MORAL CARTOGRAPHY:
CLASSIFICATIONS OF VILLAGE RESIDENTS
IN THE EVERYDAY LIFE OF RURAL BUREAUCRATS

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A b s t r a c t : The article analyses the classifications of the residents of settlements used by rural bureaucrats (employees of rural administrations and members of their teams). The analysis is based on materials gathered through participant observation in two rural settlements in southwestern Siberia. The principles by which the "characters" of villages are distinguished are examined, i.e. in what contexts a "moral cartography" of localities takes place. The study shows that the most frequent differentiating features in the bureaucratic characterisation of villages are: 1) the independence of residents in solving their problems or addressing the requirements of the administration; 2) the community's cohesion and willingness to help bureaucrats in governance or lack thereof. These classification signs relate to the "problematic nature" of the village for rural bureaucrats, i.e. the possibility of conflicts, complaints and claims. The author concludes that one of the functions of the bureaucratic classification of villages is contingency coping strategy, which is characteristic of the task-oriented work of rural bureaucrats. Knowledge of the "character" of the inhabitants of settlements allows officials to form expectations, develop work strategies and explain managerial successes and failures. In addition, the ability to map the social space of a village is important for confirming the status of rural governors and especially the heads of rural administrations. Faced daily with a shortage of administrative and material resources, rural bureaucrats find their own intermediate positions to be vulnerable. However, the "proper" knowledge of social space allows them seemingly to reverse their dependent position. In accordance with the principle of the administrator's responsibility for a given space, the classifications of villages afford local officials the opportunity to demonstrate a comprehensive knowledge of the territory, thereby testifying to their status as "owners" (*khozyaeva*) of the land.

K e y w o r d s : anthropology of bureaucracy, municipal government, street-level bureaucracy, rural administration, contingency, classification.

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"Black and white"

The television was on in the kitchen, as always, and against the background of the mystical soundtrack to the programme *The Blind Woman (Slepaya)*,[1] I was having tea with Ira,[2] a social work specialist in Pavlovo, in whose house I had rented a room. It was our first conversation, and discussion of details of our life-stories alternated with tales of my research and of the village where I had arrived that morning. Ira had been born and grown up in Pavlovo, and spoke lovingly about the place. She remarked that it was largely inhabited by "locals", that it was a "friendly" village, "there are good people here", and as confirmation brought forward the inhabitants' sympathy for each other and readiness to help each other out in misfortunes. "One old man's shed caught fire, and everyone brought water and helped putting it out. If anyone dies (God forbid), or gets seriously ill, everyone is on hand," Ira said proudly. The other village, Ilyinka, as she told it, was a curious

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[1]   The popular Russian TV series telling the life mystical stories coped with the help of a blind clairvoyant.

[2]   All personal and place names have been changed.

antithesis to the social idyll of Pavlovo. Ira described Ilyinka, which was populated "more by incomers", as a place where the inhabitants not only would not put out a neighbour's house that had caught fire, but would stand about smiling, watching the head of the village administration struggling with the conflagration.

One could certainly take this dichotomous description of the settlement as the prejudice of a local resident who stressed the merits of her own village and the faults of the neighbouring one. However, though there is a measure of justice in this interpretation, it was not only Ira who was prejudiced in her assessment. During fieldwork in Pavlovo I regularly came across this opposition, drawn by administrators, between the two villages that made up the settlement. Thus, the same morning, while I was waiting for Ira at the administration office, I learnt from the leading specialist Valeriya that the inhabitants of Ilyinka were "incomers" and "younger", while those of Pavlovo were for the most part "local" and "pensioners". Equally, there was no avoiding a comparison between the two villages in a conversation a few weeks later with Nadezhda, the head of the rural settlement: "I really like the people here [in Pavlovo], they're all calm and kind. We get on with our lives, but when something happens, fires, or someone falling ill, or, God forbid, dying, everybody comes. […] People are responsive. […] But in Ilyinka, the people there are incomers, they live their own lives, there isn't the same responsiveness, they're younger, they're more difficult people." Once when I shared my plans to visit Ilyinka with Ira, she commented: "There'll be a difference in your relationships in the one village and in the other, although we live close together, we're in contact. […] And what the relationship is in our village and in the one there — black and white." Unexpectedly for me, a woman living in Ilyinka who took part in the governance (the chair of the Sovet Veteranov or ex-servicemen's association) described the villages in a similar way; like the other administrators, she answered that the people in Ilyinka "are a cautious lot. They're all incomers and don't all get on with each other."

This way of describing a rural space, when the inhabitants of one village are endowed with common characteristics that distinguish them from the inhabitants of the neighbouring villages, is not unique to Pavlovo. As is shown by material from participant observation in two rural settlements in the same district[1] in south-western Siberia (August and September 2021, August 2023 in Bolshoye rural settlement, population c. 1,300, and October and November 2022, Pavlovo rural district, population c. 500), and interviews with the four heads

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[1]   In Russian, *rayon*, the intermediate level of administrative unit in both urban and rural areas. There are several *rayons* in each region. A rayon consists of urban and rural municipalities (rural settlements). At the time of writing, before the reform of municipal government, rural settlements consist of several villages and have their own administrative center and authority — the rural administration. [Eds.]

of administration of neighbouring settlements, villages that make up each rural settlement are actively compared and contrasted by rural bureaucrats. As one of the heads of a rural administration put it, "every settlement is, altogether... like chalk, I suppose, and cheese in any case. People have different casts of character, people are different. Even though they only live a few kilometres away from each other. What can you say, we have villages, five of them, and the people in each of them are all completely different!"

Classifications of villages by "character" coexist in the working practice of rural administrators — the employees of the rural administration and the members of their teams,[1] — with binary categories applied to particular residents: "straightforward — complicated", "good — bad", "active, responsible — passive, idle", "normal, one of us — not normal", "authoritative, worthy, upright member of society — disadvantaged" and so on. What these qualities of character are, and why they become persistent categories for classifying particular residents, is an intriguing question, but I have been forced to leave it outside the scope of this article. Here I propose to focus on those classifications that I found most surprising, that is, the ideas current in administrative circles of a single "character" or "soul" for an entire village. Why, to what end, and how are such essentialist macro-classifications (re)produced by rural administrators? By centring the article on administrative classifications of the "characters" of villages, I shall try to analyse the principles whereby rural administrators classify the territories for which they are responsible, the functions of these characterisations, and what they can say about the peculiarities of rural administration.

Bureaucracy and classifications

Means of classification is a popular topic within research into bureaucracy. As Don Handelman writes, the idea of a taxonomy, i.e. "the naming and placement of all things […] by contrast and comparison", is built into the very idea of a bureaucracy [Handelman

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[1]   In order to fulfil the requirements of the district in what is in fact a vertical system of local government, and to have an effect on the social space of the village and the infrastructure, administrative heads form *teams*, which consist of "their own" (*svoi*) people, that is those who are prepared to take part in the governance and whose relationship with the head of the administration is one of confidence. I propose to call the members of these teams, and not only the employees of the rural administration, *rural administrators*, stressing that they belong to a common structure of administration. In this way are formed in the settlements the elected body of the village council (*Selskaya duma*) and the staff of the local electoral commissions and the voluntary citizen patrols. In conditions of a vertical system of local government (not legally, but in fact), the members of these agencies must acknowledge the authority of the head of the local administration, assist the employees of the local administration in the everyday running of the village, and also be supportive of the policies of the district administration and simply exist, because they are required to do so by law. This "team" system of administration also includes the members of the council of ex-servicemen (*sovet veteranov*), cultural workers, medics and "activists", each of whom may have a more or less close relationship with the head of the administration, but in one way or another has a place in the system of mutual assistance and participates in the governance.

1981: 7–9]. Authors who have focused their research on bureaucratic classifications have affirmed the embeddedness of bureaucrats' stereotypes in national culture [Becker 1957; Handelman 1981; Herzfeld 1992], and spoken of them as an instrument for producing bureaucratic indifference and social inequality [Herzfeld 1992; Nisar, Masood 2020], analysed classifications as a product of the institutions that legitimise a particular order of social relations [Douglas 1986], and tried to understand in accordance with what economic and political interests of the country civil servants use taxonomies [Heyman 1995; Roberts 2020].

Researchers into bureaucracy have also asked what meaning the classification of clients has for street-level bureaucrats themselves. For example, John van Maanen asserts that labelling someone as "a suspicious person", "an asshole" or "a know-nothing" helps American policemen to form their expectations, explain the reasons for deviancy in behaviour and justify using force [Van Maanen 1978]. Dividing the world, by means of their classifications, into those who are "for us" and those who are "against", policemen take up the position of warriors against those who "upset the just order" [Van Maanen 1978: 222], which allows them a sense of their own moral superiority. According to Van Maanen, the classification of citizens is an important part of street-level bureaucrats' work both from the point of view of the technique of face-to-face interaction with strangers and in the context of an understanding of their own professional role as fighters for justice.

The originator of the theory of street-level bureaucracy, Michael Lipsky, also drew a clear connection between the specifics of street-level officials' work and the means of classification that they create [Lipsky 2010]. Lipsky writes that behind the bureaucratic division of clients into "worthy" and "unworthy" of receiving services stand the bureaucrats' personal sympathy or antipathy, the correlation of a particular case with general moral values, and the idea of the strength of feedback. In Lipsky's logic, street-level bureaucrats' differentiation of clients is to be explained by the need to rationalise an uneven distribution of limited resources — time and social services.

The employees of rural administrations may also, with some reservations, be classified as street-level bureaucrats: subordinate to the demands of their official superiors and dependent on their budget, which is assigned by the district, that is, incorporated into the structure of local (and in fact state) power, they interact with citizens face to face. At the same time, rural administrators are substantially different from the standard street-level bureaucrats — magistrates, policemen, social workers or doctors.

Firstly, unlike Van Maanen and Lipsky's heroes, and unlike the urban officials of the "multifunctional centres" or migration services (see,

for example: [Griffiths 2013]), rural civil servants and members of their teams interact, in their working practice, not with an abstract mass of "clients", who need to be classified to determine who is "worthy" or "unworthy" of receiving services. I propose to call the heroes of this article not "street-level" but "rural bureaucrats". One might say, developing Lipsky's metaphor, that their work takes place not on the abstract street, the populous urban space, but in lanes, paths and banks that are well known to them. As they work with the residents of a small settlement, who are known to them outside work, local administrators nevertheless assign them to persistent categories. Moreover, it seems to me that there are not sufficient grounds for saying that it is the problem of the distribution of resources between "clients" (as in the cases described by Lipsky) that obliges the administrators to create and employ classification categories.

To a great extent rural bureaucrats act as mediators in the interactions between the residents of the settlement with other bureaucratic structures: they issue the certificates that are necessary to apply to other agencies, make arrangements for registration with the Pension Fund, supply the telephone numbers and addresses of various organisations, assist in obtaining material assistance (though they do not themselves approve applications for it), etc. Consequently, the basic resources of rural bureaucrats are knowledge and time. And in circumstances where the number of "clients" is limited, the difficulty in distributing these resources among their "clients" characteristic of urban bureaucrats should not arise.

Secondly, in the works of Michel Foucault, the classifications used by agents of the state — instruments of a particular regime of knowledge — are understood as a form of power that "transforms subjects into objects" in the process of intervening in their lives, and as a technology of security directed toward social control [Foucault 1982; 2004]. However, the employees of rural administrations have no power to assign anybody to the marginal status of a lunatic or a criminal (although they can, by means of character references provided on request, affect the assignment of such a status). In itself the question of what forms of dominance exist among rural bureaucrats is not a one, and requires further analysis. It may nevertheless definitely be said that in the rural bureaucrats' case ascribing persistent qualities to residents of the settlement generally does not affect their everyday lives. As far as I can judge, the village residents who have been so classified do not know about their classification: it is always expressed in their absence and circulates within the working collective. In my view such classifications have a different modality: to a great extent their effect is noticeable not in the everyday lives of the residents of the village, but in those of the rural bureaucrats themselves. So how exactly are the administrative classifications of villages constructed?

The moral cartography of settlements

One September evening Anna, the administrative head of Bolshoye, and I were going home after experiencing the emotional stress of the elections that had finished the previous day. I had managed to spend time at both local polling stations, in Bolshoye and Nikulino, and one day the administrative head had drawn my attention to the different ways in which the members of the commissions experienced the elections. At the polling station in the Bolshoye school, it was as if war was being waged: the observers were bombarding the members of the commission with observations, turning them into "whipped puppies", and taking turns to disappear into a classroom and exchange comments full of worry, irritation and bitter irony. The source of their anxiety was not only the election result, but also the threat of a low turnout. In Nikulino, by contrast, everything was peaceful and even jolly. We found the members of the commission at a laid table and in a good mood: the turnout at their polling station had been high since early morning.

That evening Anna organised an interview for me with two of the local deputies. The two women spoke indignantly of the "alienation" of the residents of Bolshoye from each other, their passivity, their refusal to undertake unpaid assistance and take part in joint activities — "in a word, they've all become far too businesslike." Trying to make sense of the previous days' observations and these words, I asked Anna whether it was true that people in Bolshoye were alienated from each other. Anna recalled once more how different the atmosphere at the polling stations had been, and went on to discuss it as follows:

Anna: *Bolshoye is the village of the soldiers* [who came in the eighteenth century]. *[…] They all had ambitions when they came […] and so, if anyone else came, there would be envy, rivalry. […] And that's how it all started, that is, the way family members, cousins, don't have contact with each other […]. Everyone arrives with their own character, as they say. […] They're all used to their own way of doing things, and so none of them gives a damn how they do things here.*
A. Z.: *So is there any sort of common principle here?*
Anna: *There isn't […].*
A. Z.: *And in Nikulino* [another village in the settlement]?
Anna: *In Nikulino the principles are quite different. There they've always been much more friendly […]. If something needs changing or doing there, they won't go running around kicking up a fuss. If someone wants to do something right away, they'll go out, take […] a rubbish sack and go picking up rubbish, to tidy things up, and won't start shouting at the top of their voice "Let's all tidy up!" But here in Bolshoye that's the sort of thing that would happen.*

A. Z.: *Is there anyone at all who would do things by themselves?*
Anna: *No. Not in Bolshoye. In Zarechnaya* [another village in Bolshoye settlement] *there are. They even built a playground by themselves, made it and repaired it.*

Thus, in her answer Anna appealed to the peculiarities of the "characters" of the inhabitants of the different villages. "Character", "way of life", "soul" — administrators often refer to these essential signs, apparently inherent in the inhabitants of an entire village, when they describe the villages in their settlement. Here is another telling example.

We have Dimitrovo and the settlement of Kuznetsy […] and in between them the village of Uspenka. […] In Kuznetsy they're such active people […] they were always like that, and they still are, you know, such good householders, they love cleanliness and order […]. That is, they're so hard-working […]. In Dimitrovo they're not such bad people, but they're more quarrelsome, for a start. And again, they're lazier […]. They've practically only got, probably, three houses in decent order. But in Kuznetsy, they're a hundred percent in good order, yes. Well, because of… the desire to live better. They really are completely different. Although the people in Dimitrovo make more demands: "Give us this, give us that, give us water." The water mains don't go to those villages any more, because there aren't enough people. […] In Kuznetsy they've all long ago sunk wells. […] On the one hand, this lot are demanding, and the others don't ask for anything: "We're fine, we're doing very well." […] The people in Uspenka are more like the people in Dimitrovo. They ask for stuff too, and will only do the minimum for themselves. There's even a difference between two different streets. […] I don't know, you only have to drive into the village, and you can feel it (Ekaterina, head of the Markovo rural settlement, 2021).

As can be seen, the villages (sometimes from different rural settlements) are characterised dichotomously. This principle of classifying social space is described by James Ferguson. Analysing the images of the village (which represents the moral antithesis of the amoral city) that are popular in Zambian discourse, he speaks of a *moral geography* which, beginning with an existing dichotomy, animates the government [Ferguson 1992: 84]. Developing Ferguson's metaphor, one might say that on the outline map of Zambia villages and towns are "shaded" differently: the former are shown as areas of generosity, unity and morality, and the latter as places of competition, immorality and egoism, which the government calls upon people to overcome for the sake of the people of the villages and the whole nation ("work for nation") [Ferguson 1992: 81–84]. Rural bureaucrats work with their map of the district in a similar manner. In determining the "character" of a village,

administrators engage in what I propose to call *moral cartography*[1] — using "shading", as in the old "moral statistics"[2] to show the distribution of values (access to education, voting rights for women, etc.), they classify the differences in the degree to which one or another sign, indicative of a value, is expressed among the inhabitants of a particular part of the settlement.

The most popular classificatory sign among administrators is the readiness of some residents to engage independently in the upkeep of their area and the solution of problems ("activeness", "industriousness", "homemaking skills", "amity"), as opposed to the "demandingness" ("quarrelsomeness", "idleness") of others (often characterised with the negatively marked word "consumers", which is very important in the discourse of administrators). Besides that, rural bureaucrats find themselves having to define the "way of life" of a village — more or less "rural",[3] which may be influenced, for example, by the degree of solidarity and involvement in each other's lives, or by occupations, by the choice of clothing for going out in public, and by the villagers' tastes, as in the following quotation.

That is, roughly speaking, "agricultural zone" — "recreational zone". […] Those who, shall we say, live in the "recreational zone" […] if they go out to the shop or somewhere, will dress decently, won't they? But if we take, shall we say, the same people living in Krasnaya, they, shall we say, roughly speaking, will run out to the shop in whatever they happen to have on, because they've no time to get changed, they just run there and back. […] [It shows] *even in their social life.*

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[1]   The concept of *moral cartography* is used in geography, literary studies and the social sciences without any terminological exactitude and may refer to phenomena which, though close, are not identical. On the one hand, it refers to actually existing geographical maps on which by means of shading the *moral landscape* of a territory is depicted: a scale of moral values reflecting the ideas of the dominant group, in accordance with which social space is divided into "dark" territories (oppressed groups and/or groups with values different from the dominant ones), and "light", morally excellent territories (see, for example: [Friendly, Palsky 2007; Dando 2010]). Subsequently the idea of the influence of the cartographer's moral values on the map became a commonplace of social geography, and then also of other social sciences, in which the map in itself came to be regarded as a cultural text reflecting power relations (see, for example: [Harley 1988; Campbell, Shapiro 1999]). There came to be an idea that cartography is *a priori* connected with the construction of hierarchies and standardisation of the landscape, and that "behind most maps is a patron" [Winlow 2006: 122]. Finally, *cartography* may be a metaphor for the ascription of value significance to space — the literary image of a country [Cronin 2012] or of an actually existing city, in which particular districts are perceived as "hotbeds of vice", breeding future criminals [Driver 1988; Fleury-Steiner et al. 2009]. All in all, cartography functions as a synonym for typology, conditioned also by spatial characteristics, a practice of governance through the limitation of otherness [Brown 2011]. There are also homonymic concepts that are less relevant to the present case. For example, *moral cartography* can be used to mean an internalised scheme of values that exists in the form of regimes of justification of what is right, i.e. principles of moral evaluation (here the author relies on the ideas of Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot) [Tuesta 2021], the ascription of ethical significance to the mapping of time and space itself [Bayly 2013], a moralising attempt to impose one's own values on other territories [Shweder 2017], etc.

[2]   See in greater detail: [Friendly, Palsky 2007; Dando 2010].

[3]   Among the factors influencing the perception of a place as more "rural" or "civilised" are the distance from the town and the infrastructure, but this topic deserves separate attention.

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In Krasnaya they prefer folk songs, accompanied on the accordion, shall we say, they like those... folk instruments, they prefer a more popular direction (Matvey, head of the Kholminskoye rural settlement, 2021).

When mapping the social space of the village, rural bureaucrats evaluate the residents as potential "clients" of the administration and try to explain why the "ways of life" in the villages differ. As in Anna's story cited above, peculiarities of lifestyle are often explained with reference to the imagined history of the village. For example, the head of the Markovo settlement characterised the inhabitants of one village as solid and intelligent, because their ancestors were Ukrainian, and said that the residents of another one liked cleanliness and order because "there were a lot of Germans there." The head of the Priozerskoye settlement used the same principle of classification on the basis of the mythologised ethnicity of the inhabitants, finding the reasons for the neatness, good looks and industriousness of his fellow-villagers in that their ancestors (like his own) "had come from the province of Vitebsk".

Another factor determining how a territory should be shaded is migration, which in the discourse of the administrators of Pavlovo created a "black and white" opposition. The proportion of "locals" versus "incomers"[1] in each village is significant for the rural bureaucrats. If there are significantly more of the former, new residents can be "re-educated", thereby preserving the overall character of the village: under the influence of the general "atmosphere", the "incomers" start to keep things clean, or get jobs, or stop overindulging in alcohol, since "drunkenness and idleness are not accepted" in the village.

As the administrators see it, once "incomers" become more than an evident minority, they introduce negative changes into the social space of the village. Two years after her survey of the territory Anna added that the people in Nikulino were no longer as friendly as they had been, because there were fewer locals, as opposed to incomers. It was as if the incomers were in opposition to the image of rural solidarity, breaking down "the common village mentality", which was taken to subsume readiness to help each other and to take part in collective activities.

Natalya: *There were cases when people died who had no family […] and their neighbours collected money for all that […].* [Village Day]

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[1] "Incomers" may be people who have moved in a couple of years ago, or people who have lived in the village for forty years; both employed and "positive", and "disadvantaged"; both those who take an active part in collective activities (events, administration) and those who do not. Someone who has moved in will probably remain an "incomer" as long as there is a significant number of people in the village who are "more local" (having been born or grown up there). However, this topic cannot be developed within the scope of a short article.

was our favourite holiday in the village […] what a lot of people used to come! […] And where help is concerned. In the village it's still that, the village mentality […] the rural mentality is still preserved.

A. Z.: *Why have people started living with less togetherness in some places?*

Natalya: *If, you know, if there are a lot of incomers* (Natalya, head of the Staritskoye settlement, 2021).

But does the idea of classifying the "characters" of the villages belong exclusively to low-level bureaucrats? Of course, a large part here is played by the rural administrators' involvement in the local social order. The habit of bestowing on the inhabitants of different villages a presumed specificity is, on the whole, typical of countryfolk, and this is known to researchers, *inter alia*, from the example of folk nicknames given to local groups and folk songs about neighbouring villages.[1] Indeed, both in Pavlovo and in Bolshoye the settlements are classified during conversations by various inhabitants, noting the merits of the appearance of their fellow-villagers and indicating the overall atmosphere in the village, as does, for example, Marina, an assistant in the shop at Pavlovo: "In Pavlovo, unlike Ilyinka, people are friendly, gentle. Even in [a neighbouring settlement] they said that the prettiest girls are in Pavlovo. Although they're all incomers here, not many people were born in Pavlovo, but they're all friendly. […] Evidently the more different ethnicities there are, the friendlier they are — they've nothing to quarrel over."

Often residents of both villages with experience of migration, when conversing with me, compared the two, like the administrators, connecting the solidarity or individualism of their fellow-villagers with the number of incomers and the distance from the town. One of the oldest inhabitants (born 1932), referred in classification to the geography of migration.

They [in Pavlovo] *were from Grodno […], so I suppose they were regarded as Ukrainians.[2] […] They were from Grodno, and the people there* [in the village where S. V. lived until she was twelve] *were from Smolensk. Even when my mother and I came here […] those people from Grodno called us "Smolyari"* [she laughs] (Stepanida Vasilyevna, resident of Pavlovo, 2021).

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[1]   As Natalya Drannikova, who has analysed material from Archangelsk region, observes, collective nicknames are based on a single distinguishing feature of the community (resulting from the specifics of their appearance, ethnicity, geographical peculiarities, etc.), which is referred to, usually with a negative evaluation, by people outside that community, in the contexts of interaction (before brawls, at social gatherings and on holidays) [Drannikova 2004]. Alongside this there are also collective nicknames that refer to people's own community, and these are not stylistically abased. They have the same purpose as "external" nicknames: to distinguish one's own community from another. This function of distinguishing between small groups is also fulfilled by songs about the inhabitants of neighbouring villages, to whom a common (usually negative) collective feature is ascribed [Drannikova 2004: 135–206].

[2]   Grodno (Hrodna) is in fact in Belarus. [Transl.]

However, the residents often expressed a point of view that was totally different from that of the administrators. "Villages nowadays are all the same. The state farms and collective farms have collapsed, people are leaving, it's the same everywhere." "People are all the same in the country — chatterboxes and gossips." It seems impossible to hear such opinions in conversation with rural administrators. Working with people from different villages, they predictably pay more attention to the differences between their inhabitants.

However, the ways villages are classified may differ, for example, between the employees of the village administration and women working in cultural activities. Whereas the employees of the Pavlovo administration compare people from Pavlovo and people from Ilyinka with the signs "locals — incomers" and "straightforward, good — complicated, bad", Victoria, who managed the club and the library in 2022, and Zhanna, who was in charge of the sports club, stressed the "passivity" of the people from Pavlovo, which was a hindrance to their work (when they tried to persuade people to take part in concerts or sports competitions, come to rehearsals and training sessions), in contrast to the "activeness" of people from Ilyinka.

Here I propose to ask the question why rural bureaucrats characterise villages with particular attention to how active and independent their inhabitants are. In Michael Lipsky's words, "street-level bureaucrats will differentiate among clients for reasons having more to do with solving or resolving work-related problems" [Lipsky 2010: 107]. What is the problem that rural bureaucrats solve when they classify various "characters" of villages?

Dependence on the unforeseen

The thesis of uncertainty, typical of the everyday work of street-level bureaucrats and resulting from "the complexity of the subject matter (people) frequency or rapidity with which decisions have to be made" [Lipsky 2010: 29] (see also: [Stalcup 2015]) is a commonplace in works on street-level bureaucrats. However, what uncertainty can there be, if rural officials are working with people they know, and not with a great flow of different "clients"?

The answer to this question should be sought in the specifics of the work of rural local government officials, whose responsibilities are formally limited to the solution of problems "of local significance" [Federalnyy zakon 2003: pt. 3, art. 14]. In practice this means that the work of the employees of local administrations is task-oriented [Thompson 1967]. Although rural local government officials are hired workers and, in E. P. Thompson's terms, their work is time-oriented (as is indicated by the working hours 08:00 to 16:00

displayed in their offices), in fact the time[1] of their work depends on the extent and urgency of their tasks on any particular day. In this sense rural administrators may be compared with doctors, policemen and the emergency services, who deal with clients' problems that arise suddenly and with emergencies, so that their work is predictably unpredictable.

Perhaps the degree of uncertainty in the everyday life of rural administrators is even higher, because their activity is composed of the accomplishment of the most diverse socially oriented tasks. Occupying an intermediate position between "the district" and "the population", rural bureaucrats must both react to the applications of their fellow-villagers and respond to the demands of the regional administrative agencies, and with a budget in permanent deficit and with no autonomy from their regional superiors.[2] As Valeriya, a leading specialist of the Pavlovo administration said regretfully, her work on the requirements of the "district" was "always new": "you don't know how to do" work of that sort. The tasks presented to the employees of the administration by the inhabitants of the settlement are also predictably unpredictable. As they maintain their social capital (a permanent network of relationships of mutual acquaintanceship and acknowledgment, based on group membership [Bourdieu 1986: 248]), and are therefore influenced by it, rural administrators fulfil the role of advisors on bureaucratic and personal questions, judges and peacemakers in conflicts, educators, and, all in all, people responsible for the wellbeing of the social space. Consequently, employees of the administration find themselves in a situation where the potential volume of their working tasks cannot be accurately calculated: at any moment it could be expanded by an unexpected request to give someone's unruly teenage daughter a good talking-to, resolve a quarrel between neighbours, or cut down an old poplar.

Thus, an administrative position in the village is in reality connected to a large extent with dependence and a lack of freedom of action. As one of the residents of Bolshoye, Igor, a businessman, said: "the settlement head is someone appointed to be responsible for something, a permanent scapegoat." Rural bureaucrats' everyday work (and therefore their everyday life in general, because the boundary between their working and non-working time is fragile and penetrable) depends entirely on the demands on them, the composition of which, even for the current day, cannot be known in advance. Following Elizabeth Cooper and David Pratten in

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[1] I hope to devote a separate work to the topic of rural bureaucrats' sense of time and interaction with it, touched on here in passing.

[2] On this peculiarity of rural local government see, for example: [Nikulin 2015] and the other articles in the collection edited by D. M. Rogozin [Rogozin 2015].

understanding uncertainty as a structure of feeling, "the lived experience of a pervasive sense of vulnerability, anxiety, hope and possibility" [Cooper, Pratten 2015: 1], one may say that rural administrators, being dependent on other people in their working practices, experience a feeling which the researchers call *social contingency.*

Contingency is one form of experienced uncertainty, linked to a sense of one's own present and future as filled with unforeseen circumstances and dependent on social relations [Cooper, Pratten 2015: 3–5]. I propose to interpret[1] this word as "dependence on the unforeseen". This is the sort of uncertainty that, for example, is written about by Susan Whyte and Godfrey Siu, who note that the life of Ugandans with only intermittent access to retroviral therapy is shot through with "an ethos of contingency" and a concern to seek and maintain potentially useful social connections [Whyte, Siu 2015: 27–29]. Understanding that their wellbeing depends on other people, HIV-positive Ugandans are always on the lookout for the possibilities latent in social relationships: "to be contingent is to be related" [Whyte, Siu 2015: 28–29].

Whyte and Siu's observations seem valuable to me in the context of the discussion of the everyday life of rural bureaucrats. These latter likewise perceive life as personal dependency on people and events that are impossible to predict; while walking home from work, Ira answered my question about her plans for tomorrow: "I solve problems as they occur. I might not have one today, tomorrow there might be one, and so I shall try to solve it." The administrative head at Bolshoye also frequently reverted to the same principle, and at the beginning of the day she often asked herself "What does the coming day have in store for us?" Whyte and Siu note that "Contingency denotes uncertainty about what may or may not occur, but it inflects uncertainty with specificity and invites us to consider connections" [Whyte, Siu 2015: 19]. These connections may move a situation of uncertainty towards greater certainty [Whyte, Siu 2015: 20]. Classification, which is at the centre of this article, seems to me to serve as evidence of these connections, of which account is constantly taken.

The rural bureaucrats' system of characterisation is, in this way, the result of the dependence of their position, and not of uncertainty in

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1   The English or French word may be translated literally into Russian as *kontingentnost,* in the sense, for example, of "le savoir du pouvoir-être-autre de la chose mondaine [knowledge of the possibility-of-being-different of any thing in this world]" [Meillassoux 2006: 54]. Kurt Hübner's "contingency of ontologies" is the inessential and arbitrary nature of ontologies, which nevertheless depend on decisions taken in the past [Safronov 2022: 389], and so forth. However, so as not to use a complicated term from philosophical discourse, I propose a more semantically perspicuous interpretation — dependence on the unforeseen — which reflects that nuance of meaning that is most relevant to the case that I am studying.

the sense of a lack of knowledge combined with a lack of time and/ or of the resources to be distributed, as it is among urban bureaucrats, who work with a large flow of clients and/or strangers. By sketching the social space and identifying the "characters" of the villages within settlements, rural administrators create a more predictable landscape of tasks, establishing which demand is more likely to be addressed to them by people from which village. Thus, by classifying the inhabitants of a village as "straightforward" or "complicated", rural administrators define how problematic it is for their work, and make the dependence on the unforeseen that accompanies their working practice less dangerous.

I would stress that, according to my observations, in all administrative systems of characterisation the principle of classification of villages according to how demanding their inhabitants are for the administrator unfailingly prevails. The inhabitants' preparedness to act independently, or at least not to obstruct the bureaucrats with claims and disruptive behaviour makes the officials' work easier and does not impose new problems on them. When they characterise a village as more "friendly" or "industrious", or *vice versa*, rural administrators create expectations of the direction from which more demands are likely to be made upon them, and which village they can feel more relaxed about.

The classification of the inhabitants of villages as "straightforward" or "complicated" serves a similar purpose. Rural administrators use these categories to determine whether they can count on help from the residents of a particular village. Thus, even before I went to Pavlovo I was intrigued by how Anna, the administrative head of Bolshoye, characterised this village during her weekly reports on the vaccination of the inhabitants against Covid-19: "They live in their own little world, they don't spend time on the internet like here. That's why they get vaccinated. Here everyone's super cool, everyone goes everywhere, everyone knows everything [and so many people refuse to be vaccinated. — *A. Z.*]." Later, in Pavlovo, the head of the administration and the workers at the village primary medical centre[1] confirmed that their vaccination statistics were indeed more than 90 %, since the local medics possessed authority thanks to the long time they had worked in the village and their common experience ("our children have grown up together"), and also because overall the village "is a very friendly one": "You tell them about the consequences […] they come and get vaccinated."

To demonstrate how the difference between a "straightforward" and a "complicated" character of a village is understood in practice and how these categories affect the working decisions of the employees

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1   A clinic staffed by nurse practitioners (*feldshery*) and midwives, rather than trained doctors. [Eds.]

of the administration, I shall give the following example. During my fieldwork, first in Pavlovo, and then a week later in Ilyinka, new gas supply contracts were being signed. This procedure had no impact on the formal indicators of the work of the administration, but the head of the settlement, Nadezhda, felt that it was in her interest[1] that as many people as possible should sign the new contract, since, in her words, only here could she, as the representative of the local authority, help to mitigate this bureaucratic procedure (prepare certificates, solve problems with documents and come to agreement with the gas board in difficult situations), whereas in the [district] administrative centre (the journey to which was, moreover, long and expensive) people without the right documents would simply be met with a refusal.

Nadezhda rang round the residents of Pavlovo whose names were on the list provided by the gas board in advance, and deliberately did not put up a notice, "so that they didn't all come at once". Nevertheless, people whose names were not on the list also came to the administrative office, and those whose names were on the list more than once appeared before their appointments. Finally, on the day when the new contracts were to be signed, a queue formed at the administrative office early in the morning, as the head of the administration had predicted, previously observing with satisfaction (like the other local administrators), "Our people are responsible, you don't have to call them in specially."

By contrast, the head of administration had not only rung round the residents of Ilyinka, but sent around with a local postwoman printed reminders of the date of the new contract and the necessary documents. However, there were only a few people at the club in Ilyinka, where the gas people were, and Nadezhda had to send the driver Timur round the houses of everyone on the list. As a result, a few more forgetful individuals arrived, but by no means everyone who had been invited. As Ira commented when she had heard the story of my trip to Ilyinka, "you bring them [the gas people] to people, and then they're dissatisfied, they'll complain."

Thus, knowing the "complicated" character of the people of Ilyinka and the "straightforward" character of the "responsible" people of Pavlovo allowed the employees of the administration not only to organise their work more effectively, but also to form their expectations and to devise a means of justifying their administrative successes and failures with reference to the peculiarities of the inhabitants' "character".

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[1] As I see it, her interest in this procedure was partly conditioned by the fact that it would demonstrate the "work" of the administration. (The employees often complain of the reproaches addressed to them by the inhabitants that "they aren't doing any work".) A demonstration of "work" would have a positive effect on the officials' symbolic capital.

The ability to classify as knowledge of the "*khozyain* of the territory"

So, in resisting dependence on the unforeseen and aiming to fulfil their tasks, rural administrators make active use both of individual and group characteristics of the inhabitants of the settlement. The classifications, moreover, are not implicit, they are frequently enunciated by members of the administrative teams in accordance with their accustomed culture of discussing every demand and event that takes place in the village. Rural bureaucrats use persistent categories describing particular persons or the village as a whole, when they discuss the inhabitants amongst themselves after interacting with them (explaining the reasons for their words and behaviour), or else try to predict the possible course of events before interaction, saying, for example, "now I'm going to listen to them, if they come here", or planning to ring up a resident at a particular time, because "they don't get up till lunchtime in Ilyinka". In the same way, in their conversations at work, low-level administrators firstly rationalise their successes and failures of communication with the residents, rooting their causes in essential characters, and secondly, they form expectations, resisting the unforeseen.

It seems significant to me that besides their occasional remarks in the course of their everyday work, rural administrators often referred to the description of the social differences between villages in conversation with me, an outsider in the village. Both they and other residents unfailingly stressed that one of the main features of rural life was "knowing everybody": "Anyway, we live in the village, anyway, we know everybody." The ability to classify particular residents and villages in one's territory is evidence of such knowledge, and gives the employees of the administration and the members of their teams the possibility of affirming their status as rural administrators. This thought is confirmed, in my view, by the fact that in conversation with me, describing their work in the village administration, primary medical centre or club, people often came by themselves, without any leading questions, to comparing the "characters" of the villages. Here, I contend, an important role is played by the idea of responsibility for a territory, which the administrators share, particularly the heads. As Nadezhda put it, "There are two villages, I'm responsible for both of them, beginning at birth and ending when they're taken to the graveyard. […] If there are fires, I can't sleep. […] I know who drinks, I know […] who can be looked after. […] I know all that, and I really feel responsible for each of them." In this system of ideas the head of the administration takes the role of "*khozyayka* (the [female] person in charge) of the territory", as the administrators and other inhabitants of Pavlovo and Bolshoye explained to me several times.

Douglas Rogers, who studied the peculiarities of post-Soviet administration using the example of a village in Perm region, noted that an essential element of it was "being a *khoziain*" [Rogers 2006: 917].[1] By "*khoziain*" [*khozyain*] Rogers meant primarily the heads of local businesses, who, by means of informal exchanges and conniving at petty theft, were able to bring people together in moral communities. Asking whether the local administration was a *khozyaistvo*, he came to the conclusion that since the local authorities had no resources that could be stolen, and had a highly developed audit culture (constant reports and checks), it was difficult for officials to create moral communities with the inhabitants by means of informal arrangements. This circumstance was a hindrance to administrative employees acquiring the status of "*khozyain*".

To a large extent this conclusion chimes with a comment by Elena, who worked at Bolshoye as a specialist in military registration: "As the head, she is the *khozyayka* [feminine of *khozyain*] of the territory. But in fact, we don't have any rights at all. We are purely a mediator between the people and the district. They [the district administration] dump it on her [the head], and she asks it of us [the administration employees]. And if anything goes wrong — 'sort it out for yourselves' [the words of the district officials]." The people who live in the country and the administration employees have the idea of the head as the "*khozyaika*", but, as this specialist says, putting it into practice is prevented by the village administration's lack of real administrative powers and material resources. This institutionally created vulnerability of the administrators' position, their helplessness even (particularly noticeable in contrast with the position of the director of the agricultural enterprise at Bolshoye, who has real material resources) is regularly underlined by the employees of the administration, who complain that they are "pawns" in a political game and "in debt to everyone". Therefore, in my view, it is important for administrators to demonstrate, by means of classification, their knowledge of the territory. Thereby rural bureaucrats, as it were, remind themselves of their status as *khozyayka*, even if in practice they often lack the means to conduct themselves as if they were fully "persons in charge". As the administrative head at Bolshoye explained to me, "I want to cut [some trees] down, and I can't do it here and I can't do it there. It's not in my power [nor do I have the budget for it]. I can't do it on the school grounds, because they've got their own *khozyain* [the educational administrator (*zavuch*) and headteacher, who is at a school in another village, since the one in Bolshoye is subordinate to it]."

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[1]   Rogers does not even attempt to translate the Russian word *khozyain*. The primary meaning is *owner,* but it has a very wide semantic field, in some ways comparable to that of the French le *patron*. [Transl.]

In Bolshoye I noticed that when we were discussing the curiosities of my telephone conversations with the inhabitants, whom I used to ring up to invite them to the elections, Anna always tried to guess who exactly I had been talking to. Since the programme I was using only gave information about the year of birth and the name and patronymic of people on the electoral roll, together with the initial letter of their surname (which in any case I did not always remember exactly), I could guess by their voice what sex they were and about how old, and tell this to the administrative head, also repeating particular things that they had said. Anna was much taken with this recognition game. On one occasion when she had again come up with what she thought was the right answer, she commented laughingly, "However well you hide [behind initials], I still know you all."

This episode illustrates that "knowing everybody" (which was emphasised by everyone in the village) is not only social capital to which all the inhabitants of the village have access, but also, in the case of low-level bureaucrats, cultural capital, an embodied "product of accumulated labor", through accumulation of knowledge about the inhabitants, "external wealth converted into an integral part of the person", an attained level of "education" [Bourdieu 1986: 244–245]. The ability to classify and determine the seemingly dominant qualities of the inhabitants' character is, therefore, an important part of an administrator's competence.

Thinking, as she did from time to time, about changing her job, Anna said: "I'd like something calmer: not having to answer for the cows, nor for the dogs, nor for the children, nor for any piddling nonsense." From this, and from the remarks cited above, it follows that the administrators perceive their own role as implicitly including the idea of being the *khozyain* — not economically, with the ability to provide resources (as Rogers understood it), but presuming the ideas, important for notions of rural social order, of responsibility for and of knowledge of everybody. The classifications studied in this article performatively restore to the rural administrators the status of "*khozyain* of the territory", which is becoming ever vaguer in view of the reduction in the autonomy of rural settlements (on this see, for example: [Sheludkov et al. 2016: 146–149]).

Thus, the classification of the "characters" of villages is of great significance for administrators' perception of their own position. Knowing everybody and an ability, demonstrated without leading questions, to classify the inhabitants of various villages, thereby creating a moral map of the territory, are an echo of the administrators' ability to represent their "subject" territory. This skill is essential, not only for conducting the administration, but also literally for being an administrator.

Conclusion

The idea of the "special" "own" (expert or internal) knowledge developed within a professional community has become a commonplace of social research into professions (see, for example, the survey in [Romanov, Yarskaya-Smirnova 2009]). In the cases of moral map-making of villages that I have examined, "special" knowledge is also an important attribute of the professional activity of administrators, but this knowledge ("knowing everybody") is not entirely, or even not at all exclusively bureaucratic. "Knowing everybody" is shared, to a greater or lesser degree, by everyone who lives in the village, coexisting within a small and more or less isolated space, and it is one of the most important components of the rural social order. However, the knowledge of the head of the administration, the village social worker or an administrative specialist must be the "quintessence" of the common rural knowledge, its ultimate form, and, among other things, the administrative classification of villages serves as a proof of this.

It is harder, according to all the administrators that I talked to, to be a rural bureaucrat than to be a bureaucrat in the town. To a great extent this is the result of the universal knowledge that is expected of rural civil servants both by the district officials, who require legally correct documents and diverse information about the population, and by their fellow-villagers, who wish to know all kinds of telephone numbers or sort out the details of local events. "You'd have thought, why ring me, eh? How should I know? But still, I'm not going to answer everybody. How should I know where things are?" complains Anna after another phone call about the date of the funeral of someone from the village. "I'm not a lawyer, but they [in the regional administrative agencies] sit there, each getting on with their own work, but they expect us to know everything. They make us out to be some kind of prodigies," comments Nadezhda on a request from "the district". Such examples of bureaucrats' displeasure at excessive demands on their knowledge are not infrequent. Nevertheless, as I have tried to show in this article, universal knowledge — not of everything, but of everyone — is essential to rural administrators.

This knowledge, which manifests itself as an ability to determine the character not only of individual residents, but of whole villages, is used at work to allow low-level bureaucrats to fulfil some particular task, form expectations, and justify their administrative successes or failures, that is, to adapt to the predictable unpredictability that is characteristic of their work. However, the cartography of residents' characters is not only a tool of administration that allows the bureaucrats to make the right moves in their game of chess. The enunciation of characteristics, the performative placing on the outline map of

the settlement of different shadings and symbols has an important function in itself.

By means of the moral cartography of their space, rural administrators, as it were, elevate knowledge that is accessible to one degree or another to every villager to its ultimate form, that which a real "*khozyain* of the territory" should have. Being low-level officials in a centralised administrative system, dependent on the contingency of the social, rural bureaucrats perceive their position as vulnerable and devoid of any real power. However, by making a map of the social space, that is, creating a hierarchical image of the territory in accordance with their own values, they perform an act of power. Making a moral map of the settlement allows the employees of the village administration and the members of their teams to demonstrate, within the collective and to themselves, their administrative cultural capital, that is, their exhaustive knowledge of everybody. I suggest that classifications of the "characters" of villages allow rural bureaucrats to affirm their status as "*khozyain* of the land" and to influence how their role is perceived. Thus, by creating a moral map of settlements, rural bureaucrats affirm their status as village residents and authoritative administrators.

Acknowledgments

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