Introduction

Deservingness

Reassessing the Moral Dimensions of Inequality

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The work on this volume started from an office conversation in 2016, the editors sharing their outrage about another public controversy sparked by the Austrian conservative right-wing government. Once again, members of the government suggested that asylum allowances were somewhat unjust to 'the population' or 'us taxpayers', or 'hard-working Austrians' and 'Austrian pensioners'. The elements of such messages seemed all too clear: an imagined 'us' threatened by 'undeserving' yet still '(over)assisted' 'Others'. This combination of differentiation and moralized assessment of distribution sparked ever more associations in our ongoing conversations. Over decades, it was claimed that 'lazy immigrants' receive too much welfare or recognition, 'scroungers' abuse welfare systems, and many other similar and contrasting examples. They prompted us to bring together disparate scholarly discussions and analyses of processes of moralized assessments of distribution that seemed to coalesce in specific conjunctures and registers of power.

(Un)deservingness is our attempt at creating a dialogue among these several fields of thematic scholarship and theoretical orientations. In recent years, anthropology in/of Europe has been a thriving scholarly environment for research on those questions. We are very pleased to have in this volume some of the scholars who drive the research that inspired us to think about (un)deservingness as a crucial category of contemporary politics. They come from various ethnographic and theoretical fields. As a comparative discipline, anthropology allows

for contrasting cases, contexts and nuances of approaches while analysing the structural features of entangled phenomena.

We hope readers find our approach as useful as we do for the analysis of phenomena that are neither 'small/micro' nor 'large/macro', but rather entangled, distributed and pervasive. The pervasiveness of contemporary moralizations of inequality perhaps makes their consequences even more telling and problematic as they create new ways to reproduce racist, sexist and classist configurations in contemporary capitalisms. By and by, our own moral outrage at frames in public debate about refugees translated into a critical intersectional approach that politicizes how social struggles involve moralization as a way to justify or contest inequality.

(Un)deservingness as Conceptual Heuristic

Our aim in this volume is to provide a comparative and integrative analysis of configurations of distribution. At the most general level, deservingness acts as a moral assessment of processes of distribution. The focus of this volume is on processes where distribution (re)produces unequal societal configurations with particular clarity. This is especially important to us writing during the COVID-19 pandemic and also at a time in which overaccumulation meets increasingly selective redistribution. There has never been more value circulating and yet its distribution has become ever more unequal. In this conjuncture, it seems crucial to us to analyse how inequality is rendered justified or unjustified and to make visible processes by which inequality in outcome or access to resources or legal status is normalized and/or contested.

The question of who deserves what and why raises issues about social struggle and the creation and distribution of value in a range of social configurations in a racist, sexist and capitalist world. Capitalism works through a series of differentiations that order people. We still regard 'class' as the essential concept for analysing social inequality. Anthropologists provide a concept of class that describes social positionality beyond the formal realm of production as most Western Marxisms would (Weiss 2018: 110). Laura Bear and others point to class as generated in gender, race, sexuality and kinship (Bear et al. 2015) and link to a rich literature in Social Reproduction Theory (Bhattacharya 2017; Bhattacharyya 2018). Such a broad conception of class is necessary in order not to lose sight of 'society' while attempting to understand the complexity of categorization within

the configurations in which interlocutors are assessed. A formulation of class as 'shifting, interconnected and antagonistic social inequalities' (Kalb 2015: 14) and their reproduction allows us to understand both the historical roots and emergence of deservingness frames and contemporary positional claims. Ethnographic research can observe what Alessandra Mezzadri calls 'fragments' of social order (2021: 1) and reconstruct the specificities of 'how come' certain configurations of class have become crucial in a given situation, at the same time as focusing conceptually and theoretically on how 'actually existing class' can be analysed.

The approach we and the contributors follow in this volume is to look at situations in which (un)deservingness does not smoothly legitimize wealth or poverty, but where it is ambivalently contested and legitimized. The reasons for choosing such entry points are manifold, yet, most importantly, they reveal the always-unfinished emergence of certain configurations, their processuality and the labour that goes into maintaining, creating and undoing them. In economic anthropology and history, such frictions are often discussed under the heading of moral economy (Thompson 1971).

Focusing on frictions among the ideological dimensions of inequality makes visible how moral vocabularies articulate with social struggle (Fraser and Honneth 2003). These could work either as the contestation or legitimization of existing configurations. Contestations often problematize a given configuration of distribution, as is the case when individuals (seen) as members of a group do not have access to resources, but claim that they would deserve to. Legitimization frequently works the other way around, as in arguments that some people, due to their behaviour or moral character, do not deserve access to certain resources. Normalization is the endpoint and outcome of a process in which a certain configuration of inequality appears as 'normal' or even 'natural' so that the very notion of (un)deservingness is sedimented into 'common sense' (Crehan 2016: 136).

In order to explore the emergence of contemporary claims of deservingness, we suggest employing a genealogical approach in terms of tracing ideas of deservingness in different socioeconomic and ideological-political configurations by being especially attentive to implications of them 'not having a history' (Foucault 1977: 139). Our focus thereby lies in tracing the arrangements of resources in which deservingness came to be strongly negotiated in recent decades – the redistributive welfare state in neoliberal capitalism, national citizenship and access to social insurance, contemporary forms of consumer debt and privatized care, and welfare institutions.

Because (un)deservingness is often normalized, moralized assessments of inequality require theoretically informed, reconstructive and comparative ethnography to relate the more open contestations or legitimizations to the hidden or sedimented forms that are key to how societies are organized. To understand how people in specific socioeconomic circumstances conceive of inequality and what they think is right or wrong, just or unjust about it, ethnographic fieldwork can provide substantial insights into the complexities and paradoxes of these conceptions and the social positions of those who attend to them. Such a reconstructive and comparative approach is well equipped to address the actual situations, ideologies and actors, and can be related to various strands of social theory that attempt to explain such configurations of inequality and moralization.

(Un)deservingness is a processual and relational notion rather than a condition. It is situated in structures of power that articulate inequality with specific moral common senses. Structural patterns of racism, sexism, ableism and classism form and cohere the specific patterns of inequality, and also how they are legitimized, normalized or contested. Following Hadas Weiss' writing on values, we are more interested in the work performed by deservingness than understanding it as a mere orientation of people (Weiss 2015: 251). The structural insights into configurations of power need to be combined with a careful and reconstructive analysis of how historical and emerging patterns of contestation and legitimization reconfigure and reinscribe (un)deservingness into the relations between imagined or constructed groups.

While (un)deservingness as an analytical heuristic can be an orientation towards specific questions of inequality, distribution, morality or ideology, it is not in itself an explanation. As the various authors in this volume show, the explanation requires a mutually constitutive relationship between ethnography and theory (Mezzadri 2021).

Arguments and Ideologies of (Un)deservingness

Arguments made about (un)deservingness are often contingent, context-specific and used in morally laden comparative assessments of subjects and their access to unequally distributed resources (Willen and Cook 2016: 96). As such, they indicate access to distribution of resources and recognition as subjects. A concept figuring prominently in arguments about deservingness is the notion of rights or entitlements. If the entitlement of a person or group to certain

resources is institutionalized by law or obligation, (un)deservingness can play out as if it were a condition, normalized and/or stabilized in law and social structures. A telling example is property rights when citizens of a state are legally able to own property, whereas noncitizens are not, as is frequently the case in European societies. Whether they can actually afford to buy property or if others think they deserve to own it is an empirical question. The very fact that some people are included in the principal right to own and others are not illustrates the relationships between actual rights and the possibility to enjoy them. Both create a differentiation and both are consequences of the institutionalization of distribution. How they are normalized, legitimized or contested varies across social contexts and times.

It is the aim of this volume to trace such specific contexts and relations in which deservingness is used, what kinds of social imaginaries are mobilized in its use and what is left unaddressed. Because, for instance, public discussions of deservingness often arise along controversies, frequently the assessments of specific subjects are telling in terms of the social imaginary of who deserves what and according to which attributes.

Although these social imaginaries do not necessarily form coherent ideologies, the way in which people conceive of deservingness is seldom accidental. Specific ideologies and how they frame and legitimize inequality play an important role in the patterns we trace and reconstruct through ethnography. Arguably, it is rare that ethnographers encounter coherent ideologies, which is why fragments of (un)deservingness we find in the field are better analysed through a Gramscian lens on common sense.

Common Senses of (Un)deservingness

In conceptualizing and tracing deservingness, we build on Gramsci's seminal insights into the workings of ideology and cultural hegemony. This allows us to further ask about affective and sensing registers of deservingness and how they relate to the broad repertoire of common sense arguments (see e.g. Gramsci 1971; Crehan 2011) regarding social justice that societal actors employ when they claim and contest deservingness in configurations of class as defined above (Hall 2019: 111ff).

On the one hand, this approach makes it possible to grasp claims of deservingness in entangled economic, political-legal and sociocultural

societal spheres. On the other hand, a focus on deservingness allows for tracing and 'unpacking' ideologies. It reveals how ideologies work with and rest on accessible common-sense arguments of deservingness, which not only mobilize citizens and arrange group relations, but also potentially 'turn into' law (e.g. cutting social support for asylum seekers). Furthermore, the lens of deservingness shows not only crucial boundaries between different political ideologies, but also the processes and instances where ideologies that are perceived as irreconcilable appear, in surprising ways, as 'strange bedfellows'.

Here, the prism of deservingness allows us to think critically with Gramsci's concept of common sense, which Kate Crehan relates to a specific reading of culture understood as a way of life and hence as a way in which inequalities are lived (Crehan 2011) – that is, the complex and seemingly paradoxical beliefs that people encounter as self-evident truths. An ethnographic exploration of such common-sense-based claims about structural inequalities can examine the play of power and reconstruct why some beliefs at certain times seem to be self-evident, and which actors and groups are involved in that process and in which roles.

After having sketched our approach to (un)deservingness as an ethnographic and reconstructive methodology compatible with critical theories, we go on to revisit disparate discussions in various anthropological fields in which we find inspiring approaches and configurations where moralization legitimizes and 'makes sense of' inequality.

Perspectives in and about Research on Deservingness

Rights, Humanitarian Subjects and Legitimate Suffering

Deservingness represents a highly sensitive barometer of inequality and 'Othering', the analysis of which adds to and complicates existing anthropological explorations of rights and humanitarianism. Rights to specific forms of distribution primarily represent the juridification and institutionalization of entitlement. Deservingness, on the other hand, refers to the moral assessment of whether these entitlements are legitimate and just or contested and unfair. An example is unemployment benefits. Their institutionalization followed negotiations about whether unemployed people deserved to be supported by the imagined community of taxpayers or insurance members. Then, once institutionalized, accessing unemployment benefits became a matter

of knowing about them, being eligible according to the formal criteria (such as involuntary job loss and income level) and claiming them. Hence, access to what one is legally entitled to is thought to be rather impersonal, formal and independent of individual assessments of moral character or virtue. Empirically, the distinction is often more gradual than categorical, as the contributors to this volume show. Rights and deservingness can blend into one another when looking at specific histories, sociolegal figures and political aims. Several authors in this volume start from the hypothesis that entitlements have become increasingly conditional upon forms of moral testing – for example, home visits by state actors and other moral assessments of whether a person's behaviour, virtues or character make them morally deserving of support (Fraser and Gordon 1994).

The blending of sociolegal and moral registers into one another is a key field in the ethnographic and theoretical exploration of deservingness. Obvious examples include legal cases about sexual violence that turn into elaborations of the victim's character traits and accusations of signalling immorality as 'invitations' to (predominantly male) sexual violence. The frequent police murders of Black people in the United States often provoke fierce debates about how racism translates into imaginaries of immorality and criminal conduct. (Un)deservingness as an analytical lens productively challenges a clear-cut separation between rights and morality. Instead, it shows how some groups of actors use moralization to legitimize violence or to call impersonal rights into question in relation to others. We caution that debates about deservingness in similar situations act as distractions and attempts to blame victims of direct or structural violence.

The contemporary shift towards conditional forms of social assistance, activation schemes for unemployed people and the increasing selectivity of state redistribution is accompanied by processes of accusation, suspicion and assessment, which makes deservingness such a crucial issue in contemporary economic and political processes. In some cases, individuals/groups might be entitled to forms of social support, but are said not to deserve them. In other cases, they claim to deserve them, but are not entitled to them. Understood in such a way, deservingness is a crucial concept for contemporary struggles for resources and recognition.

A specific understanding of deservingness is to be found on an ontological level in the concept of human rights. The underlying premises of human rights are based on claims of universalism and thus the ultimate claim of equality.[1] The concept of human rights builds

on the claim that all humans are entitled to basic rights, regardless of any further assessment of deservingness. Deservingness discourses, on the other hand, often stress conditionality, context-specificity and individual behaviour when used to contest or legitimize entitlements, or make the actual access to what one is entitled to more difficult. As Amartya Sen reminds us, the fact that such discourses are infused with morality should not lead us to think that not having access to, for example, social insurance or the health system is primarily a value judgement (Sen 1981: 17). Rather, we propose carefully separating the mechanics of entitlements, access and outcomes of distribution from the views and values visible in their negotiation. Thus, deservingness is more than, and differs from, discourses about entitlement.

In the specific example of the right to asylum (and thus citizenship), we can see how arguments of deservingness play out regardless of the actual instance of whether asylum is granted or not. Even in European debates about the case of refugees from Syria, who have by and large been considered as asylum-deserving and, as a rule, have been granted asylum (in the course and aftermath of the so-called 'refugee crisis' of 2015), one can often hear arguments of undeservingness as soon as their image as helpless 'bare human' victims (see Malkki 1996) is unsettled. In right-wing arguments and anti-refugee/migrant public discourse, the possession of mobile phones, money or branded clothes is taken up to frame people as 'not-really' refugees or 'merely' economic migrants. For example, in the summer of 2015, a right-wing local politician (a member of the Austrian Freedom Party) posted a sarcastic set of pictures entitled 'find the latest iPhone' on social media showing refugees in Linz, Austria (Schmid 2015).

The issue of forced migration is also a prime social field where the discourse of rights intersects (and forms a disjuncture) with what has been recently explored in the anthropology of humanitarianism. As Liisa Malkki has outlined in her early work on Hutu refugees in Tanzania (Malkki 1996), discourses and policies of humanitarianism imply a specific image of the 'real' refugee, deserving of humanitarian aid and assistance. This image crucially rests on the victimization of individuals and groups, as well as on a strong gendering tendency that frames the ideal human victim as a woman and/or a child, whose 'wounds speak louder than words' (ibid.: 384). Most importantly, humanitarianism 'depoliticize[s] the refugee category and [constructs] in that depoliticized space an ahistorical, universal humanitarian subject' (ibid.: 378).

According to recent work in anthropology, humanitarian reason describes the emergence of thought that considers humanity as moral

community, where suffering of fellow humans elicits compassion if the suffering is considered legitimate (Fassin 2012: 252). As a rather recent form of moral sentiment (ibid.: 1) – embedded in, but different from, religious charity – humanitarianism's crucial tension is the one between compassion and repression, rather than the recognition of rights (ibid.: x). In this sense, humanitarianism is a 'politics of precarious lives' (ibid.: 4) resting on inequality, since it is directed 'from above to below, from the more powerful to the weaker, the more fragile, the more vulnerable – those who can generally be constituted as victims of an overwhelming fate' (ibid.). However, compassion is not unconditional, as the idea of humanitarianism implies that there are legitimate sufferers – this idea of legitimacy suggests a boundary-making process between those who suffer legitimately and those whose suffering does not render them deserving. An example is victims of natural disasters – who suffer due to events beyond their control – who are most often understood as deserving of assistance (e.g. Ticktin 2011; Fassin 2012). A more ambiguous example, which shows the selective and historically embedded logic of humanitarianism, is Miriam Ticktin's analysis (2011) of how, even in the context of pronounced anti-immigrant sentiments and restrictive migration policies in France under Sarkozy, having experienced sexual violence rendered immigrant women as 'deserving' of compassion, as well as of the right to be granted legal residence status. Hence, such phenomena as homonationalism can link with imperialist legacies of white saviourism (Puar 2007; Abu-Lughod 2013).

As both examples show, humanitarianism exemplifies how deservingness can play out in different and ambiguous ways. However, the analytical prism of deservingness makes it possible to go beyond the focus on humanitarianism, as claims of deservingness are not bound exclusively to precarious populations (e.g. when the salaries of top managers are discussed in terms of deservingness) and feature other forms of moral politics around distribution.

Furthermore, while humanitarian aid is grounded in the affective-political practice of compassion with certain precarious categories of people in need (those seen as not having contributed to their condition), claims of deservingness are often affectively charged in other ways. Claims of deservingness primarily have the affective quality of deploring injustice, while implying a relational-comparative perspective: one feels entitled to something; concerned about having been unjustly deprived of something; or that someone else has obtained something without having deserved it. Related to, yet distinct from, the affective dimension, we conceptualize deservingness also in terms

of *sense/sensing*. We thereby aim to capture the everyday practice dimension of how social difference – and related claims of who deserves what and why – is continuously 'sensed', without necessarily being accountably argued. As noted above, exploring the sense/sensing of deservingness thus lends itself to recapturing Gramsci's notion of common sense.

Deservingness is often 'articulated in a vernacular *moral* register' (Willen and Cook 2016: 96, emphasis in original) that infuses everyday discourse, media reports, political negotiation and legal discourse. As a vernacular moral register, deservingness appears to be much more accessible and employable in everyday use than notions such as rights or humanitarianism, which predispose particular and often expert forms of knowledge. In other words, statements of deservingness are more 'at hand'; they can be easily 'picked up' and employed, and do not necessarily have to rely on accountable argumentation. Related to this point of 'argumentative accessibility', deservingness has a strong and specific affective-emotional dimension. This dimension is not only interesting in terms of its intersections with morality (see, for example, Throop (2012) on 'moral sentiments'), but because it opens an important aspect of differentiation between statements of deservingness and claims referring to rights and humanitarian concepts of legitimate needs.

In such a way, our approach towards deservingness adds to the existing literature: (1) by pointing towards the way in which rights and entitlements are complicated by moral registers that underlie, undermine or attack institutionalized rights through assessments of deservingness; (2) by offering an analytical approach towards inequality that combines power, morality and inequality; and (3) by directing the analytical framework towards all kinds of social arrangements, including those in which humanitarian reason or suffering plays only a minor role. The ethnographic and reconstructive approach that we take furthermore enables the linking of specific settings in which something gets moralized to larger configurations of inequality across time in which actors do the moralizing.

Migration and Migrant (Un)deservingness

Research on mobility has a decades-long history of analysing political and moral questions about migration, asylum and multiculturalism, questions that were exacerbated by the so-called 'refugee crisis' in Europe in 2015. Political parties and groups from across the political spectrum seem to agree on a tacit consensus regarding the European

migration regimes at the most basic level. This agreement constitutes categorizing immigrants into those who deserve asylum and others who are undeserving of that status, as well as into those who are welcome as investors or highly skilled professionals and those unwelcome, 'merely' economic migrants, who are often low-skilled and with few resources. Paralleling the electoral successes of right-wing parties in Europe, the boundaries between legal categories, and hence those people who are legally entitled to asylum/citizenship and those to be deported, have been contested among and within political parties and governments, and by social movements and political initiatives all over Europe. This process was accompanied by a remarkable moralization of migration and access to welfare and asylum. A related example is the former Austrian Vice-Chancellor Heinz-Christian Strache's argument (*Krone* 2018) for cutting welfare allowances for asylum seekers (in this case, the minimum monthly allowance), which can be paraphrased as follows: people who have never contributed to the Austrian social system do not deserve to have more monthly allowances than pensioners who worked and paid taxes for years, since this would not be in accordance with social justice. In the aftermath of the so-called 'refugee crisis', this discourse and then policy shift regarding asylum seekers had folded into the overall moralized legitimization of Austrian migration policy marked by increasing deportations and cutting welfare allowances for refugees. According to former Austrian Chancellor and People's Party (ÖVP) leader Sebastian Kurz, such policies would deter others from trying to cross the Mediterranean and risk their lives in search of a better life. Hence, cutting welfare benefits for asylum seekers would contribute to saving lives and would thus, according to Kurz, even represent a moral and humanitarian act (*Welt* 2019). Such moral acrobatics, we argue, form part of the moralization of inequality in general and the argument of deservingness in particular in a racist necropolitical conjuncture.

A focus on immigration and deservingness is of particular interest not only against the background of the rise of anti-immigration rhetoric and policy in the aftermath of the so-called 'refugee crisis', but also because, in hierarchies of deservingness, it is frequently immigrants who occupy the lowest position after the elderly, the ill, people with special needs and the unemployed (e.g. van Oorschot 2006). Assessing hierarchies of deservingness – even if based on simplified heuristic categories – highlights the fact that, for a holistic and integrated analysis of deservingness, as aimed at in this volume, questions of welfare, health, citizenship and migration should not be

explored separately. In this sense, the analytical lens of (un)deservingness can also contribute to the 'demigrantization' (Dahinden 2016) of migration research, since it makes how debates and policies on (forced) migration are embedded in and co-produce processes and dynamics of intersectional inequality more accessible.

Furthermore, it is essential to analyse and compare how the category of immigrants is diversified and hierarchized through moral assessments of deservingness. As mentioned above, the common ground of different European (im)migration policies (beyond their ideological differences) is the differentiation between the undeserving 'fake' refugee and economic migrant on the one hand, and the 'real' refugee deserving of humanitarian aid and asylum, as well as the 'desirable' work migrant (e.g. the highly skilled and sought-after professional) on the other. As highlighted by Kristin Yarris and Heide Castaneda, deservingness figures as a 'discursive framing' of displacement, in terms of border crosser's motives for migration (Yarris and Castaneda 2015: 64). It implies a normative binary between the 'voluntary' (economic) undeserving migrant and the 'involuntary migrant' (refugee), whereby political persecution, for example, frequently makes the migrants 'deserving' of refugee status/asylum, whereas climate change or poverty render those fleeing such conditions 'undeserving economic migrants'. The use of policy-driven categories in migration, which typically focus on the dichotomy between forced and voluntary migration, has been shown both to be harmful to migrants and to not reflect migrant experiences (Crawley and Skleparis 2017).

Most recently, the so-called 'refugee crisis' in Europe has fortified this binary and has given the notion of deservingness an acute importance in decisions about asylum or deportation and, in many cases, life and death (Holmes and Castaneda 2016). Both border processes of inclusion and exclusion and the political-public discourses about the so-called 'refugee crisis' focused on 'sorting people into undeserving trespassers versus those who deserve rights and care from the state' (ibid.: 13). An ethnographic approach to migrant deservingness, as highlighted by Holmes and Castaneda (2016) and as pursued in this volume, makes it possible to address the contested nature and mutual impact of political, legal and vernacular moralizing discourses of which (forced) migrants deserve what, and how this relates to the needs and claims of other (domestic) populations defined as vulnerable and in need of or having the right to assistance. Exploring the agents and processes of 'parsing moral deservingness' (ibid.: 18) between (and against) different population categories reveals both

the moral dimensions of legal regulations as well as the similarities and differences between legal and (again contested) vernacular claims of deservingness.

To us, deservingness is a fruitful conceptual framework for deepening the analysis of how state actors categorize mobility and thus legitimize migration and welfare policies, as well as the institutional processes and public discourses on migrants. We join Sarah Willen in her observation that there are well-developed approaches for exploring migrants' entitlements and access to social services, while the 'subtler moral positions that undergird them remain conspicuously underinvestigated' (Willen 2012: 805).

Within different assessments of immigration and deservingness focusing on different versions of welfare chauvinism (e.g. Jørgensen and Thomsen 2016), medical anthropology and migration scholars have studied migrants' access to welfare services through the lens of deservingness. Willen has published extensively on migrants' access to health services in Israel (2015). Willen and Jennifer Cook furthermore mapped an analytical approach towards 'health-related deservingness' by carefully separating rights claims from deservingness assessments – the latter being relational, conditional, contextual, syncretic, affect-laden and mutable (Willen and Cook 2016: 97). Willen and Cook propose studying stakeholders, contextual factors and evaluative criteria employed in these assessments, and point to the importance and exploration of how expert knowledge is invoked in what they call 'deservingness debates' (ibid.: 100). Our volume aims to build on this framework and analytically reconnect claims of deservingness to the issue of ideology and go one step further by investigating a range of contemporary fields of social struggle (see below).

In our endeavour to bridge explorations of deservingness in the context of migration with other themes and fields of knowledge, we also draw on approaches to (social) citizenship. As the research by Walter J. Nicholls et al. (2016) shows, focusing on migration and deservingness opens up new avenues of comparative and intersectional perspectives. In their comparative analysis of the culturalization of immigrant youth with precarious legal status in the United States and the Netherlands, the authors show how discourses of deservingness regarding legal status (citizenship) and generation can be interrelated through claims of 'cultural assimilation'.

The notion of social citizenship – originally introduced by T.H. Marshall (1950) and taken up by, for example, Margaret Somers (2008) – represents a promising conceptual pathway to exploring

(forced) migration and deservingness in the context of contested processes of distribution in the era of 'market fundamentalism' (ibid.: 2). It is precisely the context of migration that makes profoundly visible the complex dynamic of political citizenship and social citizenship through the ways in which they can become contested both jointly or separately. Apart from arguments of deservingness figuring prominently in the processes of moralizing migrants' access to political citizenship (most prominently through citizenship tests – see van Oers (2014, 2021); Monforte, Bassel and Khan (2019)), they are also in the foreground when arguing against social provisions for (forced) migrants, reflecting neoliberal conditionalities regarding social rights eroding the very social contract upon which citizenship is based. The financial crisis of 2007/ 2008 and its aftermath (see also next section) was the context of increasing conditionality of social citizenship, a development that seriously affects not only 'non-European' (forced) migrants, but also European work migrants. As Lafleur and Mescoli point out, using the example of Italian migrants in Belgium, mobility based on EU citizenship became increasingly conditional upon not claiming social citizenship, as 'the use of welfare by poor EU migrants leads to their depiction as a group that is 'undeserving' of the right to freedom of movement' (Lafleur and Mescoli 2018: 481).

Redistribution, Austerity and Welfare Retrenchment

The financial crisis of 2007/ 2008 was followed by widespread discussions about the systemic failures of capitalism among governments, financial oversight institutions, social movements and populations. A good part of these discussions implicitly or explicitly addressed moral questions. When does the banker's instrumental motivation turn to outright greed and immoral behaviour? How should a state's legal frameworks constrain profit motives to protect its citizens? Such questions, it seems, faded quickly from public discussion, followed by another and uncannily familiar set of moralizations of inequality.

Industrial and financial lobbying groups, alongside political parties, attacked rising government debt as being immoral towards future generations. With Greece as the most prominent example, government debt served as legitimation for an unprecedented restructuring in Southern Europe. Greece received the largest loan in human history, in a programme managed by the European Commission, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund. The political negotiations and public discussions about the questions of international solidarity, about the financing of governments and the

design of the eurozone, and even technocratic questions of how to manage a sound refinancing plan, were couched in the moral language of deservingness. Among many other such moralizations, newspapers accused 'the Greeks' of being lazy and wanting to live off others' money (*Bild* 2010), and Eurogroup President Jeroen Dijsselbloem suggested that Greeks had spent too much money on 'booze and prostitutes' (*Reuters* 2017) and were now asking for support. Political and political-economic issues were reframed as a matter of character or immoral habit to question whether 'Greeks' deserved the loans. Northern Europe is not exempt from this process of conditionality of social transfers linked to a moralized discourse about deservingness, with a renegotiation of deservingness criteria of welfare entitlements (van Oorschot 2000) accompanied by an ongoing discourse about welfare scroungers and the long-term unemployed, who are portrayed yet again as simply unwilling to work.

Such recent large-scale reconfiguration of political-economic systems and the role of moral imaginaries in them has frequently drawn on moral grammars of productivism and classism that have been well analysed in the literature. In his examination of the creation of modern labour markets in the early nineteenth century in England, Karl Polanyi describes how the Poor Law Reform of 1834 created categories of the deserving and the undeserving poor among those who had lost their land and were not able to find work in the burgeoning capitalist agriculture or factories (Polanyi 2001: 86). The moralization of selective welfare introduced by this reform meant that those considered undeserving were framed as lazy or unwilling to work, and hence not deserving of benefits or other forms of transfers to substitute labour incomes.

We find very similar processes of welfare restructuration being accompanied by renderings of some beneficiaries as undeserving, commonly analysed under the header of 'the undeserving poor'. Among the scholars following differing notions of how poverty was conceived of as legitimate outcome of character or personal choice is Michael B. Katz. Tracing the genealogies of how poverty was normalized, Katz mentions how the moral categories used to label the poor rendered their poverty not as an outcome of misfortune, but of 'indolence and vice' (Katz 2013: 6) and, hence, as self-inflicted. By extension, judging poverty as deserved was and is not only done in reference to morality, but also by culture or biology (ibid.: 2f).

A frequent theme in (un)deservingness debates is the idea that access to resources makes people dependent on them. Translated into

welfare debates, an element of bad moral character is said to be prone to 'dependency', as Nancy Fraser and Linda Gordon state for the US context. Dependency there featured as a keyword of welfare debates and stated that the social figure of the pauper in industrial times was described with a 'moral/psychological register' of dependency (Fraser and Gordon 1994: 316). In the booming industrial capitalism, the heroic subjectivity of the 'upstanding workingman' (ibid.) became the normative ideal of the productive person. Those who could not act as such, like the pauper, were regarded as a morally degraded and corrupted contrast to that sought-after subject position that combined imaginaries of self-sufficiency, freedom and industrial labour.

In twentieth-century Europe and the United States, a distinctly welfare-related form of deservingness emerged. Welfare systems began making a distinction between deserving and undeserving poor early in their development after the Second World War. The United States, despite the expansion of state redistribution, installed a two-track welfare system (see Fraser and Gordon 1994: 321). Deservingness became a political term used to accuse those entitled to welfare of various vices – for instance, using resources in the wrong ways ('welfare cadillacs'), or deliberately relying on assistance instead of seeking to become independent from it ('welfare queens') (see Fraser and Gordon 1994). Revealingly, these accusations were directed mainly against poor Black people, single mothers and others who were socially, spatially and economically marginalized.

These gendered and racialized debates, which became known as the 'culture of poverty debates', started in the 1960s with the work of Oscar Lewis and were followed by debates about the so-called underclasses in the 1970s and 1980s. The literature on poor populations in the United States during these decades points to very selective forms of state redistribution that rely on racialized and gendered forms of discipline (Stack 1974). The rhetoric of deservingness in the United States was reinforced by the attacks on the redistributive welfare systems from the 1970s onwards. The ever more selective forms of assistance and social transfers were legitimized by a series of discourses about the deficient character of those who were in many ways considered as 'Other' to the productive and entrepreneurial ideal types of neoliberal subjectivity.

In the US context in the 1980s and 1990s, anthropologists intervened in these public discourses and policy debates by countering the dominant focus on cultural and moral features of poverty ('culture of dependency'). Examples of such scholarship include Judith Goode's

work (e.g. Goode 2018) or the ethnographies of the so-called New Poverty Studies (Goode and Maskovsky 2002).

In Europe, scholarship on the attribution of undeservingness started, to our knowledge, in parallel to the increasing conditionality of social assistance entitlements after the peak of welfare state expansion. One of the exemplary ethnographies of this literature is Leo Howe's *Being Unemployed in Northern Ireland* (1990), in which he explores the production of difference according to moral evaluations of unemployed people. The late 1990s and early 2000s brought about studies on the transformation of redistributive systems after the disintegration of the Soviet Union. One such work is the 'historical ethnography of Hungarian welfare' (Haney 2002: 238), published as the monograph *Inventing the Needy*. In it, Lynne Haney traces the changing categorization of maternal work from 'social responsibility deserving remuneration' (ibid.: 189) to social assistance, which then required an assessment of neediness. Although the literature on socialist and postsocialist welfare rarely mentions deservingness explicitly (with exceptions; see e.g. Dorondel and Popa (2014)), these studies utilize a layered approach towards the state that makes it possible to distinguish between different levels of the administration of access to resources and tracing the transformation of conceptions of deservingness at different scales. An example of such an approach is Chris Hann's analysis of moralizing discourses about workfare (Hann 2016: 9), and, furthermore, Don Kalb's work on worker populism and class (published, for example, in Kalb and Halmai (2011)) and the Kinship and Social Security (KASS) project at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology in Halle, Germany (see e.g. Heady and Schweitzer 2010). Anthropologists research welfare state transformations by pointing towards state austerity – cutting costs for public health or unemployment benefits – and towards the way in which state actors select the beneficiaries who are deserving of assistance. Vincent Dubois' (2015) work especially focuses on these processes of the administration of poverty. Patrícia Alves de Matos and Antonio Pusceddu (2021) link deservingness claims in contemporary Europe to a common sense of austerity in which the moralizing selectivity has already been normalized.

In recent anthropological work, especially on living conditions under tightening austerity after the 2007/2008 financial crisis, it is the precarious themselves who mobilize against elites through moral registers and notions such as 'dignity' (Narotzky 2016). These notions are also taken up by private organizations – such as volunteer, aid, activist or solidarity networks – as a moral vehicle to

advance a critique of the neoliberal transformation of welfare states. Andrea Muehlebach (2012), for instance, shows how these moral registers of critique are in themselves ambivalent for the volunteers involved in such networks in Italy, as they reflexively critique that welfare retrenchment, Catholic morality and volunteerism work well together. On the other hand, Giacomo Loperfido and Antonio Pusceddu (2019) show how unevenness and deservingness co-constitute spatial differentiation as a way to study global capitalism through a local lens (Loperfido and Pusceddu 2019).

The literature on social insurance and welfare entitlements from and on Europe and the United States shows how deservingness discourses are tied to increasingly selective forms of social assistance. Through conditionalities, moral assessments and the turn towards 'activation' as a paradigm of redistribution, deservingness has become a key register for calling entitlements into question.

Towards Ethnographies of Deservingness

The literature in which we situate discussions about deservingness in the United States and Europe focuses on processes of state redistribution and welfare provision, as well as migration and citizenship. Debates about redistribution, and especially those about social hierarchies, are crucial fields of contention and transformation in the relationships between populations, states and capital accumulation. Yet, deservingness might bring us to think beyond the social welfare nexus and towards studies on distribution in society at large. Such studies might explore the moral registers of conditionality in private aid organizations (as several chapters in this volume do) or discuss controversies about whether private corporations deserve tax breaks. In other words, while building on the scholarly genealogies of where to locate deservingness, we seek to expand the question of deservingness and ask about its specific role as a powerful tool to (re)produce, institutionalize, justify, negotiate, contest and depoliticize inequality. One way of doing so is to explore the relative class positions of those whose virtues and vices are being discussed.

The breadth of the contributions in this volume shows how fruitful a conversation between subfields of the discipline might be and, furthermore, the variance of research fields in which such questions are raised. Beyond pointing towards the complexity of the phenomenon in scholarship and hence the diversity of approaches to framing and exploring (un)deservingness, we identify several features that we

and our contributors by and large share: (1) an ethnographic interest in how deservingness is *done* in a range of contexts; (2) a comparative endeavour of contrasting, juxtaposing and complicating with other cases across scales; (3) a curiosity for reconstructing patterns that connect cases and exploring relations of power and configurations of inequality; and (4) an orientation towards the analysis of 'society' and a critique of its capitalist, racist and sexist structures of inequality.

Such a perspective on inequalities allows for an integrated observation of the several critical junctions (Kalb and Tak 2005) in European and American societies, and how the changing inequalities are produced, legitimized or contested – to us a major way in which class can be reconstructed in its polyvalence and contradictions (Kalb 2015: 14).

In this volume, we foreground three critical junctions: first, the transformation of social welfare systems, specifically variegated austerity accompanied by debates about 'welfare fraudsters' and 'undeserving migrants' exploiting welfare states; second, moral panic about migration that advances a split between a defensive 'we' and general suspicion regarding 'Others', and that led to the blurring (particularly in mainstream public discourse) of legal categories of refugees and migrants; and, third, financial crisis, which led to new ruptures between Northern and Southern European countries and is likely to be rekindled during or after the COVID-19 pandemic.

As the selection of empirical fields and the choice of analytical frameworks suggest, we insist that investigating inequalities from the social sciences requires a critical outlook. As vulnerable people are targeted, socially marginalized groups are scapegoated and migrants are criminalized, anthropology needs to take a closer look and employ tools for critical analysis. In the best-case scenario, such analysis combines rigorous ethnographic work, theoretical determination and an engaged stance that seeks to explore social, political and economic power.

The Chapters in This Volume

This book starts with a topical section of four chapters by scholars working on moral conceptualizations of inequality and discussing central aspects of deservingness. Susana Narotzky takes valuation and valorization as key processes of 'a political economy of human worth' during the COVID-19 pandemic. She proposes an epistemology of ethnographically sensible historical reconstruction in order

to understand the consequences of how human worth is assessed, categorized and ordered hierarchically. The consequential classification of 'the elderly' in the Quality Adjusted Life Year (QALY) triage system is her point of departure for exploring the political economy of care and death.

In their chapter, Sarah Willen and Jennifer Cook operationalize the concept of health-related deservingness in the context of migration as a framework for analysing current deservingness debates. This take on deservingness proves to be a timely conceptual lens (and intervention) because it is precisely migrant populations, as well as healthcare systems that migrants often struggle to access, that are marked by extreme vulnerability due to the deregulation of healthcare and ever more restrictive migration regimes. In their theoretical-ethnographic approach to deservingness, Willen and Cook pay special attention to carving out the boundary between rights and deservingness, the latter being understood as 'complex forms of vernacular moral reasoning' embedded in particular and competing forms of common sense.

Don Kalb then links his earlier research on Central and Eastern Europe (Poland and Hungary) and the Netherlands with an analysis of ongoing processes such as Brexit and the COVID-19 pandemic to reconstruct the emergence and current effects of neonationalist mobilization in Europe. In his analysis, deservingness figures as a 'popular call for a just social hierarchy' under conditions of neoliberal dispossession and devaluation of labour, 'particular skills, rights, expectations, spaces, subjectivities and forms of popular culture and social reproduction'. In his chapter, Kalb employs the analytical heuristic of deservingness as a way to add to the analytical work of uncovering and reconstructing 'subtexts of class' in the context of neoliberal transformation.

Finally, Erik Bähre contemplates how the lens of deservingness can enhance reflexive and comparative dimensions of ethnography, and thus its often-downplayed explanatory potential. In his both eclectic and integrative take on deservingness as a 'reflexive and comparative category', he recaptures anthropological engagements with comparison and draws on Rorty's reflexive epistemology of solidarity and cruelty. He arrives at the conclusion that due to its focus on relations (in particular between insiders and outsiders), deservingness enables a novel assessment of the European crisis and, moreover, allows for new forms of comparison.

Part II brings together four ethnographic-theoretical discussions about poverty, exclusion and the transforming arrangements through which those affected are included or excluded from distribution and

recognition. The chapters focus on the need to understand structural political and economic aspects, together with processes of subjectivation, bodily experiences, rituals and symbolic frames of reference. In his chapter, Stefan Wellgraf discusses the articulation between social hierarchies, and the affective, bodily and sensual experience of inferiority among his interlocutors, *Hauptschüler*innen* in Berlin. He categorizes corporal reactions such as stomach problems, sleeping disorders and nightmares as sensual and emotional registers at play in the reproduction of social inferiority. Carlo Capello then takes the discussion to municipal centres offering courses that focus on active job seeking for unemployed people in Turin. He asks 'how come' most of the unemployed he worked with accept a discourse and ideology of deservingness according to which they themselves are mainly responsible for their predicament. Such internationalization, according to Capello, happens through hidden rituals and symbolic qualities of these rites of passage of neoliberal ideological apparatuses. Patrícia Alves de Matos then discusses an 'emerging redistributive political regime' in Southern Europe where austerity and the technocratic language of provision to 'those who really need' gave rise to a myriad of religious-based charity organizations as welfare providers. Discussing her work in Portugal, she analyses how the moral topologies of deservingness and welfare provision are a continuation of austerity politics or, rather, a departure from it. In her chapter, Elisa Lanari places her discussion of deservingness in the first large municipality in the United States to fully outsource its welfare services to a private corporation. The historically white, affluent and conservative town of Sandy Springs, Georgia, is the setting for her discussion. In it, deservingness features as a key analytic for understanding the logic of creating and reinforcing hierarchies among the low-income residents by using various types of welfare-providing actors and local ideologies of welfare, entrepreneurship and suburban citizenship. She analyses deservingness as the process through which issues of poverty and structural discrimination are depoliticized and moralized, leading to frames of reference through which low-income residents fashion themselves vis-à-vis welfare providers.

Part III brings together discussions of migration and flight and how people on the move become categorized as legitimate refugees, worthy sufferers or as morally belonging to a community or not. In her chapter, Sabine Strasser analyses the politics of distribution based on the deservingness of refugees as established by the EU–Turkey border regime through the lens of the policy tools of re-admission and resettlement. She traces these policies, associated legal processes

of border control and the reaffirmation of a neo-orientalist perspective of the Muslim 'Other' in the everyday lives of young Syrian men on their way to Europe through Turkey. Nicole Hoellerer then challenges the widespread perspective of deservingness as a top-down external process, which is forced upon refugees. In her ethnography of resettled Bhutanese refugees in the United Kingdom, she demonstrates how refugee communities also internally employ notions of deservingness and create inequalities among their own communities through moral categories of belonging. Ildikó Zakariás and Margit Feischmidt discuss the construction of deservingness in the institutional context of philanthropy in the so-called 'refugee crisis' during the summer of 2015 in Hungary. They argue that the commitment to help among those private organizations may be conditional upon constructing and identifying the deserving along sameness and difference. The assessment of legitimate suffering and the distribution of possibilities is, they argue, related to the image of suffering in the imagination of the witness.

Part IV draws on three chapters that discuss the relations of debt as key aspects of the economic crises in Spain, Greece and Croatia. The chapters each take a different ethnographic entry point into analysing the negotiation of deservingness and its relation to wider ideological, political and economic spheres. In her chapter, Irene Sabaté Muriel discusses deservingness using different narratives about debt relief in the Spanish mortgage crisis. She traces how mortgage default, along with the stigma and moral panic associated with it, was reframed by anti-repossession movements after 2009. Their narrative of the crisis as a collective fraud perpetrated by banking elites, with the complicity of public authorities, provided one empirical manifestation of deservingness assessments among others, as defined by the law, welfare institutions, bank employees and the social networks of defaulters. Sabaté argues that it is necessary to relate those different scales of deservingness to the ideological construction, reproduction and naturalization of social inequality. In her chapter, Theodora Vetta uncovers the Greek social cartography of unequally distributed blame, deceit and responsibility through her ethnography of the implementation of the Katseli Law, which protected insolvent households against foreclosure. In the trials, she found that the legal focus was placed on morally charged patterns of evaluating (over)consumption and, hence, whether indebtedness was legitimate in the first place and insolvent households thus deserved to be protected. She argues for understanding indebtedness as a form of rent extraction and class demobilization, and focuses on how the implementation

of insolvency protection narrowed possibilities for solidary reaction and collective claim-making in Greece. In his chapter, Marek Mikuš focuses on claims and counterclaims between creditors, debtors and activists in post-credit boom Croatia to analyse the politics of debt. He argues that debt-related activism and parliamentary politics emerged as significant forms of political practice, which draws and reconfigures hegemonic, sub-hegemonic and counterhegemonic concepts of deservingness. He argues that the various registers of deservingness play a crucial role in how various groups claim suffering, rights and economic importance.

The volume concludes with an Afterword by James G. Carrier, which draws together the main ethnographic, analytical and theoretical lines of argumentation, and looks at ways of working out the moral aspects of social, political and economic inequality. Carrier argues for the importance of classification as a general process in which humans engage when forming societies and the specific modes of classifying that – in specific situations – hierarchize social groups.

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'Balkan Route' and the COVID-19 Pandemic', *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* (2021); and 'African-European Trajectories of (Im)Mobility: Exploring Entanglements of Experiences, Legacies and Regimes of Contemporary Migration' (Special Section), *Migration and Society* (2019), co-edited with Annika Lems.

Notes

1. Notwithstanding the reality of its selective and hypocritical implementation and different local appropriations, as explored by, for example, Goodale (2007) and Cowan et al. (2010).

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