Roma, and Rudari.[9] Out of 2,852 inhabitants, 658 are Roma or Rudari.[10] Most of the Roma live in the village of Costești, situated about five kilometers away from Dragomirești. The Rudari live in a segregated settlement located on the outskirts of Costești.

Dragomirești is a highly stratified community with the Romanian population at the top. Most Romanians work at the Dacia car plant in the vicinity of the commune. They own agricultural land and forest, obtained through post-socialist land reform, and rely on subsistence agriculture and industrial wages (Dorondel 2007b). The next social layer comprises the Roma, who mostly are fiddlers. The Roma never owned land or forest before socialism and have not benefited from the land restitution policy. They used to work at Dacia, but after the privatization of the car manufacturer in 1999, they were laid off or they quit. At present, most of the Roma earn an income by playing music, either at local parties and weddings or on the streets of Western European countries. Finally, the Rudari are the most socially and economically disadvantaged. They also worked at Dacia during socialism. Generally illiterate and lacking technical skills, the Rudari were also laid off from the car plant after privatization. Like the Roma, the Rudari never owned land and forest and were also excluded from the benefits of land reform.

At the time of our fieldwork, most members of the Rudari community relied on social aid, a means-tested benefit that they received from the local government.[11] The difference in economic opportunities was visible in the commune: while Romanian and Roma houses had more than two or three large rooms and a kitchen, Rudari homes usually had two small rooms that accommodated up to 15 family members. Under these circumstances, the Rudari population was the principal target for state social assistance. Out of 306 people enrolled for social aid at the local government, only 12 were Romanians and 67 Roma, while the rest were Rudari.[12] For the European food aid program, the Rudari represented the most significant group of beneficiaries.

The commune of Selo is located in southeastern Romania, in the Dobruja region. Its three component villages—Selo (the administrative center), Brătieni, and Livada—counted a total of 5,184 inhabitants in the 2002 census.[13] Historically, the villages of the commune have been inhabited mainly by ethnic Lipovans (Old Believers),[14] Romanians, and Bulgarians. At the time of our fieldwork, the population of Selo was predominantly Lipovan, whereas the other two villages were largely inhabited by Romanians.

In the past, most villagers were involved in fishing or agriculture. The majority of the Lipovans have historically been involved in fishing. During socialism, Selo benefited economically from having a state fishing enterprise. The fact that most of the Lipovans worked in this enterprise created a clear difference between them and the Romanians living in the commune. Historically, the latter were predominantly agriculturists, and during socialism they worked mainly at the two local collective farms. At the time of our fieldwork, fishing had increasingly been taken over by the Romanians, but it was generating reduced incomes when compared with the socialist era. Most of the agricultural land that the villagers from the commune had received after decollectivization was cultivated by a handful of local agricultural entrepreneurs in exchange for annual rent (most often paid in kind). Many people of employable age were relocating to the nearby urban centers of Tulcea (the county capital) and the seaport city Constanța or were migrating abroad for work.

The most fortunate inhabitants of the commune were probably the pensioners, who had secure access to a monthly income. In contrast, many people in their late adulthood were without a job and thus without a stable income prior to receiving their pensions. For some of the poorer villagers (especially the elderly and the disabled), taking part in religious rituals facilitated access to livelihood means. In the village of Selo, money and food were regularly given to those who took part in funerals and in the ceremonies for the commemoration of the dead. Moreover, the annual celebration of the village church's dedication day represented an occasion for the poor to partake of festivities prepared communally with contributions (food and funds) from both modestly well-off villagers and well-to-do local sponsors.

The socio-economic stratification of the two communes and the overlap of economic inequalities and ethnic boundaries are important in explaining the differences in the implementation of the EU food aid program. Also important in this respect is the ethnic composition of the two local governments. Nearly all the officials in the Selo mayor's office were Lipovans. The most notable exception was the mayor, a Romanian from the village of Brătieni, who was on his fourth mandate. In contrast, all of the officials in the Dragomirești mayor's office were ethnic Romanians. Of the three ethnic groups in Dragomirești, only the Rudari had no political representation at the regional or national level (Thelen et al. 2011). In contrast, Lipovans were politically represented at the local, regional, and national level.

Our analysis emphasizes how the implementation of policy is shaped by the differential political representation and participation of the Rudari and Lipovans and by the historical relations and inequalities between these groups and the Romanians. As will become clear, local distribution was much more tense in Dragomirești than in Selo. In Dragomirești, when the food aid program takes on community-building functions, it is primarily used to perpetuate historical hierarchies, an aspect that is absent in the case of Selo. Food distribution stokes existing tensions between the Romanian forest-owning population and Rudari forest poachers, reinforcing the argument that the Rudari are lazy and to be blamed for their poverty. Like the 'bad' poor in France described by Dubois (this issue), Rudari are accused of parasitism and of encroaching on state resources. On the other hand, ethnicity plays a diametrically opposite role in Selo, where the feast of the dedication day of the local Orthodox Old-Rite Church is sponsored in part by EU resources. In the next section, we provide a detailed account of these distinct local implementations and outcomes of the EU food aid program in Romania.

Distribution Practices of Local State Officials in Dragomirești and Selo

Formal Distribution Schemes

As previously mentioned, the European Union allocates national-level funding for food aid, with national governments in turn determining how this aid

will be distributed. At the time of our fieldwork, the administrative process in Romania went as follows. Adminstrative lists of beneficiaries were compiled by the County Labor Agencies, County Pension Agencies, and the General Social Assistance Agencies from their own electronic databases.[15] Local governments provided the County Councils with data about social aid recipients. All lists were gathered at the County Councils, where they were processed in order to draw up a schedule for the transportation of food from the county-level warehouses to each locality. While county officials knew that these lists contained overlapping entries, as some people straddled several beneficiary categories simultaneously, cross-verification was a task left to local state officials. These officials were responsible for keeping the County Councils informed of the status of distribution in each locality and for reporting possible overlapping entries found on the lists.

The Practices of Distribution in Dragomireşti and Selo

One important point must be made before describing the practices of distribution in the two villages. The Romanian presidential elections took place in November 2009, one month after the annual food aid was distributed. During campaigns, political party activists customarily distribute various goods, such as pens, lighters, hats, aprons, T-shirts, and plastic buckets, as well as food items, such as sugar, cooking oil, and wheat flour (Flonta 2005). It is against this background that local officials could regard the distribution of EU foodstuff as an opportunity for promoting their political interests.[16]

In practice, foodstuff distribution during our research largely followed governmental provisions. The actual distribution process in both localities was arranged so that recipients would take the foodstuff from the local governments' offices. The process, as observed in both localities, largely followed the script of an orderly bureaucratic ritual (Herzfeld 1992): recipients presented themselves to the offices, waited in line for their turn, showed their identification documents to the officials, and signed the distribution list next to their names after receiving the foodstuffs. 'Orderliness' is analytically interesting, but as we choose to start from a point of resistance that "as a chemical catalyst" can "bring to light power relations" (Foucault [1983] 2000: 211), we focus primarily on 'disorderly' events deviating from the bureaucratic norm and on events ensuing from conflict, as described in our ethnography below.

In the late afternoon on 21 October 2009, the vice-mayor of Dragomireşti phoned some Romanian social aid recipients and asked them to unload a truck carrying nearly 10 tons of wheat flour coming from the county capital.[17] Two weeks later, nearly 3 tons of sugar was deposited in a storage room at the mayor's office. Local officials knew their role well: they had to mobilize people to unload the trucks, make sure that the packages of foodstuff were safely stored, and inform recipients about the delivery. Although the Rudari were the largest group of beneficiaries for EU flour and sugar, the vice-mayor decided that no Rudari would be involved in unloading foodstuffs. "They would steal from the packages. You can't trust them," the vice-mayor assured Dorondel.

Because social aid recipients work for their monthly aid at the mayor's office, a few Romanians who received this aid were asked to help unload the flour and sugar. After the work was completed, the vice-mayor asked the men to spread the word among villagers, family, and neighbors that the goods had arrived.

The morning after the foodstuffs were unloaded, the vice-mayor of Drago-mirești informed the Rudari social aid recipients that they should come to the mayor's office with their horse carts and chainsaws. A few days before, the local government had bought large quantities of wood for heating the com-mune's offices, schools, library, and clinic. These logs were stored behind the local government's main building, and after a few rainy days, they were soak-ing in a large puddle. The vice-mayor explained to the Rudari that they would receive the wheat flour immediately after they finished cutting the logs and storing the wood.[18]

Upon hearing these preconditions, the Rudari protested loudly, raising their voices as they argued. The mayor came to the scene and promised them some good-quality homemade plum brandy from his own stock. To show the men that he meant it, he phoned his wife and asked her to send five liters of brandy. He then asked the janitor to buy some soft drinks, biscuits, and cigarettes "for the workers." This relaxed the atmosphere, and the mayor promised he would stay there with the vice-mayor and drink with the men while they worked. This event was significant. Given that the two categories of villagers belong to two different social strata, by drinking with the Rudari, the officials had performed a boundary transgression (Gefou-Madianou 1992).

Only after finishing their work were the Rudari allowed to collect their food packages. The other beneficiaries, Romanians and Roma, were allowed to pick up foodstuffs after the Rudari. This ordering says as much about how local offi-cials perceive the Rudari as about the role of negotiation and conflict in commu-nity building. Rudari, by virtue of their low status and their dependency on social benefits, are relatively powerless in relation to local bureaucrats. While local officials control administrative information and know the legislation, Rudari are unfamiliar with the legal norms of EU food distribution or with welfare legisla-tion. Nevertheless, taking into account their protest, the fact that the mayor had personally served them plum brandy, and especially the fact that Romanian and Roma food aid recipients had to wait until the Rudari finished their task, it is clear that the Rudari were able to negotiate certain aspects of their status. By exploiting the ambivalent position of the mayor and the vice-mayor—imple-menters of the governmental programs but also politicians who need villagers' votes—the Rudari received something in return that they otherwise would have not obtained: drinks, cigarettes, and a modicum of symbolic capital. This event also illustrates how local officials manage tensions arising from the incongru-encies between job demands and the demands of their fragmented constituen-cies. As bureaucrats, they had to distribute food aid to persons on the lists sent from the county capital. But as politicians, they had to show their Romanian constituents that the Rudari worked for their benefits and to show their Rudari constituents that they were not outright exploited in exchange for each welfare transfer. Making Rudari work for their EU aid was consistent with the attitudes

of the local Romanian class of landowners, who criticized the Rudari (and other poor Romanians) for putatively preferring to receive social assistance instead of working the land.[19] In such a context, striking a balance between different interests was crucial to maximizing political support.

In Selo, EU food aid packages arrived at the beginning of autumn. In contrast to Dragomireşti, the program's lists of beneficiaries were on public display at the entrance of the Selo mayor's office building. This observed difference in the transparency of the administrative process can be explained in terms of a distinctive professional ethos in the two local governments, but it can also be related to the different composition of the groups of beneficiaries and to the different ways in which state officials were embedded in the two communities. In Dragomireşti, mostly Rudari, Roma, and a few elderly Romanians were among those entitled to food aid, whereas in Selo both Romanians and Lipovans were included in the program. The potential for protest from representatives of these groups of beneficiaries clearly differed in the two localities, and it may explain the lax attitude of officials in Dragomireşti. Moreover, Lipovan and Romanian officials in Selo were much more careful to avoid criticism from villagers for outcomes in food distribution than the officials in Dragomireşti. While for elected officials this attitude toward villagers can be explained in terms of their dependence on votes, for the appointed officials it can be explained as having resulted from their embeddedness in local social networks that contained many actual and potential beneficiaries, as we explain below.

In Selo, the atmosphere during distribution days was generally relaxed. One local government employee, always a good-spirited man, at times said jokingly to the women taking their flour: "Bring me doughnuts!" It is through such casual banter that the official could frame the distribution process as gift-giving and position himself on the side of benevolence. The good mood was once interrupted by a man who complained about not receiving any flour. Unperturbed, the employee asked him how big his pension was. Upon hearing that his pension was way above the eligibility threshold, the official retorted jokingly that the man should donate rather than collect flour, alluding to the fact that this was a redistributive process targeting the needy. Others complained that they had been expecting food aid only to learn they were ineligible. "The lists are from them [i.e., the County Council], not from us," was the general response of the social worker, who would assign the blame for the outcome of distribution to the county-level bureaucrats, but at other times would explain the intricate process of list drafting. Similar events took place in Dragomireşti. Some villagers, confident that they would receive aid, hired a horse cart or a car from a neighbor to carry their flour. To their disappointment, they found out at the mayor's office that they were ineligible. Some were wholeheartedly convinced that the vice-mayor had 'screwed' them. They pointed to his two-story tall house as evidence that he was manipulating the distribution of flour and sugar to further his own interests. When a woman who thought her aunt was entitled to receive aid found out she was not on the list, she told Dorondel that the vice-mayor "most probably takes the lion's share from these staple foods. Otherwise, he would not spend time distributing foodstuff for weeks."

As it turned out, such suspicions were not unfounded. Local officials in Dragomirești took home some of the flour that was sent in excess by higher authorities due to list redundancies and that had remained in the local government's stock after the list-based distribution. They even offered some to Dorondel. Looked on as almost an insider in the local government, Dorondel was considered by the local officials as potentially a more important critic (if left out of the backstage sharing of surplus food) than were the members of the local constituency. Although such sharing of flour among members of the local government was actively covered up, some villagers nevertheless discovered it. Those who thought they should be eligible but were not on the lists were the most virulent critics of such practices. They said that the remaining quantity of flour should have been distributed among those poor enough to make good use of it. Villagers thought that the people who worked for the local government were too well off to need 10 to 20 kilograms of wheat flour and sugar. In contrast, local officials in Selo were preoccupied with avoiding criticism and mentioned to Popa that if he took part in the distribution, villagers would no longer accuse them of not wanting to grant the aid. Popa did not hear about any instances of officials appropriating EU foodstuffs for personal use in Selo. There, the excess foodstuff resulting from list redundancies was used in different ways.

In Selo, an ineligible pensioned widow received flour from her cousin who coordinated the unloading of the food. A mentally disabled man was not listed for food aid because he did not have a formal certificate attesting to his disability. Nonetheless, his sister, in whose household the man was living, was called upon by one bureaucrat-cum-political activist of the mayor and was given flour from the stocks. As Heyman (2004) stresses, files are records used to track people, allowing high-level bureaucrats to make references to impersonal standards when conducting their work. Citizens who lack files or are not listed under appropriate categories do not exist from the perspective of higher-level offices, for which reason villagers like the mentally disabled man described above could not be officially counted among the 'most deprived' persons in the EU. This is the kind of situation that Jansen (2014) and Street (2012) present, in which people actually want to be 'seen' by the state. To a limited extent, street-level bureaucrats, as we observed during our fieldwork, were able to use their discretion to negotiate more satisfying arrangements. The inability of higher state offices to 'see' all the possible beneficiaries was to a certain extent counteracted through the actions of local bureaucrats.

In Selo, the distribution of the EU aid preceded not only the national presidential elections but also the annual village feast. It was in this context that the village's Orthodox Old-Rite Church received a portion of EU foodstuff, which was used in preparing the upcoming communal meal for the celebration of the church's dedication day.[20] With presidential elections on the horizon, the good-spirited worker of the mayor's office presented above, one of the mayor's key 'vote gatherers' in previous campaigns, delivered EU wheat flour to the church.[21] The quantity had an almost insignificant value in terms of market price, but what was important was the local meaning of the act. By giving food to the church, the mayor had responded to the expectation that his office should

support local church events, an expectation otherwise difficult to fulfill under the conditions of harsh budget constraints. The mayor could thus maintain the legitimacy of his office tenure and strengthen his claim for support for his party's candidate in the national presidential elections. Such acts were made possible by the discretion that the local state officials had in implementing the policy—a discretion that was not granted but seized. The distributive practices of local bureaucrats ignored national regulations but responded to villagers' expectations. As Thelen, Vetters, and Benda-Beckmann point out in the introduction to this issue, a relational approach to the state that views "relations as decisive in shaping state formations, images, and practices" would explain how local officials navigate between national policy and local needs. People's expectations (and pressures) shaped local practices of distribution and changed the official requirements of national agencies' programs.

The food cooked at the church in Selo was consumed in a communal meal by all those attending the Mass on the church's dedication day. While most of the well-to-do participants were Lipovans visiting from other villages, some villagers from Selo in need of assistance attended the meal as well. Thus, even those not officially targeted for food aid nevertheless benefited from the program. In Dragomirești, too, elected officials went beyond the provisions of the law and invested resources into actions that furthered their political agenda. The vice-mayor decided to use a vehicle owned by the local government to deliver the food to the listed beneficiaries, mostly the elderly Romanians who were unable to come to the distribution center. On his various stops, the official sometimes jokingly said, "The vice-mayor is your servant and brings the flour and sugar to your home." This was an ironic remark that pointed to the ambivalent position of the official, who held a powerful administrative position yet still depended on the benevolence of his constituency. Leaving humor aside, he told Dorondel that for the elderly who cannot come to the mayor's office themselves, or who have no relatives to help them, this was the only way they would receive the food. Such a statement proves that the vice-mayor acted not only as a bureaucrat on a mission to distribute the EU food or as a politician seeking votes, but also as a member of the community who knew the people well and offered his help to those in need.

It is clear from our examples that in both localities the local officials attempted to benefit symbolically from their role as distributors. By jokingly asking for a counter-gift from the recipients (in the case of the Selo official) or setting oneself up as a benefactor by taking packages of food to the homes of recipients (in the case of the Dragomirești vice-mayor), local officials tried to secure some symbolic capital from the mere act of giving (distinct from granting, which was in large measure controlled by higher state agencies). At the same time, the acts of the local officials in both communes contributed in two different ways to building community relations. In Dragomirești, where community relations are plagued by tensions between the Romanians and the Rudari, the actions of local officials tended to reinforce historical inequalities between these two groups. In Selo, local officials built community relations in accordance with the local configuration of ethnic relations. The communal meal was a major component of

an annual event important to all ethnic Lipovans. The poor, even those beneath the radar of national agencies, were able to take advantage of the EU food indirectly by attending the event.

Conclusion

What do the local implementations of the EU food aid program tell us about the workings of the state in present-day Romania and how could our analysis enhance a relational anthropology of the state? We have shown how a transnational policy was 'transformed', at least partially, at the local level. Although the standards, rules of implementation, and beneficiary lists of the transnational program were created at a higher level, the discretion of local bureaucrats allowed them to allocate these resources in ways they deemed more relevant for local relations. Rural bureaucrats in Romania did have discretion in implementing the policy articulated in higher offices, as Lipsky (1980) found for US street-level bureaucrats, but the source of their discretion was different in the cases analyzed here. The ambivalent political and administrative position of the Romanian street-level bureaucrats, their embeddedness in village social life, and the inability of higher state offices to discern the local social landscape combined to endow the local state officials with room for maneuver. Their double embeddedness as representatives of the state and as members of their local community has to be acknowledged as a major source of discretion and power. In order to understand the workings of the state, we need to pay attention to the multiple relations entertained by local officials in their roles as elected officials, state bureaucrats, and members of the community. As we have shown, citizens who could not be 'seen' by upper state offices were visible to local bureaucrats. Discretion could be used to correct the 'illegibility' of village settings at higher-level offices. Officials deployed local notions of entitlement in granting EU food aid to the 'invisible' needy.

The germ of the idea of relational analysis of the state can be grasped in Weber's ([1959] 2009: 78) definition of the state as "a relation of men dominating men." In our analysis, we have demonstrated the need to look beyond relations of domination through state authority and to take into account larger configurations of power relations in order to understand the actual workings of the state. In the cases discussed, power differences in the process of distribution contributed to local social dynamics of inclusion and exclusion. These dynamics were historical and partly independent of the power relations between bureaucratic agencies and between these agencies and citizens. As we have shown, power differences structured along ethnic lines influenced the local workings of the state. At the same time, actions of local officials also contributed to community building, namely, the structuration of wider balances of power within local communities.

Understanding the everyday workings of the state requires understanding power relations between actors embedded simultaneously in the state administrative apparatus and in society. Social relations and the power balances that

characterize them have to be analyzed not in static terms but in processual terms. We did this by looking at the circulation of information and goods (i.e., administrative lists and food packages) between different state agencies and between differently positioned social actors. In line with other analyses of the workings of state bureaucracies (e.g., Benda-Beckmann and Benda-Beckmann 1998; Heyman 2004), we have drawn attention to the fact that the practices of local bureaucracies cannot be separated from the society in which they are embedded. In addition, we have pointed toward a more inclusive perspective that takes into account the use of technologies of government of which adminstrative lists are just one example.

Acknowledgments

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Notes

1. See http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/most-deprived-persons/index_en.htm (accessed 10 June 2011).
2. See http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri = CELEX:31992R3149 &rid = 9 (accessed 10 June 2011).
3. Romanian Government Decision 600/2009. See http://www.apia.org.ro/files/pages_ files/ Hot％C4％83r％C3％A2rea_nr._600_din_2009.pdf (accessed 19 August 2012).

4. Romania's public administration is organized into three governmental tiers located at the central, county, and town/commune level. A 'commune' (*comună* in Romanian) is a rural administrative unit comprising one or more villages. Mayors and local councilors are elected for mandates of four years. The mayor is assisted by one or more elected vice-mayors and by an executive staff comprising secretaries, agricultural agents, social workers, and other employees in charge of rendering public amenities functional.

5. We will use here the term 'community' for lack of better alternatives, despite the problems associated with its use. Throughout the analysis, 'community' will not refer to romantic notions of belongingness, relational warmth, and harmony—connotations eloquently criticized by Creed (2006)—but to dynamics of inclusion and exclusion and to social processes revolving around and resulting in power differentials. The term 'community building' will thus refer to structuration processes of power relations at the local level.

6. The names of the field sites are pseudonymous.

7. Katherine Verdery (2002) has shown how local officials were able to obstruct land restitution after the fall of socialism. Part of our analysis speaks directly to Verdery's, in the sense that we also point to how local officials can interfere with the implementation of centrally planned policy.

8. Dorondel carried out fieldwork in Dragomirești (2004–2010), while Popa carried out fieldwork in Selo (2009–2010).

9. None of the censuses present Roma and Rudari as separate ethnic groups. This is an emic distinction, and this article will not address the question as to whether or not the Rudari are of Roma origin. The Rudari population refuses to be considered Roma; instead, it defines itself as "people working the wood, living in or close to the forest and speaking the Romanian language" (Chelcea 1940). The Roma population also denies any ethnic relation with the Rudari.

10. Data from the 2002 census were obtained from the County Department of Statistics, Pitesti.

11. The benefit is formally called 'minimum income guarantee'. For an overview of the scheme's implementation, see Rat (2009).

12. The Dragomirești mayor's office provided these figures.

13. Data were obtained from the County Department of Statistics, Tulcea.

14. Selo was founded by Old Believers (*starovery*, in Russian) fleeing persecution in the Russian Empire after having rejected the liturgical reforms introduced in the mid-seventeenth century by Patriarch Nikon of the Russian Orthodox Church (see, e.g., Robson 1995). *Lipoveni* (Lipovans) and *ruşi-lipoveni* (Lipovan-Russians) are ethnonyms with which Old Believers are designated and also designate themselves in Romania (Ipatiov 2002).

15. This information comes from interviews conducted by Popa with county officials in Tulcea.

16. For recipients' deep dependency on local officials in rural Romania, see also Mungiu-Pippidi (2010).

17. The vice-mayor is charged in this commune with the supervision of social programs.

18. For a detailed account of the mandatory work that social aid recipients have to perform, see Thelen et al. (2011).

19. Verdery (2003: 217) presents a similar configuration of ethnic tensions overlapping with emergent class differences in a Transylvanian village.

20. Religious ritual is central to the Old Believers' history and identity (see, e.g., Naumescu 2010).

21. The EU foodstuff was not recorded officially as being donated to the church.

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