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**Searching for the Melanesian Way: culture, ethics and public service
performance in Papua New Guinea**

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I hereby declare that this thesis has not been and will not be, submitted in whole or in part to another University for the award of any other degree.

Signature:

Abstract

My thesis seeks to examine the ways in which notionally “Western” governance concepts and norms translate to a developing country context. Specifically, the thesis undertakes an ethnographic study of the ways in which public servants in Papua New Guinea interpret and enact a range of ethical-normative governance concepts and practices associated with the effective functioning of public bureaucracy - such as ‘duty’, ‘impartiality’, ‘accountability’, and ‘transparency’. It seeks to show how their manner of interpreting and enacting these concepts and their related practices influences the way that cooperative action is constituted and legitimated in the Papua New Guinean bureaucratic organisational context, in a way that influences the operational performance of the organisation as a whole.

The thesis approaches this task by comparing the way Papua New Guinean public servants characteristically interpret these ethical-normative governance concepts and practices with a notionally “Western” ethical discursive orthodoxy associated with Weber’s ‘ideal type’ of bureaucracy. In making this comparison, the thesis seeks to illuminate how the representations, signifying practices and related modes of ethical thought in use in Papua New Guinean state bureaucracies are characteristically shaped and influenced by socio-culturally situated moralities, identities and systems of meaning that derive from a general ‘ethos of mutuality’ - one that I argue is characteristic of contemporary forms of Melanesian reciprocal sociality, and which in turn derive from ‘traditional’ cultural forms of that sociality. Finally, by analysing the operational performance of a particular bureaucratic program – and the way in which cooperative action is constituted and legitimated under this program – the thesis aims to illustrate how the operative bureaucratic representations, signifying practices and modes of thought influenced by this distinctively Melanesian ‘ethos of mutuality’ contribute to the persistent inability of the program to fully meet its mandated purposes and objectives.

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

1.1 The aims of this thesis

This thesis seeks to examine and account for the role of ethics and ethical agency in shaping the operational performance of state bureaucracies in Papua New Guinea. It seeks to describe and account for how Papua New Guinean public servants Interpret and perform their ethical responsibilities as bureaucrats, and are constituted ethically as both as persons and agents of the state, in a cultural, social and institutional context that requires that they navigate different and often conflicting demands of identity, interest, expectation and obligation. By extension, it also seeks to examine the ways in which their ethical performance-in-context influences – and is in turn influenced by - the functional performance of the organisations in which they work.

I begin my account by quoting David, a junior public service manager in the Papua New Guinean government department where I conducted the bulk of my fieldwork. I had just commenced interviewing David by explaining my interest in exploring the links between culture, ethics and the performance of the Papua New Guinean public service. He quickly offered me his view on the matter:

It's always been a blanket that covers the system - the ability to excel in, more or less within the set systems - because of these cultural and traditional sort of ways of doing things. This has been the barrier to our country as a whole, to sort of change. So - particularly on value and ethical front - is a very big challenge from our end, given that most of us come into working places with this traditional values. Workplace very different.

I highlight David's quote because among the many discussions I had while doing my fieldwork his particular claim stood out, for the simple reason that it neatly encapsulated a general point of view I had come to PNG in large part to attempt to understand and assess. In fact, David's statement incorporated two main claims that I aim to investigate in this thesis: firstly, that aspects of the distinctive culture of the

peoples of Papua New Guinea - linked to in some way to their 'traditional values' and 'sort of traditional and cultural sorts of ways of doing things', as David put it - act in a very broad way (as a 'blanket') to impede or constrain the ability of contemporary formal institutions (the 'system', or 'set systems') to function well ('excel'); and secondly, that this situation is a challenge particularly related to questions of 'workplace' values and ethics, and by direct implication, a particular challenge for people employed in David's specific kind of workplace: the public bureaucracy.

My interest in these issues arises directly from my career experience as both a public servant and an international development practitioner working mainly in the field of governance. At least since the emergence of the so-called 'good governance' agenda in the early 1990's, within the development community a broad consensus has prevailed around the central role of governance institutions in enabling and promoting development outcomes. A central challenge of development, in this sense, has been identified in many ways with the challenge of building effective governance institutions. Confronting this challenge has not been without its share of difficulties and failures. In the very broadest of terms, lessons learned over the past few decades in response to these failures have seen a general shift in focus from 'technocratic', 'top-down' capacity building approaches focused largely on state institutions, to more overtly 'political' approaches that view institution building as a "complex process of bargaining between state and society actors" (IDS 2013; see also Carrothers and Gramont: 2016). Key to this shift has been an emphasis on understanding the context for development interventions, and how context operates to shape constraints and enablers for desired change via processes that are seen as intrinsically political.

Notably, however, contemporary approaches to understanding the context for governance interventions generally rely on a distinction between the 'formal' institutions, organisations and norms of the state, and the 'informal' context in which they operate. For its part, formality is often represented as comprising something like a regime of 'impersonal rules' - usually expressed in writing - that are intended to govern social conduct and relations in relevant contexts and which are enforced by a third party whose authority to do so is itself constituted by a regime of rules. Typically

this third party authority is ultimately that of the state, whose regime of rules – the law – underwrites all others. Formality in this sense is constitutive of the ‘official’ or ‘public’ spheres. Formality is typically distinguished from ‘informality’ in two ways. Firstly, it may be distinguished from the often unwritten cultural and social norms – such as those constitutive of kinship or gender relations - that may ‘informally’ govern more ‘personalised’ conduct and relations in the ‘social’ or ‘private’ sphere. (see Leftwich and Sen, 2010. For various examples that tend to explicitly or implicitly utilise versions of this overall schema, see North et. al. 2009; Levy 2013, IDS 2013, Munggiu-Pippidi 2012, Booth and Cammack 2014). In the simplest terms, under this general conception, failures to adequately institutionalise ‘formality’ are often ascribed to the persisting influence of such informal norms in the notional domain of the formal¹. Alternately, the notion of ‘formality’ may also be drawn in contrast to the ‘informality’ of actual or prevailing practices within the ‘official’ or ‘public’ domain of the state which do not conform to ‘formal’ rules or norms, irrespective of whether such ‘informal norms’ are seen as reflecting the intrusive influence of the ‘social’ domain on the ‘official’ or ‘public domain’ (Biershank and Olivier De Sardan 2015; De Herdt and Olivier De Sardan 2016). In terms of these ways of distinguishing between the ‘formal’ and ‘informal’, ‘culture’ – when it is explicitly identified as an object of study - is usually placed in the box of the ‘informal’: something seen to be of interest as part of the mix of ‘informal norms’ that are viewed as somehow different from, and often in tension with - the ‘formal rules’ of the state.

In this sense, however, while understanding the ‘informal’ social and cultural context of the ‘formal’ has become a focus for detailed study, far less attention has been paid to interrogating the distinctive normative culture of formality itself, or the ways in

¹ I stress the ‘notional’ domain of the formal here. Any contrast between ‘formal’ and ‘informal’ institutional domains proposed in this thesis is not intended to reflect any essentialising separation or opposition between ‘society’ and ‘state’. Rather, the domains of the ‘informal’ and ‘formal’ – along with the related analytical and practical separation of ‘society’ and ‘state’ - are taken to be constituted via distinctions and processes that arise within society itself. In this sense, concepts of ‘state’ and ‘society’ – and thus related notions of ‘formality’ and ‘informality’ - are used in this thesis in a manner intended to be broadly consistent with the ‘state-in-society’ model proposed by Migdal. (2001). In contrast to Migdal, however, I focus my attention on the role of ‘formality’ and ‘formal organisations’ in constituting the capabilities of states, and hence on the social processes, ideas and practices through which ‘formality’ and effectively functioning formal organisations are constituted.

which *interpretations* of formality may be influenced by the distinctive cultural context of the society in which they are embedded. By a 'normative culture' of formality, I mean the characteristic representations, signifying practices and modes of thought that shape action in a way that may be understood to normatively constitute *effectively functioning* 'formal' institutions and organisations of the state, particularly those of state bureaucracy. By 'influence', I mean the ways in which these characteristic normative representations and signifying practices may be construed and enacted by social actors in the light of their otherwise culturally constituted and characteristic categories and modes of thought and practice.

Thus, firstly, in suggesting the notion of a distinctive 'normative culture' of formality, I am suggesting the existence of a distinctive professional ethos or ethic that is broadly characteristic of *well-functioning* state bureaucracies in modern liberal democratic polities. Such an 'professional ethos' or ethic broadly defines what it means to be a 'good bureaucrat. When understood, adopted and enacted by those who work as bureaucrats, I suggest, it enables bureaucratic organisations to function more or less well. Further, I suggest, such an ethos constitutes a distinctive mode of sociality – one that enables a distinctive mode of cooperative social action oriented towards the optimal achievement of organisational purposes. This mode of sociality may be described as 'impersonal' and 'non-relational', in that it ethically requires that considerations arising in the context of 'personalised' relations on the whole to be subordinated to the pursuit of legitimate 'impersonal' organisational purposes and interests.

Such an ethos can be seen in outline in Weber's well-known ideal type. As a sociologist, however, Weber's ideal type tended towards a description of the typically observable outward forms bureaucracy: formal rules and roles, hierarchical authority, specialisation, the use of writing, salaried careers, and technical knowledge qualification etc. This ideal type was intended to include non-government as well as government bureaucracies, as well as aid analysis of bureaucracies under different forms of state. Thus, to the extent that he described an underlying 'ethic' for his ideal type, Weber limited his formal analysis to certain minimal or core normative notions,

such as formal duty, impersonality, disinterestedness, adherence to procedure, and an orientation to optimising means-ends rationality (Weber: 2019). Nevertheless, in terms of his study of the further dimensions of this ethic in the context of state bureaucracies, Weber argued that bureaucracy as a social form required a particular type of actor, the *Beamte* ('official'), who subscribed to a particular ethos or 'life-order'. However, drawing largely on the Prussian civil service as his example, Weber focused his discussion this ethos in terms of its broad role in shaping the character of public service as a distinct ethical vocation, and its role in relation to the formation of a distinct sociological class (Du Gay 2000).

However, bureaucratic ethics in contemporary states, particularly those that are formally constituted on the basis of liberal-democratic principles and ideals, are typically associated with a more specific set of ethical values and principles than those identified by Weber: notably, those of impartiality, accountability, and transparency. These values and principles – whose intended meanings are, I suggest, broadly encoded, both explicitly and implicitly, in various forms of law, policy and administrative regulation – are expected to function in both legitimating and constituting social action in accordance the 'impersonal' bureaucratic ethos, and are in turn are associated with, and given meaning by, certain characteristic kinds of signifying administrative practices. Unsurprisingly, such principles and practices tend to overlap with, or correspond to, generally acknowledged contemporary principles and practices that are characteristic of global discourse on 'good governance' practiced by international donors including the World Bank and the IMF.

Crucially, however, I suggest that both Weber's ideal type of bureaucracy, as well as contemporary global discourses on bureaucratic ethics, both implicitly presuppose a particular conception of personhood – one that centres on the notion of the 'rationally and ethically autonomous individual' oriented to action on the basis of abstract, impersonal ethical and causal principles. This is not to say that by presupposing such a notion in his ideal type Weber necessarily invalidated his 'value-neutral' sociological stance. Rather, I suggest, such a notion of personhood, associated with his notions of both 'scientific' and means-ends rationality, was simply something he understood as

characteristic of 'rationalised' capitalist modernity, and a necessary part of what constituted modern bureaucracy in his view as a functionally superior and thus dominant and increasingly ubiquitous mode of social organisation – itself a fact he himself clearly did not seek to ethically valorise, but simply describe and explain. In contrast, I suggest, contemporary global discourse on the bureaucratic ethics appropriate to liberal-democratic states generally tends to presuppose a more substantive ethical commitment to a notion of the 'rationally autonomous individual'. This is simply because bureaucrats, as citizens of liberal-democratic and market or commodity-based societies, are seen to owe their principled workplace obligations to notions of duty, impartiality, accountability and transparency in a social, political, legal, economic context that, both implicitly and explicitly, ethically valorises such a conception of personhood and ethical agency.

Such an understanding of the ethical assumptions underlying the normative discourse of 'formality' has several implications. In general, I suggest, it is axiomatic that how representations and signifying practices associated with bureaucratic ethos are interpreted, evaluated and enacted by bureaucratic actors will influence the performance of their organisations. If bureaucrats are not in general adequately oriented by a sense of obligation to be 'impartial', 'accountable' or 'transparent' *in relevant senses*, their organisations will presumably not function effectively, and will typically fail to achieve their mandated purposes. Importantly, this does not only apply to their interactions with persons or agents outside their organisations (e.g. citizen 'clients'), but to their interactions with other bureaucrats inside their organisations.

I suggest, however, that this raises a further interesting question: namely, how the process by which actors interpret, evaluate and enact 'impersonal' bureaucratic ethics – including normative notions such as legal and ethical 'duty', 'impartiality', 'accountability' and 'transparency' - may itself be influenced by representations, practices and related modes of thought that are characteristic of the broader culture in which both bureaucratic actors and the formal organisations of the state are embedded. In particular, I suggest, it raises the question of how interpretations of the professional ethos of bureaucracy may be subject to the influence of more relational

modes of sociality and personhood, such as those widely viewed as distinctively characteristic of societies like Papua New Guinea. Put another way, this is to ask how agents who tend to be culturally constituted as ‘relational persons’ in ‘informal’ domains in which norms of personalised reciprocity and mutuality generally prevail, interpret and enact their ethical personhood in the putatively ‘formal’ and ‘impersonal’ sphere of the bureaucratic workplace, where they are in some way implicitly expected to think and act in some relevant ethical sense as ‘rationally and ethically autonomous individuals’. Arising from this is a second question, which may be put more simply: namely, if such an influence can be shown, what effects does it have on the overall functioning of bureaucratic organisations?

The most appropriate way to pursue these questions, I suggest, is in the first instance through the descriptive and explanatory lens of the ethical itself. The ethical can be said to include those aspects of our lives for which we have and offer particular kinds of meaningful, evaluative, motivating reasons: reasons about what is better or worse, good or bad, right or wrong, proper or improper, to have, to do, to know or to be. Ethics in this sense concerns “what matters to people”, as well as why and how (Sayer 2011). The domain of ethics includes how we (individually and collectively) understand, evaluate and judge our own and others’ speech and conduct, as well as who we are, who we aspire to be, and what we feel we owe to ourselves and others (Keane 2017). It thus also concerns how we are each constituted ethically as human agents, and how we may work, individually and in concert, to constitute (and re-constitute) ourselves as persons in light of our most valued and meaningful aims, purposes and relations (Taylor 1989). Though we may not always be fully conscious of our reasons, or always able to give a complete account of them, we nevertheless possess an ability to be reflective and, alone or in dialogue with others, examine our motivations and reasons for action. This evaluative reflexivity is itself partly constitutive of the ethical: the capacity to stand back and reflect, to assess and reassess, and to justify and amend, both to ourselves and others.

My investigation of these issues partly takes the form of an ethnographic account of the everyday practices of Papuan New Guinean public servants as they are situated as

ethical persons within their broader social and cultural context. This account aims to elucidate and examine their actual performance in the workplace, in a context in which they often encounter conflicting professional, personal, social and cultural expectations and obligations. It examines what they value, hold important and pursue (as well as seek to avoid); how they relate to others, what they feel they owe, and what they feel is owed to themselves; how they frame and deal with ethical challenges and dilemmas they face in their professional and social lives; and how they may also seek to transform themselves and others in order to better realise their (ethical) ideals and ends.

At the same time, my account seeks to examine the impact of these considerations on the functional performance of the bureaucratic organisation in which they work. It does so by examining the ethical dimensions of the everyday practices of a group of Papua New Guinean public servants working on a specific government program, and seeks to examine the consequences of their practices for the performance of that program. In so doing, it seeks to identify ways in which their understandings of key normative notions associated with bureaucratic ethics - such as 'duty', 'impartiality', 'accountability' and 'transparency' – may diverge from the meanings typically assumed in global discourses, as well as the extent and manner to which this may be accounted for by the way in which they tend to be constituted as ethical persons in the broader social and cultural context in which they and their organisations are embedded. It also seeks to evaluate consequences of those divergences for the performance of their organisation in delivering the program they were responsible for administering. It thus seeks in a structured way to examine the sense and validity of David's claim.

As part of this, however, my account also seeks to grapple with the terms of David's claim. Specifically, in a post-colonial context such as Papua New Guinea's that has undergone, and continues to undergo, profound and rapid cultural transformation, a question arises as to the meaning of the 'traditional'. Specifically, in what way does it make sense to describe contemporary practices as being influenced or shaped by 'traditional culture' - particularly those practices associated with institutional contexts (such as the public service) that can in no way be described as 'traditional'?

Recent approaches to the study of state bureaucracies developed in the context of African have tended to answer this question by suggesting its inappropriateness. These studies emphasise the disjunctions and discontinuities that have occurred in African societies and cultures as a consequence of colonial and post-colonial experience. Notions associated with the continuity or influence of 'traditional culture', it is argued, reflect oversimplified and 'essentialist' readings of what are now, in fact, complex, multi-faceted modern societies. Such cultural disjunctions, it is claimed, have resulted in pluralist societies in which any notions of a 'homogenous culture', or a broad sense of continuity with a 'traditional past', are rendered at best oversimplified and misguided, or at worst erroneous. (see, for example Anders, 2006; Olivier de Sardan 2016a)

My thesis seeks to re-engage with this question in the Papua New Guinean context, initially by challenging some of the theoretical and methodological assumptions and approaches of this stream of African scholarship. Subsequently, through the analysis of my ethnographic materials, I seek to provide a different answer. Answering this question, I suggest, lies in the ways in which my Papua New Guinean public service informants encounter their everyday sociality both within and beyond the workplace, in institutional contexts that may be ostensibly associated with both the 'traditional' and 'indigenous' as well as 'the modern' and 'Western'. In particular, I argue, it lies in the ways in which this distinctive sociality - and its emphasis on maintaining valued and appropriate personalised relations of mutual respect through appropriate reciprocal recognition of positional standing and status - grants them meaning and a distinctive sense of personhood and identity in a way that may be seen connect them to a sense of continuity with ancestral past. I also argue, however, that for my public service informants, it is this same mode of sociality – and the ways in which it tends to constitute them ethically as 'relational persons' within an ethos of mutuality – that also influences and inflects the way they interpret their ethical obligations as bureaucrats, and does so in ways that affects the overall functional performance of their organisations.

1.2 The plan of this thesis

The next chapter (Chapter 2) establishes a platform for this thesis by providing an historical overview of the functioning of the Papua New Guinean public service since Independence. It begins by situating the public service in the context of the Papua New Guinean constitution, highlighting the way in which the role of the public service in serving national aims was initially conceived in culturally specific terms by Papua New Guinean Independence leaders. In light of these aims, the chapter then traces the development of the public service as an institution in the years since Independence, and the perceptions and explanations of failure it has engendered among politicians, the public and aid donors alike. It also examines contemporary approaches by both the Government and donors to respond to those perceived failures, including approaches that focus on the strengthening of public service ethics linked to the culturally specific aims and aspirations encoded in the Constitution. The chapter concludes by highlighting the implicit tensions that observers have long recognised between the organising ethical principles of Melanesian societies and those characteristic of the 'legal-rational' bureaucratic state, and poses the question of how an investigation of this tension can be approached theoretically and methodologically.

Chapter 3 responds to this question by establishing a methodological framework. The chapter aims to examine key aspects of the theoretical and methodological challenges involved in investigating and assessing the questions posed by this thesis. It starts with the premise that the most appropriate methods for researching these questions are ethnographic. Several recent ethnographic approaches to the study of bureaucracy are discussed. Each of these approaches emphasise the central importance of studying the 'everyday practices' of public servants as means to investigate and understand the workings of state bureaucracies. Examination of their respective approaches will highlight key strengths as well as problematic aspects of their approach to 'everyday practices', focusing on key issues of theory and methodology that arise in relation to two specific concepts - those of 'culture' and 'normativity' - and the ways in which these concepts are understood, related and deployed for purposes of explanation. In so doing, the discussion also seeks to clarify the sense in which a notion of the

continuing influence of 'traditional culture' may be meaningfully approached. Further, a key conclusion of the theoretical and methodological discussion is that in order to adequately address the specific questions posed by this thesis, it is necessary to first develop an account of key features of bureaucratic ethics that are relevant to 'effectively functioning' bureaucratic organisations. It is argued that such an account is necessary to enable a comparative and analytical perspective on the actual ethical understandings and practices of contemporary Papua New Guinean public servants, and thus enable an evaluation of the influence of these understandings and practices on organisational effectiveness.

Chapter 4 then seeks to develop such an account of 'orthodox' bureaucratic ethics relevant to a contemporary liberal democratic state. This descriptive and analytical account is initially situated in the context of Weber's well-known ideal type, but is further developed by drawing more widely on a range of contemporary sources in law, administrative regulation and the practical and academic discipline of public sector ethics. Consistent with the conclusions of Chapter 3, this account involves three related dimensions: first, an account of the characteristic 'normativity' that is expected to constitute relevant salience for bureaucratic actors with respect to their categories and modes of thought and practice in the workplace; second, an account of the specific agential capabilities and characteristics, including relevant representations and categories and modes of thought and evaluation, that are expected to enable actors to consistently respond in relevant ways to that normativity; and third, an account of how these normative categories and modes of thought and practice routinely lead to practical effects that enable achievement of legitimately sanctioned organisational purposes.

The theoretical and methodological considerations outlined in Chapters 3 and 4 form the basis of the overall approach taken in the remainder of this thesis. This commences in Chapters 5 and 6, with the development of a descriptive and analytical account, via empirical study and analysis, of the normatively constitutive dimensions of key aspects of the 'social' domain in Papua New Guinea. This will focus on the ways in which Papua New Guinean Public servants are characteristically constituted as

ethical agents – involving characteristic modes of thought and evaluation - in the context of their social relations with kin and community. These are described as occurring within a generalised, culturally distinctive social ethos of ‘mutuality’. Chapter 5 also specifically examines the question of how this characteristic form of sociality, and the forms of personhood and ethical agency associated with it, may be meaningfully linked to notions of Papua New Guinea’s ‘traditional’ culture. Chapter 6 then attempts a more formal presentation of the general character of the ethics associated with this form of sociality, and compares it with the formal account of the ethics of bureaucracy presented in Chapter 4.

Chapter 7 then seeks to develop an account of the ways which Papua New Guinean public servants encounter and respond to ethical issues arising when obligations and expectations originating in the domain of social relations come into conflict with ethical obligations and expectations associated with their workplace. It commences with a discussion of ‘wantok’ relations, a distinctively Melanesian form of sociality that has emerged historically from ‘traditional’ forms of kinship relations, and which I argue constitutes a ‘recontextualised’ extension of the ‘traditional’ Melanesian social ethos of mutuality into ‘modern’, urbanised contexts. The chapter will present detailed examinations of two case studies involving individual public servants’ accounts of their interactions with actors outside the public service to whom they related as wantoks. The discussion will seek to examine how tensions between the expectations and obligations constituted in the two domains are interpreted, evaluated and responded to, by highlighting the particular discursive representations and modes of thought that inform and legitimate their practical strategies for dealing with these situations. Building on the account of Melanesian sociality and ethical agency identified in Chapters 5 and 6, and the account of ‘orthodox’ bureaucratic ethics outlined in Chapter 4, it aims to show how Papua New Guinean public servants draw upon their indigenous cultural resources to manage and resolve tensions between the conflicting demands imposed by their workplace and their social relations in ways that involve specific interpretations of core ethical concepts such as ‘impartiality’ and ‘transparency’ that are distinctly different to those I argue are characteristic of ‘orthodox’ bureaucratic ethics.

Subsequent chapters (Chapters 8 and 9) will be devoted to an ethnographic account of 'everyday practices' within a particular government bureaucracy, with the aim of accounting for ways in which Papua New Guinean 'culture', via the medium of ethical agency, impacts on the performance of that organisation. This will be approached in two stages. Firstly, Chapter 8 will present a detailed analytical account of the functioning of a particular program managed by the organisation. The presentation aims to trace the organisational effects of the everyday practices of the public servants responsible for managing the program, highlighting specific functional reasons why the program failed to meet its mandated objectives. Chapter 9 will then seek to account for these functional challenges through an examination of the ethical orientations of actors within the organisation - that is, via an examination of their interpretations of bureaucratic norms and normativity, and how this relates to the distinctive way in which they are constituted as ethical agents. By using the interpretative methods outlined above, the influence of Papua New Guinean 'culture' on the everyday practices of these public servants will then be assessed.

1.3 Fieldwork

Ethnographic fieldwork was conducted in Port Moresby, the capital city of Papua New Guinea, over a 10-month period, from June 2018 to April 2019. My primary research methods were semi-structured interviews and participant observation. My access to informants and research sites was gained through a range of informal, semi-formal and formal strategies. Prior to commencing my fieldwork, I possessed a wide range of existing personal contacts in PNG who were potential informants, and who were able to assist me in gaining access to others. Initial informant networks were expanded through 'snowballing' methods. This same network of contacts was drawn on to gain access to my primary site for participant observation, a central government line Department. (see below)

Primary research informants were current and former PNG public servants. Formal interviews were conducted with 25 current and former PNG public servants with

experience operating in a range of Departments at both National and Provincial/District levels, including 15 who worked at my primary research site. These formal interviews were supplemented with dozens of informal interviews and discussions with primary research informants and others, both inside and outside the workplace. All interviews and discussions were conducted in Port Moresby.

For purposes of research, I focused both my formal and informal engagement with public servants on those with experience working in an administrative and policy implementation context. Typically, these comprised core personnel within central coordination and service delivery/line departments, usually but not always located in Port Moresby, who worked within notionally 'Weberian' bureaucratic organisations, and who are (or were) engaged in driving the 'machinery of government' in policy and operational terms. In addition to the core group of public servants I worked with as part of my participant observation, this included a number of former public servants formerly based in provincial and district locations (e.g. former employees of provincial and district administrations). I did not plan to include front-line service delivery personnel (e.g. teachers, nurses, extension workers etc), military personnel, or specialist legal or law enforcement officers (i.e. judges, lawyers, police etc), mainly for reasons of research tractability. However, I did engage informally and insightfully with a number of such individuals.

Other key informants included several current PNG political leaders associated with public sector reform and capacity building, as well as Australian and other national and international donor personnel, including commercially contracted aid advisers. Formal interviews were conducted with both PNG national (5) and (6) foreign aid advisors working on a range of Australian-Government funded aid programs in Port Moresby and Provincial locations. I also engaged with representatives of the local media, civil society groups, private sector organisations, academic and research institutions and the general public to gain appreciation of wider community views on public sector performance and ethics.

Formal interviews were recorded and supplemented with written notes, with selected interviews fully transcribed for later analysis.

Participant Observation

My initial fieldwork plan was to spend 12 months in Papua New Guinea, with the majority of this time spent conducting participant observation in one or more Government departments at the National and possibly also Provincial levels. I had expected to be able to negotiate and confirm relevant placements through various senior government and donor contacts I had made in my previous life as an aid adviser. In the event, this plan proved too ambitious.

The first obstacle was obtaining my research visa, which was delayed by nearly 7 months as I sought to navigate a number of administrative hurdles thrown up by the PNG government bureaucracy. Ultimately my visa was granted only after I sought and obtained the intervention of a trusted friend and former colleague in a senior position in the PNG Government bureaucracy. Subsequently, securing my sought-after placements proved equally elusive, as promised assistance from various sources repeatedly failed to materialise. In the end, the duration of my fieldwork was shortened to 10 months. In the absence of a placement, the first 7 months were spent in Port Moresby conducting formal and informal interviews and conversations with a range of primary and secondary informants, including serving and former public servants, politicians, foreign aid advisers and others. In addition, to defray some of my expenses during this initial period, I also secured some short-term paid work writing and editing reports for an Australian government funded aid project – a situation that enabled me to gain access to a number of useful contacts and informants.

Participant observation was conducted for over the final three months of my fieldwork in a central Government line Department in Port Moresby, where I was eventually able to secure a volunteer placement working in an advisory and capacity building role. This Department is identified in this thesis as the Department of Human Happiness (DHH). (The manner in which I secured this placement is described further in Chapter 8.) The objective of the volunteer role was to work with DHH staff responsible for

managing a government-funded infrastructure program to improve their management of that program. This included an analysis of the functioning of the program, the provision of some on-the-job training, and the preparation of a range of formal tools and documentary resources that could support staff in the management and administration of the program following my departure.

During this time, primary data was collected through day-to-day participant observation of the work and interaction of staff in the Department, as well through a series of interviews conducted with a selection of those staff. Given intrinsic issues with informant reliability, it was important where possible to interact with and interview a range of informants who worked together. This enabled some degree of triangulation of accounts, as well as opportunities to examine conflicting and well as mutually supporting interpretations of events, practices and their meanings. Where possible, triangulation of informant accounts of events was complemented by direct observation.

Consistent with my methodology (described in Chapter 3), it was also important to gain an understanding of the non-work lives of the public servants I worked with - and public servants more generally – to obtain an understanding of how they situate themselves within their social and (extended) family contexts. This included socialising with them in a range of ‘private’ contexts, including after-hours social events. I had hoped to also attend extended family events such as customary kinship-related ceremonies. However, this did not prove logistically possible, given much of this ‘private’ activity occurs within an individual’s home village, and would have required travel to regional/rural locations. I relied instead on people’s accounts of such activities.

This meant that I was unable to directly engage with the rural milieu which my informants spoke about, or directly capture the voices of the village-based relatives of my public service interlocutors. The materials I present therefore represent the perspectives of my urban-based informants: their reflections on their experience of kinship and wantok relations, and the expectations and obligations - along with actual

and potential risks, rewards and challenges - they associate with such relations.

However, I do not see this as a limitation, insofar as my primary aim was to investigate the experiences and perspectives of public servants themselves: not only with respect how they think about the ethics of their 'private' roles and relationships, but also how the ethical understandings and practices characteristic of these 'private' relations may impact upon - and be reflected in - the manner in which they interpret and enact the ethics associated with their 'professional' roles and relations in the public-sector workplace.

Positionality and ethics

Prior to undertaking this PhD research project I had a 25 year career as an aid practitioner, primarily in the areas of public sector capacity building and governance reform. My work spanned the public, private and not-for profit sectors, including seven years working as an official with the Australian government's aid program both in Australia and internationally. My most recent long-term consulting assignment was in Papua New Guinea, where I spent 15 months as the Director of the Australian Government tertiary education scholarships program in PNG.

As such, I possessed a relatively strong pre-existing practical and cultural familiarity with the research context, including wide networks and contacts across PNG government and civil society, as well as within the donor and expatriate adviser communities. While English one of several official languages in PNG, it is the business language and is a required language for public servants. My research was primarily conducted in English. Nevertheless, neo-Melanesian (PNG "Tok Pisin") is also widely used both formally and informally and some knowledge of Pisin proved to be a useful adjunct to English as a research tool. I possess basic skills in Pisin, which I studied privately while stationed in Port Moresby.

I approached my research project ethnographically as both an 'insider' and 'outsider'. Both of these aspects of positionality brought specific ethical and methodological challenges. I was an 'insider' insofar as I share a professional history as an aid official

and consultant, both in PNG and elsewhere, with many of my informants within the PNG consulting and donor communities. Further, I was both professionally and personally acquainted with a number of the specific individuals who comprised my field of informants. While this provided significant advantages in terms of access, it also came with potential ethical risks. In particular, I needed to take care not to be perceived as committing breaches of personal and professional trust by taking undue advantage of personal relationships. To manage this risk I was fully transparent about my research aims and methods, obtaining explicit informed prior (and where feasible, written) consent to both interviews and observation.

I was an ‘outsider’ in dealing with local informants, insofar as I am not a PNG national. While my status as a former (Australian) public servant and a previous long-term aid adviser in PNG provided a strong basis for trust and rapport-building with many local informants, there was a risk that my status as an Australian national might be interpreted ambivalently, and at times with some disfavour, as a legacy of Australia’s former colonial past in PNG as well as contemporary political and aid relationships between the two countries. Care was therefore needed in presenting my research aims and methods transparently and in a non-threatening, non-judgmental and constructive manner. Given that PNG public servants speak English and are generally tertiary educated, I sought explicit informed prior (and where feasible, written) consent to both interviews and observation. Further, I was often able to gain their confidence, continued engagement and support through framing my research as an opportunity to contribute to “outsider” understanding of their own culture and practice, with potential benefits from dissemination and application of research findings.

Throughout, from the perspective of my voluntary advisory work, my main focus was on assembling as best I could a picture of the way in which the DHH managed the infrastructure program, and how it might be managed differently to work better. This, however, provided the main entry point for my underlying research concerns: gaining an understanding of how people in the office approached their work, and how they thought about it from an ethical perspective. In pursuing this dual agenda,

though, I was also conscious of what the DHH staff thought about me, and how they were responding to what I was doing. After all, it was one thing to be seen to perform in a familiar capacity building and advisory role, asking questions about general work practices and capabilities; it was quite another to delve into matters of people's cultural values and personal and professional ethics, or their perceptions of the values and ethics of others.

In general, however, I found that the two roles were complementary, and in a way that I didn't expect. On the one hand, my appearance and identity as a foreign, grey-haired male capacity building advisor was one people were generally quite familiar with: to find such a person sitting in the office, going around asking lots of questions, sitting in meetings or delivering ad-hoc training sessions, was not at all unusual. With my apparent experience and technical knowledge, I was treated with the courtesy, respect and sometimes deference routinely afforded to such figures. The kinds of questions I was interested in asking, however, were potentially sensitive, particularly coming from a foreigner, and an Australian at that. Given the chequered history of bilateral relations between the two countries, and not the uncommon (or necessarily unjustified) Papua New Guinean perception of the Australian aid program as frequently heavy-handed, self-serving, culturally insensitive and moralising, an Australian aid 'expert' going around asking questions about Papua New Guinean culture and public service ethics was not necessarily something to be warmly welcomed.

What was unusual, though, was that I was not being remunerated with a generous tax-free salary; rather, as I was careful to make clear, my work was unpaid and voluntary. This voluntary aspect of my position, I found, often helped to smooth the path of my research. For some with whom I worked, the fact that I was a volunteer seemed to facilitate a greater sense of trust, and a willingness to open up to my research interests. In short, I apparently had no hidden agenda, I was not beholden to a foreign paymaster, and I was offering my services as a 'gift' that was felt to be of genuine value to them as well as their country. Thus, once I had explained to people what my research was about and assured them of confidentiality, and they had come to broadly

understand my aims and methods, my status as a volunteer seemed for some to assist in establishing the credibility of my personal motives, and the genuineness of my desire to sympathetically understand a Papua New Guinean point of view.

Of course, this was not always the case. A few of my informants remained more guarded, reluctant to say too much that might damage the reputation of the DHH, paint them in a bad light, or potentially risk landing them in trouble. In most cases, however, people seemed more than willing to respond to my questions openly, sharing frank and often highly personal accounts of their perceptions and experience. For a small number - those who seemed to most clearly appreciate the point of my research work, and saw in it some potential value - I became in a small way something of a confidante, trusted colleague and even dialogue partner, someone from whom they could not only learn useful things, but with whom it was possible to broach challenges and issues, both narrowly practical or more broadly intellectual, that were of genuine personal and professional concern. And in return I tried my best to learn from them.

Other ethical considerations

The subject matter of my research gave rise to ethical challenges in dealing with issues related to 'corruption' and illegality. My primary research aim was to elucidate discourses relating to public sector ethics, which of course may also frame discourses of 'corruption'. However, I was not directly focused on elucidating examples of corrupt, illicit or illegal behaviour. Nevertheless, such examples did arise during interviews as well as observation, alongside examples of maladministration and 'rule breaking'. Particular care was taken however, to frame and shape dialogue in ways that minimised the need to directly or in detail address examples of corruption or illegality. This approach has also been applied subsequent written accounts, in which details of corrupt or illegal activities are minimised, and are presented from third person or anonymous accounts. However, this presents more difficulty when documenting cases of maladministration or rule breaking. In these cases, third person and anonymous accounts have also been used.

A further consideration relates to formal confidentiality requirements placed on informants, either as government employees or contracted personnel. This had the potential to create dilemmas for informants respecting their ethical position in sharing information they may consider relevant to the research. Further, if informants imparted such information in the course of my research, either knowingly or otherwise, I then I have had to decide whether (or how) to use it. Only in one case did a potential interviewee refuse to participate on the basis of such concerns.

My approach was firstly to remind informants that they may have such confidentiality obligations, and to subsequently take appropriate care in considering the information they imparted. Thus, I have been required to carefully consider the value and utility of the information, and if and how to present it as part of my research findings. At all times, have endeavoured explicitly ensure confidentiality and anonymity for informants, and to carefully consider the need for and use of all data and material. In so doing, my research has been guided by the principle of Do No Harm.

Documentary and media review

My research project seeks in part to investigate how the overall discourse on public sector ethics and performance is shaped/framed, and how such discursive framing influences the understandings and practices of both public servants and advisers. In order to develop an account of such discourse, I incorporate and review of a range of other sources (speeches, policy and administrative documents, project documents, academic discussions, media accounts, social media sources etc)

Chapter 2 – The Papua New Guinean public service in historical context

“In this province,...one cannot help but notice so-called public servants, from junior ranks to senior, chewing betelnut during working hours. As a businessman and villager I often wonder whether there is any control at all in the system over this practice. It appears to me that the Department head...is either slack or lacks management and control experience.... I believe at this time of development in Milne Bay we, the grassroots, would like to see more dedicated and technically qualified public servants.... I think it is high time the government weeded out all these betelnut chewers who waste time and money. There is no place in public offices for such unprofessional behaviour.”

- Letter to the editor of the Post-Courier, 29 November 1988 (Quoted in Foster 2002: p 32)

“The public impression is that public servants are, you know...people who do not do their job, don’t work. They chew [betelnut], they do all those bad, negative stuff. For me I had a personal commitment – we must change the perception, public service perception. And that time was the first year that I joined...”

- Interview with Deputy Secretary, line Department, Port Moresby, 2019

2.1 Introduction

Papua New Guinea became an independent state on September 16, 1975. The mode of governance that would be suited to the new nation had been a matter for deep consideration by national Independence leaders. Of particular concern was the role of the future PNG public service, which was expected to be, as one commentator put it, “the principal actor in the struggle for self-reliant development” (Turner 1991: p2).

Immediately prior to Independence, Michael Somare, the leader of Papua New Guinea’s then Legislative Council and prime minister-to-be, had expressed the strong view that “the public service systems inherited from [the Australian] Colonial Administration have been unsuitable for a self-governing and eventually independent Papua New Guinea” (Somare 1974, quoted in Turner and Kavanamur 2009: p 9). He further stated: “we do not want an Australian or European-style Public Service geared

to 20th century technology, nor can we afford to maintain such a Public Service” (Somare 1974 *ibid.*) Somare’s concerns in part no doubt reflected the basic realities of PNG’s economic means. Beyond these practical concerns, however, Somare’s views reflected deeper considerations arising from the Melanesian experience of colonialism and the particular meaning many attached to Independence: the public service, he remarked, was an alien apparatus designed for alien purposes (Ballard 1981). Such sentiments reflected a widespread view among PNG’s nationalist leaders that the machinery of the post-Independence state must be made to work in a manner fundamentally different to the hierarchical, paternalistic and often heavy-handed authority characteristic of the former Colonial regime (cf. Turner 1991).

Underlying these concerns, however, were particular questions concerning the relationship between indigenous and western forms of social organisation and governance, and the values with which they were imbued. These concerns were given explicit attention in PNG’s Constitution, a complex and detailed document adopted following an extensive nationwide consultative process described by one legal scholar as “unparalleled in comparative constitutional history” (Goldring 1978; quoted in Narokobi 2016: p42). Though formally establishing a unitary Westminster-style Parliamentary democracy consistent with the institutional architecture established under the Australian Colonial administration, the Constitution also includes a lengthy and distinctive Preamble that articulates a unique and self-consciously post-colonial Melanesian vision for the development of the PNG state. Pledging firstly to guard both the “noble traditions” and “Christian principles” that now belong to the Papua New Guinean people, the Preamble calls for balancing a commitment to liberal democratic institutions with indigenous forms of social and political life (GoPNG 1975/2014). It then sets out 5 National Goals and Directives (NGDs) to guide the nation.

The fifth of these is described in the Constitution under the heading of “Papua New Guinean Ways”. It calls for the achievement of “development primarily through the use of Papua New Guinean forms of social, political and economic organizations” (GoPNG 1975/2014), along with

a fundamental re-orientation of our attitudes and the institutions of government, commerce, education and religion towards Papua New Guinean forms of participation, consultation, and consensus, and a continuous renewal of the responsiveness of these institutions to the needs and attitudes of the People . (GoPNG 1975/2014)

In summary, the framers of Papua New Guinea's constitution sought to legitimate and shape the new state's governing authority on a distinctive cultural basis, one perceived to be radically different to the mode of operation of the Colonial administration, and which centred on a what they saw as a distinctively Melanesian way of conceiving relations between the new state and its citizens, and the obligations and expectations appropriate to each. Central to this intention was a desire to not to adapt Western techniques and forms of governance wholesale, but to adapt them to indigenous cultural principles.

In this respect, the language of the Constitution closely reflected the 1974 Report of the Constitutional Planning Committee (CPC) – a body comprised of 17 leading members of the pre-Independence House of Assembly that reported to Somare – which contained an extended discussion of the guiding principles that should be integrated into both PNG's constitutional architecture and future development priorities. Taking sharp aim at the alienation and spiritual poverty they saw as attendant to Western modes of social, political and economic organisation, the Report's writers instead sought to recover and promote indigenous practices and cultural principles as a basis for a specifically Melanesian form of nation state. Proposing a vision for the nation's future based on notions of 'integral human development', they set as a fundamental task for the new nation the conscious re-adoption of what they called 'Papua New Guinean Ways'.

Responding in advance to inevitable questions about the precise meaning of the term, the CPC Report was notable in grounding the notion in a particular way – that is, in an appreciation of what it meant to be a Papua New Guinean *person*, and the particular ways of thinking and acting this involved:

Foreigners often say, "but there are so many differences. What are the Papua New Guinean ways"? We recognize the legitimacy of this question. However, it betrays a lack of appreciation of what a Papua New Guinean person is. Our ways emphasize egalitarianism and commitment to the community. They recognize the individual as a member of his community. We place great stress on our obligations to our extended families. We share our wealth. We view life in an undivided total picture. These ways of thinking and acting should be encouraged, even in the face of the great emphasis of Western thinking on artificial differentiation between things spiritual or sacred and things physical or profane. (CPC 1974: Chapter 2, para 115)

According to the Report, Papua New Guinean Ways recognised that individual rights were exercised in the context of obligations to community: "We consider our village and tribal units as our greatest elements for common care and support." (ibid 1974: para 118)

The promotion of Papua New Guinean Ways did not mean stagnation, however, nor rejecting outright Western techniques and institutions: "Our ways have always been open to external influences"(ibid para 103). However, Papua New Guineans must avoid the danger of becoming "borrowers only": they must be "self-reliant", and "use foreign ways only to supplement [their] own resources" [ibid. 105]. Development could not be a "prefabricated, predetermined set of answers, formulae and solutions by foreigners to the problems and hopes we alone can feel and yearn for". Rather,

Proper development should take place through institutions and techniques that are not only meaningful to us, but also recognize our human dignity and enhance it. [ibid para 102]

Moreover, the Report stressed the CPC's view that modern forms of economic and political organisation - both private and public - could learn and benefit from the "tribal spirit" that animated Papua New Guinean Ways:

In our village and tribal units, no-one is a master and no-one a servant, no-one is an employer and no-one an employee. Most of our societies are classless and egalitarian. This does not mean that, in earlier times, we were lawless or that we lived in anarchy. Social obligations and customary laws governed our lives. We should redirect the government departments and the private sector

to that "tribal spirit" which is and can still be vital in efficiency, maximum output and eventual fulfilment. (ibid paras 118-119)

Central to that "tribal spirit" were specific practices of "participation, of consultation and consensus, and sacrifice for the common good". Unless the forms of these practices were revitalised, the Report argued, "we are continuing the colonial process of holding our people subservient" (ibid para 112).

The CPC Report thus called the people of PNG to a distinctive nation building project. It foresaw the opportunity for the people and their leaders to draw on their particular cultural resources to positively shape the institutions and organisations of the state in a Melanesian image - one grounded, moreover, in an image of what it meant to be a Melanesian person in the context of a distinctive and dynamic cultural ethos. Equally, however, the CPC foresaw that the success of the project was ultimately reliant on the orientation of the new nation's people to this vision, and their willingness to adapt their Ways to the needs and purposes of the new nation state.

Despite these desires and intentions, however, it is therefore notable that the CPC offered no further reflections on the form of public administration that might be considered most suitable for the new nation, or whether and how it might be need to accommodate to, or reconciled with, "Papua New Guinean Ways". Rather, they foresaw that the public service would continue to operate internally essentially along the lines of the model inherited from the Colonial Administration. Thus, the CPC in its further recommendations remarked only on the appropriate arrangements for the "control of and supervision of the public service" to ensure it was responsive to national aims. Its approach to such arrangements was in turn guided by three basic principles reflecting a typically 'Weberian' understanding of bureaucracy as impartial, merit-based and oriented to overarching goals of efficiency and economy (CPC 1974: Chapter 12, para. 2). In line with these principles, CPC's recommendations outlined a series of formal management controls that were subsequently adopted, including the establishment of an independent Public Service Commission (PSC) to decide on overall

public administration policy, and separate Department to oversight personnel management.

Following Independence, however, the practical realities of governing soon led to the questions about the suitability of the machinery of the public service to the new nation's development aspirations. In short, the machinery was not functioning as desired, and - consistent with the dynamic understanding of the institutions of the state expressed by the Constitution's framers - attempts at reform quickly commenced. As Australian PNG scholar, Ronald J. May, remarked in 2006, "[p]ublic sector reform in Papua New Guinea began within the first four years of independence, and has been a more or less continuous process ever since" (May 2006).

Despite this almost continuous process of institutional reform, however, the optimistic vision for the new Papua New Guinean state reflected in the country's Constitution contrasts dramatically with perceptions of its practical realities more than 40 years later. Driving these perceptions is a broad sense that the post-Independence state has largely failed to meet not only the exalted hopes of the political elite who birthed the new nation, but the basic needs of ordinary Papua New Guineans. The remainder of this chapter aims to trace in broad outline the history and development of the Papua New Guinean state – and particularly the state bureaucracy - over the decades since Independence in 1975.

The chapter outlines the perspectives of academic observers, donors, PNG politicians as well as the general public, examining evolving perceptions of the limitations and weak effectiveness of the state bureaucracy as well repeated donor-supported attempts to reform it. It traces the evolution of ideas about governance and governance reform, and explanations of the weak administrative capacity of the state bureaucracy. The chapter ends by returning to questions raised by the framers of PNG's constitution: questions concerning the relations between culture, matters of ethics and personhood, and techniques and forms of social organisation.

2.2 Perceptions of the performance of the Papua New Guinea State since Independence – a brief overview

The performance of the Papua New Guinean state is generally considered poor by international comparative standards. In 2016, for example, the World Bank noted PNG's "low and recently-deteriorating scores" on the World Bank's Country Policy and Institutional Assessments in areas such as economic management, structural policies, social inclusion and equity, and public sector management. Similar comparative performance is evident in the Bank's World Governance Indicators (WB 2016). One of the most commonly cited international indicators of governance performance – Transparency International's annual Corruption Perceptions Index ranking – noted in 2019 that Papua New Guinea's situation has 'stagnated' since its first appearance on the list in 2003, placing it at 137th out of 180 countries surveyed, with its index score of 27 well below the global average of 43 (Transparency International: 2019b). Similar annual surveys of civil and political freedoms and state fragility consistent rank PNG in the bottom half of their 'league tables', citing corruption, weak public administration, parliamentary instability and rule of law as key concerns (see, for example Freedom House: 2021; Fund for Peace: 2021).

Parallel to these continued governance challenges have come equally abiding concerns with the poor standard of government services. Notably, PNG continues to be among the worst performing Pacific Island States across a range of development indicators (Howes 2015; GoPNG 2015a). The lack of progress - or in many cases steady deterioration - in the quality and equity of government service delivery since PNG's independence (May 2004) has been a preoccupying theme for local and foreign thinktanks (Scott 2005; Howes et. al. 2014; IPA 2016) as well as donor organisations (ADB 2012; DFAT 2015a). Surveys of the general public find deep-seated frustrations, highlighting a widely felt and increasingly desperate public desire for improvements in education, transport infrastructure and health (Cook and Winn: 2012). Public criticisms of successive PNG governments are sharpened by perceptions that the country has failed to reap adequate reward from exploitation of its abundant natural resources. High growth rates over the past decade, driven largely by major foreign investment in

extractive industries, have led to few, and inequitable, benefits – particularly for the rural subsistence communities who comprise more than 85% of the country's 8.5 million strong population (Howes 2015; World Bank 2019).

A history of public scandal since Independence has ensured that accusations of corruption, waste and mismanagement in both politics and public administration have become central if not overriding themes in Papua New Guinean public discourse. In the years since Independence a raft of high-profile inquiries into matters of public concern have repeatedly revealed the scope and severity of government misconduct.² Adding grist to this mill for the public imagination have been a constant slew of more routine investigations: in a 2018, for example, the PNG Ombudsman Commission alone noted that it had investigated 115 allegations of corruption against different members of Parliament since independence in 1975 (Transparency International: 2019a).

Despite this record, however, any reasonable account of the PNG government's performance must nevertheless acknowledge bedrock natural and cultural realities. Mountainous terrain splits mainland Papua, isolating remote populations, and preventing road access from Port Moresby to other major Provincial towns in Highlands and Coastal regions alike. Blue expanses of the Pacific Ocean similarly isolate the capital from the populations of the New Guinea Islands. Adding to that, the state must also contend with the brute fact of PNG's famed cultural and linguistic diversity: with more than 800 different languages spoken among a population divided into more than 1,000 ethnic clans, PNG is justly described as the most heterogenous country in the world (World Bank 2019: p1). One of the few acknowledged unifying forces amidst this fragmentation and diversity is the widespread influence of Christianity, which is the nation's sole constitutionally recognised religion. However, through their denominational variety and heterogenous geography, successive and competing waves

² The depth and breadth of the concerns animating these public inquiries can be briefly illustrated by a sample list of their topics: an inquiry into the timber industry (1989), two inquiries into the Government's engagement of mercenaries during the Bougainville conflict (the so-called "Sandline Affair") (1990); the collapse of the state pension fund, NPF (2002); the privatisation and sale of the Papua New Guinean Banking Corporation (2003); the illegal settlement of fraudulent claims against the state by the Department of Finance (2010); the sinking of the passenger ferry Rabaul Queen (2012); land-grabbing through the use of so-called Special Agricultural Business Leases (2013).

Christian proselytisation in PNG have arguably created only a fragile religious basis for national unity and identity (Morgan 2005). Further, questions about the extent and manner in which indigenous animist and ancestral traditions continue to exist alongside or beneath ostensibly Christian beliefs and practices provide a continuing focus of anthropological study and debate (see, for example, Stewart and Strathern 1998; Street 2010; Robbins 1998).

2.3 Post independence – immediate challenges and responses

Despite these realities – or perhaps because of them – the Papua New Guinean public have demonstrated a consistent readiness to cast blame for their country's ills. Writing in 1991 – 16 years after Independence – Australian public administration scholar Mark Turner noted a strong tendency among PNG politicians and the general public to point the finger squarely at the public service:

The public service has been and perhaps remains the greatest recipient of criticism in Papua New Guinea. Villagers, businessmen, voluntary organisations and politicians have maintained a chorus of discontent from independence to the present. The pages of the Papua New Guinea Post-Courier carry numerous rebukes and plenty of abuse directed towards the public service. It is a "haven of waste", "an awkward inefficient system" and something that is "going backwards rather than going forwards ". Leaders such as Somare, Chan and Okuk have, at times, castigated public servants. One former cabinet minister thought there were "too many careless, inefficient, lazy, disrespectful and incompetent people " in the public service. (Turner 1991)

Among the key factors contributing to this widespread perception, Turner suggested, were a an overly rigid, hierarchical and formalistic culture inherited from the previous Colonial administration, exacerbated by far-reaching decentralisation reforms that in 1977 had overnight transformed the new nation's then 19 districts³ into fully-fledged but underfunded Provincial Governments, each with their own Governors, legislative assemblies and concomitant administrative responsibilities for local service delivery⁴.

³ Since that time 3 new Provinces have been created, bringing the current total to 22

⁴ Opting at Independence for a unitary Westminster-style Parliamentary democracy, the nascent state had quickly found itself embroiled in calls for greater Provincial representation and autonomy. In response to demands for independence from the island of Bougainville - which in 1976 became the first

To these factors were added the effects of a rapid post-Independence localisation program that left too many public servants - often rapidly promoted into senior roles - without the skills and knowledge to perform their jobs effectively; and an ineffective and fragmented training regime insufficient to meet the requirements of the localised, restructured and often under-resourced public service (Turner 1991). In sum, what at Independence had been regarded by many as a relatively disciplined and well-functioning system of public administration - albeit one that was rigid and overly-centralised - had within a decade and a half deteriorated significantly in terms of accountability, performance and service delivery capacity (Cf. World Bank 1983; Peiper 2014; Turner and Kavanamur 2009).

Significantly, Turner noted the persistent efforts by successive national governments to engineer a bureaucratic culture more responsive to the political imperatives of the nation's growing service delivery demands. In the first decade after Independence this manifested as a tendency to combat the inherited rigidities of the administration by frequent restructuring and redeployment of senior personnel. "Top bureaucrats", he observed, were regularly "shifted, sacked and reassigned in this public service version of musical chairs" (Turner 1991: p101). This ad hoc and undoubtedly counterproductive method was soon replaced, however, with a more structured and systematic approach. Following the advice of a World Bank analysis of public sector management (World Bank 1983), and reflecting the emerging orthodoxies of what came to be called New Public Management, in 1986 the wide-ranging powers of the centralised Public Service Commission were dramatically curtailed, and the PSC's powers over personnel policy transferred to a new Department of Personnel Management (DPM), answerable to cabinet. With oversight of a far-ranging program of public service organisational reform placed in a special World Bank-funded Project Management Unit (PMU), day-to-day powers over such matters as appointments, promotions, discipline and allowances were devolved to Departmental heads (Turner

Provincial Government - previously rejected Constitutional provisions for the establishment of elected Provincial-level governments were reinstated in 1977. Poorly resourced and implemented, however, and with several Provincial Governments suspended for financial mismanagement during the 1980's, within a decade these reforms were judged by many to have been a failure (May 2004: p 176ff).

1991). Crucially, however, the National Executive Council (PNG's cabinet) now became responsible not only for the broad direction of human resource management policy, but also for appointing heads of departments and agencies (Turner and Kavanamur 2009).

While Turner in 1991 noted these changes with guarded optimism, their results, in hindsight, can perhaps be viewed as inevitable. While the PMU's organisational reform agenda languished – the first in a succession of unsuccessful donor-supported efforts at public administration reform - politicisation of the public service proceeded apace (May 2006; Turner and Kavanamur 2009). As Turner and Kavanamur subsequently observed in 2009, a major consequence of the curtailment of the PSC was that “personal connections started to become more significant determinants of who occupied seats on boards of public authorities or filled the higher departmental positions” (2009 p13). Notably, however, little study of this process of politicisation, or its effects on public service performance, has been undertaken.

One exception is a 2002 paper by Papua New Guinean political scientist Hela Payani. However, Payani's paper is significant not only for its rare attention to the politicisation of the national bureaucracy. It is also unique in highlighting ethnic and cultural influences as a factor in this process. Specifically, Payani examined the influence of ‘wantokism’, which he defined as “the recruitment and promotion of unmerited candidates on the basis of family connections, kinship ties, and tribal, provincial, and regional origins, at the expense of merited candidates” (Payani 2002: 140). Payani's analysis, highlighting oppositions between “traditional” aspects of Melanesian culture and “modern” norms of bureaucracy - and blurring distinctions between genuine tribal and kinship relations and more recent, politically created forms of regional identity - perhaps lacked the nuance of more anthropologically informed accounts of wantokism. (For discussion and literature view, see, for example Schram 2014) However, the issue of ethnicization appears to have attracted little subsequent attention from any formal source, despite the fact that it was, as Payani noted at the time, “widely acknowledged” (Payani 2002:p 141).

2.4 Wantokism and ethnicisation in the public service

In Papua New Guinean parlance, 'wantoks' are those with whom you have a social connection, usually based in ties of kinship, place or language (hence the *tok pisin* or neo-Melanesian word *wantok* i.e. "one talk"). The dynamics of both politics and public administration in Papua New Guinea are often associated with the operation of wantok networks. Like the kinship relations with which they are closely associated, wantok connections bring with them relational expectations and obligations of reciprocity, solidarity and mutual support – expectations and obligations that present both constraints and opportunities that at times come into conflict with the ethical obligations public office holders owe to the state.

Commencing his discussion by noting the bureaucracy's formal adherence to principles of merit, Payani highlighted the absence of properly enforced recruitment guidelines and a reliable system of merit-based rewards for performance. In accounting for this, he noted:

In a country where regional and tribal loyalties are highly prized, it is difficult to avoid the temptation of breaching the merit principle and doing favours to one's kinsmen. Papua New Guinean societies are communal-based. The culture places a high value on loyalty and obligation to one's family, kin, tribe, province, or region. Those holding influential public office positions are often seen as the representatives of their provinces or regions. Helping friends, relatives, or tribesmen is usually regarded as a social obligation. This traditional value creates ambivalence towards the rational and impersonal norms of a modern bureaucracy. (Payani 2002: p140)

In line with this, and consistent with Turner and Kavanamur's analysis, writing of the politicisation of the public service Payani firstly observed:

a tendency for politicians in PNG to ensure that their relatives, friends, or those from their province or region are appointed to the top posts in the government sector. They perceive senior bureaucrats as representatives of regional, provincial, or tribal interests, rather than as national public servants. (Payani 2002: p139)

While citing little direct evidence, Payani nevertheless attributed this trend to two main factors: personal trust and ethnic pride and solidarity. In the first instance, he suggested, in a context where political cronyism had become entrenched, “a Minister would rather have one of his cronies as a departmental head than someone whom he does not know, irrespective of that person's competency” (p 139). Further, he argued, such appointments enabled a politician to claim to have exerted his influence in a manner which was often popular with his tribal or regional constituents (p139).

Bureaucrats, in turn, responded to these changed dynamics by adopting new strategies:

In order to protect themselves or get quick promotions, bureaucrats have to develop political links and loyalties to different political parties or influential politicians. (Payani 2002: p139)

Such links, Payani suggested, were normally hidden and “hard to detect”, but became evident during elections when senior bureaucrats resigned to run for political office under the banner of one of PNG’s various political parties. (p140) Further evidence was to be found in the politically motivated “reshuffling, demotions, dismissals, and transfers among senior bureaucrats” that were a common occurrence following changes of government at national elections or Parliament’s frequent votes of no-confidence (p140).

Payani also noted the further influence of wantokism within the ranks of the bureaucracy itself. He suggested that the pressure of wantok obligations was felt most strongly by senior officials because they were often viewed by others as ‘big men’, who were culturally obliged to show their position of power by acts of generosity:

In order for these "big men" to maintain their exalted status or image, they are tempted to abuse the discretionary powers vested in them to reward their wantoks. (p140)

Demands from his wantoks, he argued, could often “embarrass” a big man. “Cultural pressures”, he concluded, “can force a person to do things he would not otherwise do” (Ibid).

Payani’s own 2002 analysis of four national Departments, conducted in the absence of official statistics on the ethno-regional composition of the public service and based on uncited figures from 1996, indicated a significant over-representation of officers from Central Provinces and two (i.e. East and West) Sepik Provinces, and a corresponding under-representation of officers from the Highlands Region (Payani 2002:p 141). As Payani himself acknowledged, however, his analysis was both imprecise and partial, and many agencies were not significantly impacted by ethnicization. Further, his analysis was based on raw numbers, and did not, for example, systematically examine how particular groups may have been influentially positioned within the organisational hierarchy of particular agencies. In the absence of subsequent study, therefore, it is difficult to assess the validity of Payani’s original analysis, or the current extent and character of ethnicisation in the national public service. However, as attested by my own interviews with a range of public service stakeholders, contemporary anecdotal evidence suggests a degree of continuity as well as change. In particular, the marginal position of officers from the Highlands regions that Payani noted in 1996 has no doubt decisively shifted - driven in part, perhaps, by both the significant extension of education opportunities for Highlanders and the notably increased influence of Highlands politicians in the national political arena over the past two decades.

Commenting generally on the phenomenon of ethnicization, and referencing similar conclusions from a 1993 Report by a government Rationalisation Task Force, Payani claimed:

Minority officers have stated that they felt alienated and uneasy working in an environment dominated by people from a different province or region. To some, these departments and agencies appear more like tribal enterprises than government departments. There have been complaints that, in such departments, there is a complete lack of work ethics, slackness, absenteeism, and laziness. This is the direct result of the anger, frustration, and resentment

among minority officers who see themselves victimized by the ethnicization of departments or agencies. (Payani 2002: p 154)

In addition to the debilitating effects of politicisation, wantokism and ethnicization on public service performance, Payani noted a range of more practical concerns. Inadequate housing allowances, the prevailing system of dual salaries for national and expatriate public servants (since abolished), and poor training, all contributed to 'manpower weaknesses' and systematically low morale. (Ibid. passim) Together, Payani suggested, they contributed to a pervasive culture of corruption. He noted:

Corrupt practices are so widespread in PNG that they are often considered to be "business as usual," and range from the misconduct of senior bureaucrats, officers from statutory bodies, and leading politicians, to low-level government employees. (Payani 2002: p 149)

Some low-level practices, such as the use of offices resources for private purposes or the financing of private travel, were "so widespread that few Papua New Guineans recognize them as a form of corruption". (Ibid) Overall, however, he suggested that the most general and pervasive effects of corruption were reflected in poor work ethics and low productivity. The result, he argued, was to fuel public perception of public servants as "corrupt, slack, unresponsive, and inefficient." (Payani 2002: p 152).

2.5 The impact of electoral politics

Given these accounts by Turner and Payani, it is notable that the volume and intensity of public criticisms of the public service has in recent years appeared to have subsided, though perhaps not because of any dramatic improvement in its overall performance. Rather, contemporary Papua New Guineans appear to more readily identify their politicians as the chief culprits responsible for the country's state of affairs. For example, a 2012 USAID-funded pre-election focus group study of views on politics and government among both urban and rural residents across 6 Provinces summarised its conclusions thus:

Members of Parliament (MPs) are the target for most of the criticism from participants. Most say MPs are selfish, uncaring politicians who spend their time in Port Moresby and care most about enriching themselves. “To them being a member is just for the fame and name and supporting their family” is how one participant describes the reputation of MPs. (Cook and Winn 2012: p 8)

Such a summary barely does justice to the richness of the material contained in the body of the report: references to broken promises, dishonesty, lack of trust, self-dealing, corruption and wantokism are peppered throughout. As the report noted, one woman spoke for the views of many when she stated simply: “MPs run politics as their private business.” (ibid p12).

For their own part, it seems, PNG’s politicians are now just as likely to identify their own constituents as the chief problem, rather than public servants. Whether on the record or privately, MPs frequently complain of the ‘unrealistic expectations’ and ‘handout mentality’ characteristic of Papua New Guinean voters. As one high-profile Provincial Governor posted on social media in 2020, when he was growing up “[e]veryone was busy working. There would hardly be anyone sitting under the rain trees waiting for a handout.” In contrast, “Today people expect so much for nothing, no effort, no sweat, no risk.” (Bird 2020).

This apparent shift in the focus of public discussion over the past two decades is no doubt accounted for by major changes in the Papua New Guinean polity itself. These changes have focused in two main areas: increased decentralisation, and the parallel growth of electorate funds. In 1995, in an ostensible attempt to overcome the constraints on service delivery caused by the state’s ineffective administrative machinery⁵, initial efforts at decentralisation reform saw the abolition of independently elected Provincial Assemblies, and the radical alteration of Provincial and District-level administrative structures to bring them under the oversight of two different categories of National MPs (Regional and Open Members, respectively, with

⁵ While ostensibly motivated by a desire to improve local service delivery by abolishing expensive and ineffectual Provincial authorities, the 1995 decentralisation reforms were equally a response by National MPs to the fierce competition that had emerged with Provincial MPs over their electoral bases (see Ghai and Regan 1992; May and Regan 1997)

the former taking the mantle of Provincial Governors). (Kalinoe 2009; Ketan 2013 p6ff)

Subsequent reforms in 2014, which further consolidated control of District-level affairs under the leadership of Open MPs, were largely an attempt to clarify many of the confusions which arose from the initial reforms. (Duncan and Banga 2018) Notably, both sets of reforms also saw increased formalisation and consolidation of electoral funds as a key mechanism for the local delivery of government services. Growing significantly over time, these electoral funds have provided both Regional and Open MPs with effective control of substantial development budgets within their respective spheres of government (Ketan 2007; Duncan and Banga 2018). Together these reforms are widely seen to have entrenched the domination of national parliamentarians over regional and local affairs, politicised Provincial and local-level administrations, and to have broadly resulted in a deterioration of Provincial and local-level public service capacity and accountability (May 2004:pp174ff; Ketan 2007; Morgan 2005; Walton 2019). As one research report has remarked, “politicians have taken on the role of service providers rather than policy-makers, with ‘implementation’ considered a task of handing out dollars rather than building sustainable bureaucratic structures.” (Reilly, Brown and Flower 2014: p11)

As such, older concerns with the quality of public administration appear to have given way to the often troubled relationships that now seem to hold between Papua New Guinean politicians and their constituents. Given its central importance in accounting for the functioning of the Papua New Guinean state, describing and accounting for dynamics of PNG’s electoral politics has received significant attention from political scientists and anthropologists alike. Studies repeatedly highlight the basis of MP’s electoral support in the mobilisation of clan and tribal ties, often through ‘bloc voting’; their reliance on extended family and kinship connections for campaign support; and the use of public resources once in office to reward supporters (Ketan 2000; Ketan 2007; Morgan 2005; Standish 2006; May 2004; Scott 2005). The role of electoral development funds – commonly known as ‘slush funds’ - in facilitating this clientelistic style of electoral politics has been closely examined (Ketan 2007), and their failure to deliver sustained or equitable benefits to constituents has been repeatedly demonstrated (Reilly, Brown and Flower 2014; Gelu; Allen and Husnain 2009).

Discussion has sometimes focused on accounting for regional variations in the prevalence of such practices (seen as more intense in the Highlands, where ‘cash politics’ and bouts electoral violence are seen to have become entrenched). (see, for example, Allen and Husnain 2009) Where it has occurred, debate has often centred on accounting for voter behaviour, where cultural explanations contend with rational choice models to explain electoral dynamics. On the one side, cultural explanations emphasise electoral competition for clan prestige, voter expectations of reciprocity from their MPs, and the image of the state among rural voters as a “distant bigman” dispensing “gifts, materials and wealth” (Morgan 2005). Rational choice analysts, in contrast, emphasise the logic of electoral competition in a broken system, arguing that voters’ inability to envisaged a workable alternative to entrenched corruption and particularistic resource allocation practices dominates their expectations and decision-making (Kurer 2005; Wood 2016, 2017). Both interpretations of voter behaviour, however, are ultimately based on the same premise: the public belief, as Morgan puts it, that despite their perceived shortcomings, “political leaders, rather than impartial state services, are the most bankable avenues for resource distribution.” (Morgan 2005)

Unsurprisingly, given these electoral dynamics, the significant political dimensions underlying the challenges of public sector reform in PNG have been increasingly highlighted by academic researchers for over a decade. In their review of 30 years of failed donor-supported public administration reform in 2009, Turner and Kavanamur (2009) rejected “conventional explanations” that blamed “inadequate bureaucratic capacity or inappropriate donor solutions” (p9), and instead pointed squarely to political factors as “the root causes”. (p19) Noting a wide range of familiar technical shortcomings in public sector management – weak policy analysis; poor definition of processes and responsibilities; inadequate supervision; lack of trained staff; slowness of bureaucratic action; constant turnover of managers; insufficient coordination; infrastructure shortcomings etc. – they stated plainly:

The technical shortcomings occur because there is no concerted effort by the political elite to ensure that implementation of public sector reform conforms to the policy plans. (Turner and Kavanamur 2009: p 20)

In turn they ascribed this lack of political interest in better performing and more accountable public institutions to three closely related main factors: the clientelistic nature of PNG electoral politics, in which “particularistic concerns of staying in office and of satisfying small groups of supporters have dominated political life” (p20); periodic crises in government, including ongoing Parliamentary instability, which have rendered donor-sponsored public sector reform a low priority (p20); and a trend by the national political elite to instead institute reforms which have sidelined administrative oversights and dramatically increased political control of public resources - including public service appointments - while simultaneously allowing accountability to go into decline (p20).

2.6 The perspective from “Aidland”

Notably, such an account of the underlying causes of reform failure in PNG is broadly consistent with the conclusions of more recent global research. Over the past decade, as Carothers and De Gramont have traced in detail, a distinct shift in the global development paradigm has seen increased attention focused on to the political dimensions of aid, with particular implications for analyses of governance reform (Carothers and De Gramont 2013). As they note, commencing in the early 1990’s, donors typically approached public sector reform as a ‘technical’ endeavour focused on capacity building and institutional strengthening (Carothers and De Gramont 2013: 6-7). Efforts under the so-called “Good Governance” agenda were largely directed to the reform and strengthening of formal monitoring and accountability mechanisms (such as ‘top down’ bureaucratic disciplines, specialised oversight agencies, or methods of democratic accountability) to drive and improve public sector performance. Governance research over the past decade, however, has highlighted the failure of efforts to strengthen performance through formal means (sometimes characterized as “principal-agent” models) in the face of persistent informal norms, institutions and power relations (including those related to political patronage and

ethnicity). (See, for example, Booth and Cammack 2013; IDS 2005, IDS 2010; World Bank 2017; Andrews 2013; Levy 2014.) As a consequence, attention has increasingly moved away from formal capacity building approaches to an emphasis on problem-driven methods of politics and collective action. As such, priority is now focused on institutional function, not form; the search is for effective institutional hybridity established via politically astute stakeholder analysis and engagement, and anchored in informal elements of the local institutional context, sometimes expressed using metaphors of “institutional bricolage” (Andrews 2013) or of “working with the grain” (Levy 2014).

The influence of such considerations have begun to be felt in recent years in Papua New Guinea, where the objective of governance reform remains a central focus for donors, including PNG’s largest donor, Australia (DFAT 2015a; DFAT 2020). Consistent with the emerging global emphasis on the political dimensions of governance reform, a persistent lack of success in these efforts has led to widespread criticism of the technical assistance and training approaches commonly used by the Australian aid program. A review of Australia’s Development Cooperation Treaty with PNG conducted in 2010 noted, for example, that “formal evaluations and other feedback suggest much technical assistance has had little impact in key areas”, concluding that “there are strong indications that the ‘capacity building through advisers’ model is not working” (Howes et. al. 2010: 23; see also Whimp 2009: 143). Reflecting in 2013 on lessons from recently published ODI-led research on governance in Africa, and echoing many of its conclusions (see Booth and Cammack 2013), DFAT’s then lead governance adviser argued that:

We may need to accept that supporting the structures of the state may not contribute effectively to poverty reduction. This means we have to find other, non-state modalities for delivering ‘development’... We need to (finally) give up the assumption that ‘building the capacity’ of individuals and organisations in the government will make a difference to service delivery on the front line. (Teskey 2013: 1)

Such conclusions reiterated the similar findings of a 2009 review of PNG’s decentralised service delivery reforms, which noted that: “failure to hold others to

account is one of the chief weaknesses of the PNG public sector. This reluctance is unlikely to be remedied with the application of a thin layer of capacity-building, and more likely will require fundamental evolution of the political system.” (Whimp 2009: 143)

In line with these findings, a move away from narrowly defined public sector technical assistance and capacity building approaches has in recent years been evident in the Australian aid program in PNG. Newer programming approaches are increasingly adopting methodologies that closely resemble the adaptive, localised, problem-driven collective action approaches favoured by contemporary policy research. One notable example of this kind of programming approach was DFAT’s Decentralisation and Citizen Participation Partnership (DCPP), a key initiative under the \$360 million PNG Australia Governance Partnership (PAGP) which commenced in 2016 and was completed in 2021 (Abt 2019: DFAT 2015b). However, this has not meant that technical assistance has disappeared from the Australian aid program – far from it. PAGP itself maintained a strong focus on technical and advisory support to core government institutions, and training and advisory modalities continue to play a major role in Australian aid engagement in PNG. Rather, aid policy-makers and practitioners alike are increasingly urged to “Think and Work Politically”, and are offered a growing range of tools and methods for stakeholder engagement and political economy analysis for use in the design and implementation of their programs (e.g. DLP 2016; Abt 2017).

2.7 The turn to leadership and ethics

However, one further aspect of this increasingly ‘political’ approach is a focus on the theme of leadership (DFAT 2015b). Notably, a flagship PAGP initiative under this theme was support to PNG’s rebranded public service training school now known as the Pacific Institute of Leadership and Governance (PILAG), launched formally on November 2015 by the PNG and Australian Governments. Operating under the mandate of “Ethics, Leadership, Values”, PILAG is a key platform for operationalising the PNG Government’s *Public Sector Ethics and Values-based Leadership and*

Management Capability Framework (LMCF), an initiative of senior PNG public service officials developed with support from the Australian Public Service Commission (GoPNG 2015b). Support for the LMCF rollout has been provided by the Australian Government, initially via PAGP, through range of short-courses in ethics and leadership for both central and local government public servants.

A significant aspect of the LMCF is its explicit link to provisions in the PNG Constitution highlighted at the beginning of this chapter, which calls for the co-existence and promotion of both “traditional” and Christian values, and balancing a commitment to liberal democratic institutions with indigenous forms of social and political life (GoPNG 2015b: 11). As noted, the fifth of 5 National Goals and Directives is described in the Constitution under the heading of “Papua New Guinean Ways”, and calls for the achievement of “development primarily through the use of Papua New Guinean forms of social, political and economic organizations” (GoPNG 1975/2014).

Building upon this Constitutional provision, the LCF lists four ‘sources’ for the six values it espouses: Christian values, Clan values, Governmental values and Global values (GoPNG 2015b: 12). The six values it claims to draw from these sources are Honesty, Integrity, Accountability, Respect, Wisdom, and Responsibility. The LMCF asserts these values, and provide brief definitions of each, but does not elaborate how any of the four sources are drawn upon to inform such values. As the document makes clear, however, the values espoused in the document are nevertheless expected to “govern the actions of all public officers of government”, and are:

critical to engendering a new mindset attuned to effective problem solving, results-orientation and societal maintenance whilst preserving positive traditional and Christian values amongst current and future generations of Papua New Guinean leaders. (GoPNG 2015b)

In this respect, it is notable that the LMCF assumes that a strengthened commitment to formal public sector ethics and values is not (or not only) a matter of combating corruption – indeed, the word “corruption” does not appear in the document – but is aimed at general public service performance improvement. The document thus concerns itself primarily with wider issues of motivation, attitude, judgment,

knowledge, skills and capabilities that are asserted to be the basis for professional and ethical public service performance.

Given the skepticism that has been expressed towards capacity building approaches in the PNG context and elsewhere, however, the LMCF initiative raises interesting questions. The first is straightforward: given the widely shared view that the domain of the political is the primary arena in which problems of governance must be understood and resolved, what is the value in focusing on capacity building in public service ethics as strategy for governance reform? In the first instance, this inevitably poses further questions about the likely efficacy of capacity building methods as a strategy for influencing behavioural change. At one level, this is technical matter of whether training can be an effective means to motivate and facilitate behaviour change, through appropriately contextualised training design and delivery as well as ancillary support. At a more fundamental level, however, it is a question of context itself. In short, in the face of existing political and other societal forces that are widely seen as contributing to the status quo – including the absence of appropriate and sustained political direction, discipline and oversight – what realistic capacity can be expected of public servants - both individually and collectively - to actually change their behaviour, and consistently act in accordance with relevant bureaucratic norms and expectations?

Behind such questions, however, lies a third, broader and even more fundamental one: namely, what role does the ethical agency of public servants actually play in the performance of public sector organisations in Papua New Guinea? Notably, answering this question, as well as the more specific questions that precede it, involves both empirical and normative dimensions. In the first instance, it requires empirical study of how public servants actually think and act *in situ*, and an account of the various factors that influence their conduct. In addition, alongside such empirical study, normative questions also necessarily arise. Notably, however, these normative questions take on a particular focus. While this focus is related to matters of how individual agents may be expected to be normatively orientated to a relevant set of ethically valorised values and practices, it is not concerned with the normative validity

of the character or grounds of those values and practices *per se*. Rather, it specifically and more narrowly concerns how it is that bureaucratic ethics - and individual ethical agency - causally contribute to constituting *effectively functioning bureaucratic organisations*.

However, this in turn raises a specific set of issues that is particularly highlighted by the LCMF and the PNG context. More generally, as noted, consistent with the vision of the Constitution's framers the LCMF seeks to draw on 'culture' as a resource to legitimate and shape state bureaucratic practices in a manner that is distinctively Papua New Guinean. This raises a fundamental question about the compatibility of such cultural resources – or what the LCMF calls 'clan values' - with the ethical requirements of bureaucratic forms of organisation. At one level, this question can be illustrated by reference to the contents of LCMF itself. As noted, the LCMF simply asserts that the six values it espouses are common to the four domains it identifies as sources, and presumes that they are both relevant and sufficient. In the most straightforward terms, by seeking to make these values consistent with, and partly grounded in, the cultural domain of 'clan values', is the LCMF neglecting or overlooking other values from domains outside the 'cultural' that may be inconsistent with those values, but still equally relevant or important, and thus integral to an adequate appreciation of public sector ethics? As a consequence, it also does not consider whether the specific meaning of the values it espouses, if they are required to be grounded in a 'cultural' perspective, might translate into practice in ways that may be in tension with, or inadequate to, the wider functional requirements of bureaucratic ethics. In this sense, then, the authors of the LCMF simply assume that the ethics of bureaucracy are fully compatible with, and may be legitimately grounded in, the specific representations of the culturally grounded values they identify. This may not necessarily be the case.

However, to highlight the potentially problematic domain of 'culture' in this manner is to simply to return in a more detailed way to the initial problematic posed by the framers of Papua New Guinea's constitution. As may be recalled, the constitution's framers sought to chart an approach to the development of the institutions of the state in a way that was consistent with, and built upon, indigenous cultural principles.

Specifically, they sought to frame a conception of the state - and its mode of operation - that was consistent a particular culturally distinctive ethos, termed “Papua New Guinean Ways”. This they notably defined as involving a conception of the Melanesian person, characterised in terms of particular ways of thinking and acting that accorded this distinctive cultural ethos. In essence, this was optimistic vision in relation to the mode of operation of the institutions of state, involving an assumption that such cultural principles were broadly compatible – or could be made compatible - with the operation of state institutions, including that of bureaucracy.

2.8 Incompatible principles

Notably, however, the optimism of the Constitution’s founders with respect to this compatibility was not necessarily matched by contemporary observers. Attention to this issue was forcefully drawn by Australian anthropologist Peter Lawrence in the years immediately prior to Independence, at the height of the classic period of post-war Melanesian anthropology. Responding in part to the civic education program of the Australian Colonial Administration then embarking on the early stages of introducing self-government in PNG, in his overview of *The State versus Stateless Society* (1969), Lawrence asserted that the task facing the administration was more radical than then conceived. As paraphrased by Strathern, Lawrence contended that:

To impose the principles of western law [in Papua New Guinea] would demand little short of a total revolution... of the existing socio-political order. [Lawrence made] a dramatic contrast between the Australian state, where every member is legally conceived as a citizen-isolate in formal equality with every other, and the stateless political systems of Papua New Guinea where action is always qualified by social considerations, where people are not citizens but kin or clansman, and where morality is defined not in universalist but in particular and relative terms. (Lawrence 1969, 1971, 1984; as summarised in M. Strathern 1988: p 4)

Lawrence stressed that the latter systems could not be seen simply as a rudimentary version of the former; rather, their principles were almost diametrically opposed (Lawrence 1969).

Lawrence's account might therefore be summarily characterised in the following terms: in pursuing independence, Papua New Guinean society was embarked upon a process of change from a pre-colonial situation in which people were organised within a collection of interacting but self-regulating (i.e. stateless) social orders governed by localised moral economies of reciprocity and mutuality, to one in which they were intended to be gathered under a single, unified social order (i.e. a state) governed by (in Weberian terms) a democratically legitimated form of legal-bureaucratic domination (Weber 2019). Looked at another way, Lawrence's analysis implied that the institutionalisation of the organs of the state required the internalisation among state agents of a certain ethical orientation, a certain 'impartial' and non-relational form of individual ethical agency and personhood distinctly different to indigenous forms of sociality, that in relevantly defined situations was expected to predominate over and bound - literally govern - social relations.

Notably, Lawrence's analysis highlighted the implications of this problematic for the operation of the political, and particularly legal, arms of the state. However, while he acknowledged the role of public administration as the third core element of the state-governed social order, he did not discuss it. In some respects, however, the challenges identified by Lawrence might be characterised as even more acute with respect to bureaucracy than those posed by politics and the law. Bureaucracy is a mode of social organisation with close relation of the law, and its abstractly formal mode of governing social relations. However, it is also one which is specifically intended to facilitate a certain form of cooperative action, in a manner that is formally circumscribed in a particularly detailed way. In this respect, individual members of a state bureaucratic organisation are conceived not only as 'citizen-isolates', but 'office holders', each bearing abstract, formal entitlements and obligations that are ultimately grounded in law and law-like rules and procedures, and which are expected to govern cooperative social action in the legal-bureaucratic domain. As with the law, however, the central guiding value of bureaucracy under this conception is found in the principle of 'impartiality' (cf. Rothstein 2011; Rothstein and Teorell 2008) – a notion that is notably absent from the list of core values elaborated in the LMCF.

2.9 Conclusion

In the more than forty years that have passed since the country's independence, Papua New Guinean's have continued to adapt their cultural ways to the imported institutions of 'Westernised' modernity, including the modern state. In so doing, they have also in many ways, and at the same time, adapted the institutions of the state to their cultural ways, including the institution of state bureaucracy. That they have sought to do so intentionally and with conscious ethical purpose is evident in the LCMF. However, in light of the preceding discussion, it is equally open to question how the institution of bureaucracy has been interpreted in more practical terms by Papua New Guineans in light of the distinctive principles and practices of 'traditional' Melanesian culture highlighted by Lawrence – and what effects this has had on the performance of bureaucratic organisations. The next chapter turns to the theoretical and methodological implications involved in investigating this question.

Chapter 3 - “Culture”, ethics and public service performance: defining the problem and approach

3.1 Introduction

The broader field of Melanesian anthropology includes a large and growing corpus of studies that aims to interpret and understand the profound and manifold changes that have occurred – and continue to occur – within what is now known as post-colonial Papua New Guinea. Specifically, they instance a significant stream of thought that seeks to characterise these changes in terms of the mutual influence of distinctively Melanesian and Western categories and modes of thought and practice – a process that may in a broad but related sense also be framed as an encounter between ‘tradition’ and ‘modernity’.

The most general and considered statement of this perspective has perhaps been articulated by Edward LiPuma (1998). As LiPuma has stressed, this transformational process cannot be imagined simply as a process of an “imposing West, and a resisting Other” (p 6) - whatever the valence (positive or negative) one may wish impress upon such terms as ‘imposition’ and ‘resistance’. As LiPuma characterises it, the process is instead “dialectical”. To state this, he argues, is simply:

...to acknowledge that what is considered and contested as *kastam* today has been inflected by Western presence and pressures, just as what is considered Western (parliamentary government, Christianity, the use of Western-like money etc) now bears an unmistakable Melanesian imprint. (LiPuma 1998: 6)

Writing in a similar vein to LiPuma, Knauff (1999), however notably warns against polarising an essentialising notion of “indigenous Melanesia” against “contemporary trends”, arguing that many of the forces associated with “modernity” – such as migration and diffusion, economic and political change, and changing dimensions of cultural value - have themselves been indigenous to Melanesia for thousands of years (Knauff 1999: p 13). In this sense, on Knauff’s reading, ‘tradition’ (i.e. *kastam*) in the

Melanesian context cannot be said to have ever been static, fixed or closed to external influences, but rather should be understood to have always embodied a living response to both external influences and contingent and emerging social events and conditions.

Nevertheless, even within this framing, Knauft highlights a particular sense of continuity-in-change within the process of transformation that LiPuma characterises as 'dialectical'. Focusing primarily on contemporary Melanesians' orientation to the putatively 'modern' institutions of a capitalist market economy, he highlights the sense in which they aspire to wants associated with the distinctive capitalist economic forms of "commodities and cash". At the same time, however, he argues that

rather than presenting a rupture with indigenous practices and beliefs, the dynamics of Melanesian economic aspirations are best seen as a permutation upon long standing cultural patterns. These emphasise the giving and receiving of gifts and services – sometimes competitively – as key to personal prestige and community success. Indications of modern accomplishment – or the lack thereof - thus have distinctively Melanesian meanings and implications. These draw upon the distinctive "transactional" nature of Melanesian social relationships which provide the basis for individual and well as collective identity. (p 14)

In drawing attention here to the broad domain of "modern accomplishment", Knauft's observation points beyond the sphere of narrowly defined economic institutions, suggesting a much wider field of persisting influence for distinctively Melanesian meanings – and their associated modes of social relations and forms of identity - within the general context of ostensibly 'modern' and 'Western' institutional domains.

In this sense, evidence for both LiPuma's and Knauft's related theses of 'mutual influence' and 'continuity-in change' has been amply demonstrated by anthropological study in a range of ostensibly 'non-traditional' institutional domains, each bearing marks of Li Puma's 'unmistakable Melanesian imprint' centred on the distinctive character of Melanesian modes of social relations that is highlighted by Knauft. These include (but are not at all limited to): electoral politics (e.g. Ketan 2000; Dalsgaard 2009); the practice of contemporary evangelical Christianity (Robbins 1998); the

operation of domestic markets for betelnut (Sharp 2019); orientations to the law (Filer 2006); and rural medicine and health care epistemologies and practices (Street 2011). However, little anthropological attention has been paid to the implications of this 'dialectical' transformational process for another evidently 'non-traditional' institutional domain: that of government bureaucracy. This is perhaps surprising, given the central place that institutions of legal-rational bureaucracy hold in the overall 'modernising' project – a significance reflected in the burgeoning interest in the anthropology of state bureaucracy within the global field of development studies.

LiPuma's and Knauff's general observations nevertheless pose certain challenges for the focal concerns of this thesis. In broad terms, in seeking to investigate the persisting influence of any distinctive forms and patterns of an ostensible Melanesian cultural 'tradition' on the character and performance of contemporary Papua New Guinean government bureaucracy, in what sense is it meaningful to talk about 'traditional culture' in a context in which that culture is evidently changed and changing? Participants in that process of ongoing change, such the framers of the PNG constitutions, the authors of the LCMF - or my informant David, who was quoted in the Introduction - may themselves speak of 'traditional' culture, values or ways of doing things. However, they are speaking from a vantage point that has already to a greater or lesser extent been influenced by, or inflected with, 'modern' and 'Western' categories and modes of discourse, thought and practice. In what sense, then, does the 'traditional culture' they are pointing to continue to exist, both as a source of meaning as well as a causal influence on thought and behaviour?

Knauff himself comments specifically on this concern:

The present challenge for anthropology, as much as for contemporary Melanesians themselves, is thus to recontextualise traditions of cultural distinction in a period of self-avowed modernity (p13)

This challenge, as I take it, is to avoid the temptation to essentialise a notion of 'traditional culture' as something that by definition persists in a static, closed or fixed manner, but along with Knauff to think instead in terms of 'traditions of cultural

distinction’ – that is, of culturally distinctive patterns of thought and practice that may be observed to persist in some recognisable but nevertheless ‘recontextualised’ fashion amidst a broad historical process of institutional and cultural change.

It is in light of these broad concerns that this chapter aims to examine key aspects of the theoretical and methodological challenges involved in investigating and assessing the questions about Papua New Guinea’s state bureaucracy posed by this thesis. It seeks to develop an understanding of how best to investigate the question of whether and how a living cultural tradition that may nevertheless be characterised as distinctively Melanesian – aspects of which evidently continue to broadly inform and shape the functioning of a range of institutions in contemporary Papua New Guinean society - impacts upon the effective functioning of state bureaucracy. This investigation starts with the premise that the most appropriate methods for researching these questions are ethnographic. A range of contemporary ethnographic approaches to the study of state bureaucracy will initially be reviewed and critically examined. Each of these approaches emphasise the central importance of studying the ‘everyday practices’ of public servants as means to investigate and understand the workings of state bureaucracies. Examination of these ethnographies and their theoretical and methodological underpinnings will highlight key strengths as well as problematic aspects of their approach to ‘everyday practices’, focusing on key issues of theory and methodology that arise in relation to two specific concepts - those of ‘culture’ and ‘normativity’ - and the ways in which these notions are understood, related and deployed.

By the former – the problematic of ‘culture’ - I mean the way in which we may define ‘culture’ as an object of study across three related dimensions: firstly, in terms of the role of the concept of a distinctive or particular culture or ‘tradition of cultural distinction’ in framing issues of historical and social continuity and change; second, in terms of how any elements of a culturally inherited ‘tradition’ may be broadly understood to influence action in a changing and pluralistic institutional and normative context, via the persistence of certain kinds of meaningful values, representations and related practices; and third in terms of how the notion of a ‘cultural tradition’ in both

these senses may function in helping define and unify the practical and conceptual boundaries of the research 'field', particularly in situations characterised by normative pluralism and change involving diverse and often spatially separated institutional domains.

The second major challenge that I wish to explore - the problematic of 'normativity' – arises chiefly in the context of the first and second problems noted above. Specifically, it arises in the relation to the normative dimensions of any culture: that is, the way in which a given 'cultural tradition' may be understood in some sense to be a 'carrier' of norms and their associated meanings and values that in some way can help account for the conduct of social actors. In particular, this concerns the problem of how to move from a *descriptive* and *interpretive* account of actor's 'everyday practices' to an *explanatory* account of why those practices often fail to meet a relevant 'culturally transmitted' normative standard. This not only involves the problem of determining what constitutes an adequate account of such 'normative standards' for explanatory purposes, it also involves the problem of adequately accounting for how and why it is that actors often fail (or choose not) to meet those standards. Moreover, in the context of this study, these questions are further complicated by circumstances in which the influences of different and potentially conflicting normative 'traditions' or 'cultures' may be in play (such as, for example, those that might be broadly characterizable as alternately 'Melanesian' or 'Western' in origin in some distinctive sense). Finally, given the specific questions posed by this thesis, these tasks involve the added dimension of accounting for the conduct of actors in a formal legal-bureaucratic organisational context: that is, groups of individual actors whose social action is expected to be meaningfully coordinated in specific normative ways with the express aim of achieving common organisationally sanctioned purposes.

In discussing this range of issues, the following two sections will highlight the need for a suitably tailored theoretical framework to orient both the empirical investigation of 'everyday' bureaucratic practices and the interpretative analysis of data. In doing so, they will also attempt to highlight why it makes sense that this framework should be focused on the domain of the ethical.

3.2 Culture, normativity and state bureaucracy - towards an ethnographic approach to the 'everyday practices' of public servants

The ethnographic study of developing country bureaucracies has attracted increased attention over the past two decades. The growing interest in such studies within mainstream development debate and discourse might be measured by the relatively recent production of a literature review by the World Bank (Hoag and Hull, 2017). In documenting a “general trend toward using anthropological methods of participant observation to understand how bureaucracies work”, the review noted “an emphasis throughout nearly all of literature is on the importance of attending to the everyday practices of institutions” (Hoag and Hull, 2017: p5).

Testifying to the relatively slow recognition of the value of ethnography among the mainstream of development research, a rationale for such an approach was cogently articulated by Akhil Gupta nearly two decades ago. Writing in the context of the anthropology of corruption, and his own concern with theories of the state, Gupta (2005) highlighted a crucial role for study of “problems of meaning” in revealing the particularising constitutive dimensions of state institutions in a manner that complements the typical analytical and comparative tools and approaches of political and social science. In Gupta’s view:

Attempting to think of states as cultural artifacts, whose distinctiveness is embodied not only in culturally embedded imaginaries, but in culturally marked practices, is an essential corrective to strongly institutionalist perspectives... (2005: 175)

Specifically, he argued that:

An approach that focuses on institutional forms, capabilities and organizational structures misses something critical, namely, what states mean to the people who inhabit them or are interpellated by them. States, like nations, have to be imagined through representations and signifying practices; such representations are not incidental to them but are constitutive of them. Given this, the study of everyday practices and of the circulations of representations

that go into constituting particular states might not tell us just what they mean, but how they mean, to whom and in what circumstances. (2005:188)

Notably, in thus highlighting questions of culture and meaning - and counterposing them to comparative and analytical questions of institutional forms, organisational structures and their associated capabilities - Gupta's formulation implicitly invites the further question of *how these two aspects of the phenomenon of the state are related to each other*. This is thus not only to ask along with Gupta how "culturally embedded imaginaries" and "culturally marked practices" help to constitute "what states mean and to whom", but the further question of how such meanings may work to constrain and enable the specific institution structures, organisational forms and associated capabilities that may be considered characteristic of the phenomenon of the modern state. In specific terms, this is to pose the question of how the culturally distinctive meaning(s) of a state to those who inhabit it might work to shape and condition how and what that state does, by virtue of shaping and conditioning how and what it is *able* to do. In more general terms, this is to ask how the characteristic concerns and preoccupations of anthropology that are associated with questions of meaning are able to inform the institutional and organisational concerns that are more typical of the disciplines of political science and sociology.

Posing the question in these ways serves to focus attention on a number of further issues. Given the ubiquitous role of bureaucratic forms of organisation in constituting and enabling the manifold capabilities expected of modern states, a concern with questions of state organisational forms and capabilities firstly serves to reinforce the focus of ethnographic investigation on the phenomenon of state bureaucracy. In particular, it sharpens the focus on the specific kinds of representations and practices that may be considered to be constitutive of 'modern' bureaucratic forms of organisation in the context of the state, and their distinctive character of legal-bureaucratic 'formality'. To put this another way, this is to pose the question of a distinctive 'culture' or 'cultures' of bureaucratic organisational formality as an object of study.

In doing this, however, it also focuses attention on the normative dimensions of any putative bureaucratic ‘culture’, specifically in the sense in which the character of the specific representations and practices that compose such a ‘culture’ may also serve to enable or help constitute the phenomenon of *effectively functioning* state bureaucratic organisations. This question might itself be restated as follows: how to identify and characterise relevant normative representations that orient and guide the thought and practices of state bureaucratic actors in a manner that, when appropriately adhered to, regulate, enable and legitimate ‘effectively’ organised social action within a formal legal-bureaucratic organisational and institutional context. Put another way, it is to ask: how should the matter of bureaucratic “effectiveness” be understood and evaluated from an ethnographic perspective?

Finally, in terms of the specific concerns of this thesis, the further question arises as to how to distinguish the role of relevant patterns of thought and practice that may reflect aspects of a wider ‘tradition of cultural distinction’ (such as those that be considered characteristic of contemporary Papua New Guinea in the senses suggested by Li Puma and Knauff) in shaping both actors’ interpretations of any set of ostensibly ‘normative’ bureaucratic representations and practices, and the effects of such interpretations on the ‘effectiveness’ of such practices. In another sense, this is to ask how an account might be given of the way in which aspects of a distinctive ‘cultural tradition’ might be meaningfully ‘recontextualised’ (in Knauff’s sense) by social actors in a culturally and historically ‘non-traditional’ institutional context (such as a ‘modern’ state bureaucracy), and the effects of such ‘recontextualisation’ on the ‘effectiveness’ of the organs of ‘modern’ state bureaucracy.

Despite the growing ethnographic interest in state bureaucracies in developing countries, this set of related questions is not one that has been directly and systematically addressed in the extant ethnographic literature. The following review of some recent ethnographic approaches to the study of developing country state bureaucracies will serve to highlight this. In discussing these recent approaches, however, I further seek to highlight and clarify a range of theoretical and methodological issues raised by the preceding set of questions.

These concerns may be initially highlighted by examining in some detail the approach articulated by Gupta in his more recent work *Red Tape* (2012). One of Gupta's main concerns in *Red Tape* is to account for the ongoing failure of the contemporary Indian state, despite its oft-stated policy goals and many well-intentioned programs, to ameliorate widespread rural poverty. Gupta seeks to explicitly challenge widespread narratives about the contemporary Indian state that rest on the notion that failures of state policy can be traced simply to failures of 'implementation', either due the effects of corruption or a lack of individual capacity. As he remarks:

this position, ubiquitous in the discourse of many middle-class, urban Indians, reproduces both a colonial complaint of the incompetence of the natives and a class bias towards subalterns in the bureaucracy. If the problem is poor implementation, the blame falls inevitably on lower-level officials who, for reasons ranging from corruption to poor training and education, are deemed incapable of implementing the wonderful programs thought up by metropolitan experts. (2012, p. 25).

Instead, by focusing attention on the everyday 'routinised and repetitive' practices of Indian bureaucrats he aims to show how those practices systematically contribute to subverting the very outcomes that they are supposed to achieve. In short, I suggest, to the extent that the 'routinized and repetitive' practices Gupta highlights may be associated with notions of bureaucratic formality, he seeks to locate the reason for the inability of the Indian state to function effectively not in the 'capabilities' of individual Indian public servants per se, but in aspects of the formal character of Indian bureaucracy itself.

Central to both Gupta's argument and his approach is a theory of the state that stresses the 'non-unitary' character of the state as an object of study. Drawing in part on Abrams' influential 1970's contribution (Abrams: 1988), Gupta is critical of social scientific approaches that start with the idea of the state as unitary analytical category and which assume the state to be a "singular and unified" entity. Such approaches,

according to Gupta, draw attention away from the fact that actual states are in practice far more fragmented and heteronomous: “Far from being a unitary organization acting with a singular intention, the state is characterized by various levels that pull in different directions” (p 46). In reality, he argues, “the state is really a congerie of institutions, agencies, and agendas at different levels that are not necessarily well connected with each other”. (p 55). Further, Gupta’s suspicion of a unitary conception of the state is freighted with practical and theoretical implications: “reifying the state is an important means of rule and of obtaining consent for rule, which consists of representing that reification as reality. Using the state as a generic analytic category may unintentionally co-opt the analyst into the political task of supporting the status quo.” (p 54)

Given this understanding, Gupta’s interest in the anthropological study of the state is focused on the following kinds of questions:

When is the attempt to represent these disparate, conflicting, pluri-centered, and multileveled sets of institutions as singular and coherent actually successful? In other words, by what practices and discourses is the state effectively portrayed as singular and unified to a majority of the population? What conditions allow or enable the state to appear as a commonsensical entity? (p56)

Gupta’s aim in pursuing such questions is to draw attention to the “great deal of cultural and political work goes into any successful effort to represent a state as singular” (p57), and particularly the work of representation and signification that is characteristic of everyday bureaucratic discourse and practice in India. Such cultural and political work, he argues, is exemplified in routinized and repetitive procedural phenomenon such as paperwork, reports, meetings, and other mandated formalities of hierarchical bureaucratic order characteristic of the Indian state. These, he argues, work to represent and signify the state as a singular and unitary entity, and thus to help to hegemonically legitimise its rule - along with the bureaucratic decision and practices that enact it - in the eyes of both bureaucrats and their citizen clients. On Gupta’s account, such unitary representations of the state and its purportedly legitimate hegemonic authority nevertheless also serve in various ways to license a

range of ostensibly “rational” bureaucratic practices that while notionally appearing to adhere to formal expectations are often in reality arbitrary in their effects.

Paradoxically, the legitimacy that is conferred on them by virtue of their apparent conformity to formal expectations thus at the same time also serves to mask and excuse the social suffering that is itself systematically produced as an unintended outcome of those same ‘routine’ bureaucratic practices.

Thus, in summary, on Gupta’s account it is the ‘routinized and repetitive’ procedural practices of Indian public servants that work to undermine the very goals that bureaucracy itself is ostensibly charged with achieving:

no matter how noble the intentions of programs, and no matter how sincere the officials in charge of them, the overt goal of helping the poor is subverted by the very procedures of the bureaucracy. (p23)

In contrast, according to Gupta:

A disaggregated view of the state makes it possible to open up the black box of unintended outcomes by showing how they are systematically produced by the friction between agendas, bureaus, levels, and spaces that make up the state. (p46-47)

Thus, he notes, instead of asking “what the state does and what the state is capable of doing, that is, asking questions about state capacity”, the approach he adopts “turns the state itself into a focus of investigation”: one that “inquires into the conditions that allow the state to emerge as a cohesive entity”. (p57)

In summary, Gupta’s aim in *Red Tape* is to provide an explanation of why a certain situation persists – namely, mass poverty - by tracing and highlighting the specific effects of particular mechanisms of representation and signification. Here, however, it is important to note what Gupta’s focus on foregrounding issues of representation leaves behind: namely, an enquiry into the conditions that both prevent and would enable the Indian state to “emerge as a more cohesive entity” not just in representation, but *in practice*. This concern in turn implicates Gupta’s “theory of the state”. Gupta’s rejection of the assumption that states are altogether ‘unitary’

phenomena is no doubt well-founded; what it obscures, however, is an alternative sociological conception that sees a state's 'unitary' character as a matter of relative degree: something that itself must be (more or less well) constituted, not only via the effective 'work' of 'unitary' representations, but through appropriately oriented and 'effective' bureaucratic (and other) practices.

A straightforward way to illustrate this is to focus on the coordinating function of formal policies, rules, plans, procedures and their associated norms. A primary function of formal bureaucratic plans, policies, rules and norms is to help coordinate the action of bureaucrats (and others) to enable them to work cooperatively in sufficiently concerted and organised ways to enable the achievement of official purposes (such as poverty reduction). Consequently, the degree and extent to which their cooperative action is effectively coordinated and concerted in the pursuit of those purposes arguably serves to processually constitute the state in a concretely meaningful way (i.e. in practice) as a more or less 'unitary' actor that may be ascribed with a more or less 'singular intention'. In short, this is to point to one of the primary means by which organised collective action, or an organised collective 'actor' (albeit a 'fictional' one) is constituted out of individual action. Such a relatively open-ended, processual and practice-oriented basis for conceptualising the state's organisational 'unity', I would argue, avoids Gupta's theoretical concerns with 'reifying' the state as a static analytical category – i.e. one that simply presumes the unity of the state - without either pre-judging the legitimacy or value of its 'official purposes', or foreclosing or dismissing questions about any power effects that might be associated with such coordinated forms of state action (or the representation of such forms of action).

Further, such an approach enables a return to questions about "what the state is capable of doing", along with a focus on "institutional forms, capabilities and organizational structures", in a way that retains Gupta's central concern with questions of constitutive meaning. It does so insofar as it directs attention to questions about how particular representations and signifying practices may work to prevent or enable the actualisation of the potential capabilities of a particular state for effective

(and thus more or less 'unitary' and 'coordinated') action. Specifically, it directs attention to how the circulation and performance of such representations and signifying practices works to more or less adequately constitute the institutional forms, organisational structures – and their associated forms of cooperative social relations - that enable such coordinated purposive action to occur and result in desired or intended effects. In contrast to Gupta's approach, it focuses attention not on the 'signifying work' of 'routine bureaucratic procedure' in representing the state as unitary entity per se, but on the practical adequacy and causal efficacy of that 'signifying work' relative to the state's (formally) intended organisational functions and purposes.

In this sense, it is noteworthy that while Gupta's ethnography of the Indian state describes in some detail the apparent "arbitrariness" of many bureaucratic decisions and actions - along with the systematically distorted and "unfair" outcomes they repeatedly produce - he does not seek to systematically account for the range of conditions that allow or encourage such apparent 'arbitrariness' to regularly occur. In the first instance, in describing the 'routinized and repetitive' practices of Indian bureaucrats – in effect, bureaucrats' understandings of formal (written) and informal (unwritten) 'norms' that reflect and regulate their 'everyday practices' - Gupta does not always seek to clearly distinguish and evaluate the extent to which those understandings and related practices are or may be in accord with the express or implied intentions of official policies, plans, rules and directives, or why this may or may not be the case. Secondly, while he also notes that the intended meanings of such policies, plans, rules and directives are often poorly formulated, inadequate to real circumstances and in need of interpretation by individual bureaucrats - and are thus often subject to competing and conflicting interpretations that result in both the 'friction' and 'arbitrariness' he seeks to highlight - he does not enquire systematically into the range of conditions that make this situation not only possible, but apparently routine. Thirdly, and perhaps most significantly, Gupta's presentation of his materials ultimately does not attempt to account for how it is the case that such routine 'failures' with respect to the formally expressed intentions of 'the state' are rarely subject to adequate correction, or even attempts at correction. As a corollary,

therefore, Gupta's account – grounded in his 'non-unitary' theory of the state – in effect lacks an analytical framework for assessing and evaluating the normative appropriateness of bureaucratic activity not only relative to the expressly codified intentions of the *actual* Indian state, but also in terms measuring this against any normative expectations for an *effectively functioning* state. At the same time, despite his previously stated concerns with the role of distinctive cultural imaginaries and practices in constituting the meaning of states, Gupta's account in *Red Tape* does little to explicitly identify what it is about the specific representations and practices he describes that is culturally distinctive in the Indian context, and how this bears upon his analysis.

In highlighting these issues, my purpose is not to disparage Gupta's overall approach. Rather, it is to highlight the manner in which Gupta's overall project in *Red Tape* differs from my own. Drawing on broader stream of scholarship influenced by thinkers such as Abrams, Michel Foucault and James Scott (Gupta: 2012; see also Sharma and Gupta: 2002), Gupta's primary focus is to reveal the systematic *power* effects of state actors' decisions and actions on the poor, and specifically to highlight the manner in which such effects can be viewed as a matter of "structural" (i.e unintended) violence inflicted on the poor by agents of the state. He thus seeks to foreground the manner in which bureaucrats' use of justifications of 'following procedure' or accepted protocol in the name of 'the state' enables their decisions and actions to legitimated and excused under the auspices of a 'unitary' conception of state authority, while at the same time rendering transparent the systematically arbitrary practical effects of such ostensibly 'procedural' or 'routine' practices. Ultimately, by establishing the basis for potential alternative social narratives about the character of the state and the conduct of state actors, his aim is to open opportunities for *political* action by and on behalf of the poor, rather than to systematically identify the character and causes of any real or apparent organisational shortcomings of the Indian bureaucracy, or identify ways to directly address or ameliorate those shortcomings.

An alternative approach that more closely approaches some of my own concerns has been more recently presented by Mathur. (Mathur: 2016) Mathur's ethnography,

Paper Tiger, is notably focused on an attempt to introduce reforms to the practices of the Indian public service. Specifically, her account focuses on the introduction of these reforms in the context of a specific law, and traces the reasons why the implementation of that law in a particular region of India failed. In explicit contrast to Gupta, Mathur states that her intention is not to focus attention on issues of “structural violence”, but simply to provide an ethnographic account that aims to explain “why and how what happened, happened.” (p: 15).⁶

The reforms whose fate and effects Mathur traces were introduced in the context of a high-profile nationwide poverty reduction program, enshrined in law under the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, or NREGA. She highlights specifically the role of two key normative principles that were built into the formal procedural prescriptions of the NREGA law – those of ‘accountability’ and ‘transparency’ - with the intention of ensuring that the intent of the law would be realised. What her rich and detailed ethnography claims to reveal, however, is the manner in which the intended operationalisation of these principles worked instead to undermine the NREGA’s successful implementation, by rendering the law “unimplementable” in practice.

Mathur’s account of the failure of the NREGA focuses on key aspects of both the law’s pre-existing implementation context and the prescriptions contained in the law itself, highlighting tensions between the two. On the one hand, Mathur describes the manner in which rural employment schemes have typically operated in India (described by her interlocutors as “traditional”), and which the NREGA law was partly intended to address: the so-called “Contractor Raj” or “PC system”. Under this so-called “traditional” system, contracts for rural works projects are awarded preferentially by public officials in return for a “percentage cut” (or “PC”) from

⁶ Notably, Mathur places her work explicitly within a research paradigm that emphasises attention to ethics, specifically as it implicates the role of bureaucracies in relation to questions of ‘the public good’ (Mathur and Bear: 2015). Here, Mathur frames her work as addressing the values of ‘accountability’ and ‘transparency’ as ‘public goods’, and the manner in which the content and context of these ethical principles may be contested between the agents of the Indian state and its citizens. However, her ethnography also directly addresses questions associated with the functioning (or lack of functioning) of the formal apparatus of the public service in light of these principles. It is this dimension of her work that I focus on here.

favoured contractors. In return, public officials turn a blind eye when those contractors skim the wages of those they employed. Through NREGA's detailed prescriptions for planning, documentation and verification of each step of the works program – guided by principles and practices of 'accountability' and 'transparency' endorsed by international institutions such as the World Bank and the IMF - the new law was intended to eliminate opportunities and incentives for such ostensibly "corrupt" and "wasteful" practices.

By Mathur's account, however, these detailed provisions of the law and its associated administrative regulations led to several unintended consequences. Firstly she notes how in practice – at least in the rural area that was the focus for her study - the requirement to apply these prescriptions tended to disincentivise contractors from taking on NREGA projects, turning their attention instead to more advantageous money-making opportunities. Secondly, the prescriptions themselves required additional work that created an apparently unmanageable workload for lower-level public servants, who were under constant pressure 'from above' to formulate, meet, monitor and report on State-sanctioned targets for implementation. As a consequence, many of these public servants responded by ignoring their responsibilities to apply the provisions of the law, and/or subsequently distorting or simply inventing many of the facts and figures about the program that they were required as a matter of law and administrative procedure to report. In the process, the underlying realities of the program's problematic operation became obscured or hidden. The result was a significant dysjunction or gap between what almost everybody (i.e. both bureaucrats and citizenry alike) privately understood to be the realities of the situation, and the 'officially' endorsed version of events that was recorded on paper and which tended to govern and legitimate official decision-making and action in relation to the program. This in turn often led to higher level officials laying blame on lower level officials for the program's underperformance – typically castigating them for a lack of motivation, commitment and capacity, but notably doing little else to address the situation that to reaffirm the importance of meeting the government's officially sanctioned targets.

In accounting for this, Mathur highlights the central role of formal documentation in providing the basis for legitimating the decisions and actions of Indian bureaucrats, such that 'paperwork' itself comes to be seen as the performative locus of legitimate bureaucratic action – the so-called 'paper state' alluded to in the title of her monograph. Notably, however, in contrast to Gupta, Mathur's account places this phenomenon within a broader account of the distinctive culture of the Indian state, which she encapsulates under the Indian term "Sarkari" (Hindi for 'government'). Thus, while focusing on the pivotal role of paperwork in constituting so-called "Sarkari" culture, she nevertheless also draws attention to other aspects of that culture that also appear to influence and shape the ways in which her public service interlocutors approach their work – in particular, high degree of sensitivity to relational matters of relative status and hierarchical authority, and the concomitant degree of personalisation of official authority and work relations. These aspects of India's bureaucratic culture are exemplified in the use of the cognate term "Sarkar", denoting not only an abstract notion of the state as an entity, but simultaneously the personification of state authority in the person of a public official. These personalised relational phenomena are shown to manifest in everyday bureaucratic practices such as the petitioning of individual public servants by members of the citizenry, the careful and time-consuming labour expended on the subtleties of official letter writing between public servants themselves, or indeed the specific arrangements of chairs at a public meeting involving state officials of varying ranks.

However, while describing "Sarkari" culture in some detail, and suggesting that it is in some sense distinctively Indian, Mathur notably does not interrogate what makes it so – at least insofar as considering how it may be rooted in distinctively Indian ways of seeing, acting and relating that might be different to, or even at odds with, those assumed by the ethical prescriptions of international organisations such as the World Bank and the IMF. Similarly, she does not interrogate, for example, why and in what sense her interlocutors refer to the "PC system" as "traditional", or consider the ways in which the "PC system" and the culture of "Sarkari" might be broadly related to each other, insofar as they may reflect a common basis for constituting social relations in intersecting institutional contexts. Nor does she interrogate how or why her

interlocutors apparently failed to take seriously the ethical notions of ‘accountability’ and ‘transparency’ that were assumed by the law, or how their understandings and evaluations of these notions and their associated practices in the context of “Sarkari” culture may have differed, if at all, from the meanings intended by the global financial institutions whose ideologies inspired the law. Overall, like Gupta, Mathur does not attempt to systematically account for why it is the case that the routine “failures” with respect to the intentions of the NGERA law - despite its central principles of ‘accountability’ and ‘transparency’ - were rarely subject to adequate correction, or even attempts at correction. Once again, such an account would have necessitated a theoretical appreciation of how normative principles such as ‘accountability’ and ‘transparency’ are intended to function in regulating thought and conduct in a formal legal-bureaucratic organisational context, to enable a comparison to be made with actual discourse and practice and its results.

Overall, in giving her account of “why and how what happened, happened...”, Mathur’s explanation is essentially given in terms of the emic perspective of her Indian informants. As such, it lacks a theoretical basis for systematically considering the counterfactual question of why and how *what was expected to happen, didn’t happen*. In this sense, Mathur’s account essentially offers a descriptive and interpretive account of *what happened instead*. On the one hand, she does not attempt to explicitly and systematically identify what it is about the distinctively Indian government culture of Sarkari that contributed to the failure of the NGERA Law, or precisely how it contributed. On the other hand, despite focusing on key normative notions and related practices associated with the effective functioning of bureaucratic formality, and tensions between them and workplace culture in which they are interpreted and enacted, like that of Gupta, Mathur’s approach lacks an analytical framework for assessing and evaluating in light of those normative notions the appropriateness of the bureaucratic activity she describes, and which would enable her to give a more systematic and general account of the significance of the discourses, events and situations she highlights.

Another relatively recent ethnography that also closely approaches some of my own concerns is that of Gerhard Anders (2006). Like Mathur, Anders' work *In the Shadow of Good Governance* seeks to trace the fate of a set of internationally-backed public service reforms, in his case in the context of the west African state of Malawi. In contrast to Mathur's concerns, the reforms that are at the centre of Anders' account are not introduced in the context of a specific government program, but are aimed instead at improving the performance of the public service via a range of general reforms to public administration. In this context, Anders account focuses only narrowly on the routine and 'everyday' dimensions of Malawian public service practices, insofar they relate directly to the outcomes of these intended reforms to public servants' salary and employment conditions. What is notable about Anders account, however, is that he explicitly seeks to understand and account for these practices – and their implications for reform - within their broader historical, social and cultural context. This leads him to examine significant aspects of the social and cultural lives of his informants beyond the workplace, and their relation to and influence on workplace practices. Further, he does so by providing an account of the ethical issues they raise for his informants, and the moralities that are at work.

Of particular interest in Anders' study of these phenomena is his concern with challenging the manner in which 'culture' has often been framed as a factor in accounting for the performance and functioning of African bureaucracies. Specifically, he seeks to challenge notions of a clear-cut distinction or disconnect between 'imported' formal institutions and a 'homogenous' and informal 'local' African cultural context that have often been used to account for the 'dysfunctionality' of Africa states. As he characterises his ethnographic argument:

Far from blaming an imagined disconnect between "local culture" and "imported state" for the current state of affairs it presents a more nuanced picture that, on the one hand, suggests more similarities between the bureaucratic order inherited from the colonial era and post-colonial patrimonial rule than often assumed and, on the other, questions the existence of a homogeneous "African society". [p 123]

In this sense, Anders' account of the everyday practices of Malawian public services firstly seeks to emphasise aspects of their origins in post-colonial administrative practices and imperatives inherited from the British colonial administration, rather than in any indigenous Malawian cultural inheritance. At the same time, he also seeks to emphasise a variety of cultural and social disjunctions and discontinuities that have arisen in Malawian culture and society as a consequence of colonial and post-colonial experience, which he contends undermine any attempt to explain the performance of contemporary Malawian state bureaucracy (and bureaucrats) in terms of the influence of a putatively 'homogenous' cultural context.

Anders' assembles evidence for his argument by closely examining three related phenomena: firstly, the manner in which public servants experience and manage their kinship obligations, and specifically the expectations and obligations surrounding requests for material and financial support by immediate and extended family members; secondly, the patron-client character of relations between members of two classes of Malawian public servants, referred to colloquially as 'bosses' and 'juniors'; and thirdly, the manner in which both of these phenomena are situated within a broader culture referred to by Malawians as *Katangale*, which Anders defines as denoting "any kind of illegal, shady or dubious deal or practice connected with the place of work or the office in the formal sector that served the enrichment of the employee". [p129]

In terms of the first of these phenomena – kinship obligations – Anders's account highlights various ways in which contemporary interpretations of such obligations, including those related to 'modern' needs such as formal education and healthcare, are often contested and negotiated between public servants and their rural-based kin. He also emphasises the practical strategies used by public servants – such as retiring at a "safe distance" from their home village, or accessing support from urban-based community associations – in their attempts to manage often "exaggerated" demands from rural kin and secure their own financial positions and acquired status. He further highlights the social distance between his town-based public service informants and village-based kin. In this respect, he shows that the former, despite their desire not to

break village ties and so prevent an eventual return if needed, nevertheless prefer to associate with and draw support from their formally employed town-based relatives and peers rather than their village-based kin, whom they considered less 'modern' and 'civilised'. Overall, Anders emphasises the difference in outlook between these urbanised and rural-based Malawians, with town-based public servants typically preferring represent themselves as being "autonomous" and in control of their financial resources (despite often responding to "social pressure" to support their relatives), while their rural relatives in contrast expressing a sense of "entitlement" to material support, and correspondingly emphasising the obligations of their kin. Rather than presenting a picture of a 'homogenous' culture with a single set of moral and ethical norms, Anders argues that these phenomena suggest instead the existence of a "patchwork of moralities" across Malawian society.

In describing the second phenomenon noted above – the 'client-patron' character of relations between junior and senior public servants – Anders firstly emphasises the manner in which such hierarchical and status-based relations were initially modelled on the practices of the colonial administration, and then subsequently reinforced by experience under the neo-patrimonial and authoritarian regime of Banda. Here Anders argues that the contemporary culture of the Malawian public service was decisively patterned on Colonial race relations within the pre-Independence public service, in which white superiors were granted status and associated privileges over their Malawian subordinates, who were not encouraged to question the authority of their superiors. Subsequently, this culture was reinforced by the Banda regime, such that a strategy of unquestioning loyalty and obedience to one's superiors ("respect for the boss") became ingrained as an informal cardinal rule of the public service - both as a matter of career survival, and as a means to maintain access to the boss's favour when it came to discretionary decisions that could confer material benefits (such as promotions and career opportunities, training and travel benefits, access to government loans or support for family funeral expenses). As with relations between public servants and their village-based kin, Anders similarly emphasises the social distance in relations between 'bosses' and 'juniors', as well as the manner in which this was exacerbated by reform efforts. He not only highlights their typically different

educational and social backgrounds, but stresses their differing attitudes to 'patron-client' obligations. In a manner parallel to his portrait of differing attitudes to kinship obligations, he stresses the contrast between the attitudes of 'bosses' and 'juniors' to such putative obligations when placed under stress by the imperatives of reform. Thus, while bosses often tended to ignore the interests of their 'juniors' when it served their own interests and ambitions, 'juniors' in contrast emphasised the moral and social obligations of their patrons to provide them with support.

However, in stressing the cultural and ethical discontinuities and disjunctions between and among these groups of Malawians, Anders notably does not consider or closely examine any evidence for continuities or commonalities – including those strongly suggested by his own account. Perhaps the most significant of these lies in the social ideology of *Katangale*, and the manner of its connection to both kinship obligations and patron-client relations between 'bosses' and 'juniors'. Anders characterises *Katangale* as "as system of redistribution in which everybody benefited" (p 134), and which is often linked to notions of "allocating" and "sharing"(p129) in a "society where the duty to share one's wealth is a fundamental moral principle" (p66). Anders' discussion connects these principles of *Katangale* to both kinship relations as well relations between bosses and juniors. His discussion shows that across both of these domains the capacity and willingness of a family or workplace 'patron' to allocate and share material resources with their 'clients' is linked both to their social status and the corresponding 'respect' they may claim, or are due. What is absent from his account, however, is any attempt draw out the underlying character of the form of social relations that is in operation across these different contexts.

This form of social relations, I suggest, exhibits a consistent moral economy: one that emphasises relations of mutuality and solidarity that are cultivated through *personalised reciprocities*. Such reciprocities involve transactions of material and symbolic capital that confer status on the giver for meeting their ethical and social obligations and expectations to give or share resources under their control (either their own or those of the state), and corresponding obligations and expectations on the receiver to recognise the status of the giver by showing them appropriate 'respect'

and 'loyalty'. More succinctly, Anders' account suggests a society that broadly emphasises the ethical imperatives of personalised relations of reciprocity, within a context of intra-group relations aimed at cultivating and maintaining forms of mutuality and solidarity. To the extent that such principles and their associated modes of social relations might plausibly be considered broadly characteristic of 'traditional' or pre-colonial Malawian culture and society, it thus may be argued that rather than being abrogated in the senses Anders suggests, they have instead been (and continue to be) 'recontextualised' in the sense identified by Knauff.

This argument may be extended by further questioning several specific features of Anders' account. Firstly, Anders emphasises the apparent disjunctions and disconnections revealed by the often ambivalent attitude of family and workplace 'patrons' to their putative moral and social obligations to their respective sets of 'clients'. Here, as noted, he stresses the desire of public servants to view themselves as 'autonomous' and 'in control' with respect to the often exaggerated demands of their kin – despite the fact that many obligations, particularly those to close kin, are still considered 'non-negotiable' – as well as the 'self-interest', 'personal ambition' and social distance of 'bosses' in motivating their decisions to ignore claims to support and solidarity from their 'juniors'. As noted, Anders presents this as evidence for divergent moralities at work. However, this overlooks the commonsense observation that strategies for avoiding both real and putative social obligations, often motivated by considerations of 'self-interest' and 'ambition', were presumably not unknown in 'traditional' Malawian culture (or indeed any society). In this sense, Anders implicitly presents a somewhat one-sided and idealised picture of 'traditional' Malawian culture as his frame of reference – one that does not interrogate the possibility that failures or refusals to meet a culturally sanctioned normative standard may themselves reflect recognisable and culturally distinctive modes of thought and practice. Neither does he consider the possibility that ease and readiness with which individuals may adopt such culturally familiar strategies of avoidance or abrogation is accounted for as much by changed conditions and opportunities in the social and institutional context in which they operate, as by any significant change in individuals' underlying ethical perspective.

This general argument may be extended to other features of Anders' account. For example, while highlighting public servants' preferences for socialising with and drawing support from formally educated, town-based family members and friends, Anders does not discuss in detail the moral economy that operates in such a milieu. He does note, however, that:

In an urban and modern environment, networks based on residence, social status and church membership were very important. Often these relationships were described in terms of fictive kinship, especially with regard to solidarity. [p136]

Again, this suggests a likely recontextualization of principles and practices of mutuality and reciprocity from a rural to an urban context rather than a straightforward disjunction with the operative principles and practices of 'traditional' Malawian sociality. Similarly, in highlighting public servants' tendency to rely on urban based welfare associations as evidence of disjunction, he does not seek to describe the social and moral principles upon which they typically operate. Finally, with respect to his claims regarding the public service culture of "respect for the boss", he neither considers how Colonial status practices in the context of race relations may have been evaluated and interpreted from a Malawian point of view, or indeed, how the subsequent success of Banda's Malawian variety of neo-patrimonialism may itself have been grounded in the principles and practices of a moral economy familiar to Malawians from their everyday cultural context.

Nevertheless, Anders' innovative ethnographic approach is extremely valuable in enabling these various questions to be highlighted. It demonstrates the relevance and value of close study of the social, cultural and historical contexts in which contemporary public servants operate, specifically as these impact upon their ethical experiences and understandings. It further suggests the utility of such an approach to studying the 'everyday practices' of public servants more broadly – that is, not only within the context of public administration reforms and associated issues of petty

corruption that are of specific concern to Anders, but in terms of the full range of routine and everyday administrative practices that are typical of state bureaucracies.

In this regard, it is notable that Anders' work is closely associated with a major research paradigm that shares many of his concerns and presuppositions, and which has proposed a systematic methodological approach to the study of state bureaucracies in Africa. This paradigm - styled the "practical norms" approach - has been developed by a group of collaborating scholars led by Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardan, Thomas de Herdt and Thomas Biershank. Their work (along with that of collaborators such as Anders) is primarily presented in two major volumes of collected papers: *States at Work: Dynamics of Africa Bureaucracies* (Olivier De Sardan and Biershanck: 2014) and *Real Governance and Practical Norms in Sub-Saharan Africa: the game of the rules* (de Herdt and Olivier de Sardan: 2015). The former volume (*States at Work*) serves to introduce the approach by noting three objectives: to contribute to debates on processes of state building by providing a firmer empirical grounding; to argue for an ethnographic approach to the study of developing country states; and to develop a more intensive dialogue on these issues between anthropologists and other disciplines such as the sociology of organisation that typically focus on the Global North. (Olivier De Sardan and Biershanck, 2014: p3) The second volume extends this research agenda, notably including a lengthy and detailed methodological paper by Olivier de Sardan.

Given the salience of the "practical norms" research paradigm to the questions posed by this thesis, and particularly the specific questions of 'culture' and 'normativity' raised in the previous sections, the next section will continue the discussion of these questions via detailed examination of the methodological approach to the study of developing country state bureaucracies proposed by Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardan in conjunction with his collaborators.

3.3 The “Practical Norms” approach – a theoretical and methodological evaluation

Working in the African context, Olivier de Sardan aims to present an ethnographically driven approach to research that stresses the normative pluralism characteristic of contemporary African states, and which proposes a typology of norms that seeks to be adequate to such a context. (Olivier de Sardan, 2015a). Starting with the acknowledgment that “the behaviour of public servants in Africa often departs, sometimes radically, from official standards” – what he calls “the problem of the gap” – he is nevertheless highly critical of “culturalist” explanations that seek to account for the behaviour of African bureaucracies through essentialising strategies that are reliant on weakly empirical and overly generalised conceptions of ‘traditional’ African culture. (Olivier De Sardan, 2015b). In offering an account of such “culturalist” analyses, Olivier de Sardan echoes and amplifies the concerns of Anders:

From this perspective, the real state in Africa is said to be above all a state in the African style, in other words a state immersed in an African culture that is far removed from the norms of the Western state. This disparity, so the argument runs, is the result of superimposing (legal-rational) Western rules that officially determine how the state is run onto African societies defined by a contrasting set of informal rules, based on cultural tendencies that are very different from those that underpin the state in the West. If the behaviour of public servants deviates so much from official standards, then this is basically because it adheres to social standards that derive from their ancestral past. (2015b: p63)

Such accounts, he argues, not only overlook the fact that ‘traditional’ African societies have been themselves transformed into pluralist, post-colonial modern societies, with their attendant multiple sources of authority and competing social norms (Olivier De Sardan, 2015a: p36), but also fail to notice that “the majority of practices of public servants do not comply with so-called traditional social norms”. (Olivier De Sardan, 2015a: p26) At the same time, however, he is equally critical of approaches that propose a ‘Weberian’ ideal-type bureaucracy as an unproblematic normative ideal against which to measure the performance of African states, noting that Weber’s development and use of ideal types was to aid to the empirical analysis of legitimating

orders that in reality are always plural and mixed, including in non-African contexts. (De Herdt and Olivier De Sardan, 2015; see also Biershank and Olivier De Sardan, 2014)

In response Olivier de Sardan and his colleagues propose an ethnographic approach centred on the notion of 'practical norms'. The concept of practical norms, according to Oliver de Sardan:

aims above all to inspire the rigorous empirical investigation of a particular level of social reality, that of the effective [*i.e. actual*] practices of state employees – sometimes compliant and sometimes non-compliant.” (31). [italics added]

Practical norms are defined in contrast to both 'official' and 'social' norms. Official norms, in Olivier de Sardan's formulation, “constitute an extensive family of norms which include, in particular, legal norms, professional norms and bureaucratic norms” (p23). They “express the rights and obligations explicitly recognised by public and professional institutions”. They incorporate systems of sanctions, and extend beyond laws, regulations and official texts to include such things as conventions, procedures, organisational structures and the like. (p23) While official norms may be relevant to both state and non-state actors, including organisations and individual citizens, specific subsets of official norms are relevant to particular bureaucrats, depending on their professional role and function. Social norms, on the other hand, generally regulate the “private sphere, the non-professional and non-official world”, and may include specific norms as diverse as “rules of propriety, family customs, religious obligations, ethical dictates, sport codes, associative or network-related practices” etc. (p24)

As Olivier de Sardan points out, the “problem of the gap” – that is, deviations from the ostensibly 'legitimate' normative order - occurs across both these normative domains. He argues, however, that such deviations are themselves normatively regulated. Practical norms are thus defined as “the various informal, de facto, tacit or latent norms that underlie the practices of actors which diverge from the official norms (or social norms)”. (26). Practical norms are associated with the regulation of officially

and/or socially 'non-compliant' behaviour, and thus often reflect a "deliberate but masked infringement of the normative rules". (30)

As such, he argues, the notion of practical norms is fully compatible with, and helps to support, the notion of individual agency. While noting the tendency of the concept of agency to remain "fluid" and somewhat "idiosyncratic" within sociological discourse, he highlights the way in which the concept of practical norms supports the notion of "margins of manoeuvre" for all social actors and the existence of "individual creativity in all circumstances". (p 40) The notion of practical norms, he suggests, gives both form and content to the assertion that "the social actor can always choose between a repertoire of available norms that constitutes both resources and constraints." As such, he suggests agency may be described as:

The implementation of a capacity for selection from a limited series of (formally and informally) regulated options located in the open space between official norms, social norms and practical norms. (p40)

Accordingly,

Empirical investigation alone can enable the identification of the subtle, complex, intertwined and unstable links between official, social and practical norms, and the description of the strategies adopted by actors for 'playing' between these three levels within professional worlds. They constitute a 'space for gaming'. (p40)

Importantly - and consistent with this emphasis on empirical investigation - Olivier de Sardan characterises the notion of practical norms as an *exploratory* concept: (31).

The demonstration of the existence of a practical norm does not mean... that no further interpretation is needed, it rather provides for a more solid empirical basis, which in turn is meant to trigger new research questions and innovative analyses. The identification of a practical norm is a useful intermediary step inviting further inquiry." (p31)

Specifically, such further inquiry must be directed at how the content of the practical norm is both shaped and grounded – or effectively legitimated 'in practice' - and how

it may work alongside official or social norms to offer actors 'resources and constraints' that shape their opportunities to 'select' and 'strategise'.

Olivier De Sardan's concept of the 'practical norm' thus aims to serve an important methodological function: namely, to 'clear the decks' of unwarranted a priori assumptions about the role of 'traditional culture' in shaping the everyday practices of bureaucrats. At the same time, however – and equally importantly - he does not seek to eliminate 'culture' as a factor in explanation altogether, explicitly acknowledging a range of examples where the operation of specific social norms (such as obligations of familial solidarity) may evidently serve to account for certain practical norms (such as practices of nepotism or favouritism) (p40). Nevertheless, he also warns against automatically treating such examples as straightforward instances of the illicit 'intrusion' of social norms into the official domain, noting the ways in which the meaning of social practices – such as 'gift-giving' - that are often cited as explanations for actors' divergence from official norms may be radically transformed when transplanted into an official context: "the gifts presented to a state official for 'sorting out' a file are often experienced by the giver as a mandatory gesture that has more to do with extortion than with a logic of gift-giving". (p40) Further, he warns against viewing the "intrusion" of social norms as the unilateral effect of "excessive pressure from the social and familial milieu", noting that such intrusion may equally be "the result of an absence of resistance on the part of the professional sphere", such as practical failures of management to effectively lead and sanction. (p41) Overall, then, Olivier De Sardan's aim and intention is to open such practices to rigorous empirical study.

To further reinforce his argument, Olivier De Sardan develops an approach to the concept of culture that he presents as consistent with his methodological aims. He argues explicitly against what he sees as (largely) Parsonian-inspired conceptions of culture rooted in notions of 'symbols and meanings'. These approaches, he suggests, have both "severed the concept of culture from its empirical foundations and multi-dimensionality" and tended toward an essentialising distinction between the 'traditional' and the 'modern'. He argues instead for an empirically grounded

conception of culture rooted in observable practices that allows for a normatively pluralistic understanding of suited to the cultural complexities of contemporary African societies while acknowledging the way in which culture must by definition be common or shared. He thus argues that, as a practical matter, the research field should be restricted to “certain specific areas, certain clearly defined contexts and certain clearly delineated professional and social groups”, such as single organisations or sectors, in which specific, empirically delineated “professional cultures” may be made the object of study. (Olivier De Sardan 2015a: pp 82-86)

Olivier De Sardan’s programmatic methodology thus offers a detailed, wide-ranging and rigorously argued approach to studying the ‘problem of the gap’. However, despite its rigour and range, it nevertheless suffers from significant limitations across the problematic dimensions of both ‘normativity’ and ‘culture’ outlined in the introductory section to this chapter. These limitations raise questions about the suitability of using the approach for framing a practical and effective research strategy, while at the same time suggesting alternative avenues of inquiry. These concerns may be illustrated by examining in Olivier De Sardan’s treatment of several sets of issues, including his approach to understanding the character and explanatory role of norms, his related concept of agency, and his conception of culture.

Firstly, Olivier De Sardan’s approach to norms, by focusing on their regulative and enabling roles – that is, their roles simply as ‘constraints’ and ‘resources’ for agents – notably fails to address the question of how their specific ‘normativity’ is meaningfully constituted and legitimated for actors. In this respect, in distinguishing between ‘official’ and ‘social’ norms, Oliver De Sardan largely overlooks the fact that these two types of norms are usually constituted and legitimated in distinctly different ways. ‘Official’ norms of the kinds Olivier De Sardan identifies - legal, professional and bureaucratic norms associated with public and professional institutions - are typically those associated with formally constituted bureaucratically administered organisations that are either part of the state, or recognised and regulated by the state (which may include a wide range of non-state organisations within the ‘private’ domain such as schools, business enterprises, professional associations, churches, charities, sports

clubs etc). As such, 'official' norms possess the character of 'impersonal formality' that is associated with the operation of explicit, abstract and generalised laws, policies, rules, procedures and standards that are considered ethically binding for agents by virtue of their formally defined organisational membership and role. These general features of official norms suggest that the domain of the 'official' is constituted and legitimated via a characteristic type or set of representations, signifying practices and modes of thought that are associated with these general features, and which are common to the evaluation and legitimation of action across the entire normative domain of the 'official'. On the other hand, what Olivier De Sardan identifies as 'social' norms – including kinship and family norms, as well as other norms of 'non-official' social interaction - by definition generally lack some or all of these relevant constitutive features of impersonal formality. This suggests that what is expected to be normatively 'salient' for action with respect to 'official' and 'social' norms is constituted quite differently, involving kinds of representations, signifying practices and modes of thought of distinctly different characters.

In a corresponding way, Olivier De Sardan's account of agency similarly overlooks the parallel question of how agents must be constituted to respond to these different kinds of normativity. In this sense, agency involves something more than a simple "capacity for selection" from the "repertoire of available norms", insofar as that capacity is *itself* subject to normative expectations – specifically, a normative expectation that agents should have or seek to form a dispositional orientation and relevant practical capabilities sufficient to consistently recognise and act in accordance with the expectations and requirements of ostensibly 'legitimate' norms - whether these are located in the 'official' or 'social' domains - even in the face of considerations that may potentially provide incentives to act otherwise. Such dispositions and practical capabilities may be said lie within domain of what is called the 'ethical'. However, any agent failing to possess relevant ethical dispositions and capabilities is effectively one who is unable to adequately interpret and evaluate 'domain relevant' normative representations and signifying practices – including those relevant to the formation of required dispositions and capabilities. Further, and as a consequence, they may themselves be unaware of the source of this inability or its significance. As a

result, an agent's own explanations of their reasons for their action may thus be inadequate to fully account for their failure to properly follow or instantiate a given ostensibly 'legitimate' norm. Indeed, they may not even recognise that they have failed to properly instantiate the norm - let alone why or how. Thus, their conduct may be legitimately subject to evaluation and 'correction' by others within that normative context who do possess such relevant interpretative and evaluative capabilities. Even here, however, such 'informed' observers may themselves not necessarily be able to fully articulate the basis of their normative interpretations and evaluations, much of which may remain tacit or implicit.

These issues pose significant challenges for Olivier De Sardan's proposed methodology as a basis for explaining the 'problem of the gap'. A descriptive ethnographic account of 'practical norms' will necessarily be based on individual actors' own accounts of their normative judgments and motives (i.e. their 'reasons') for acting in way that does not conform to an otherwise notionally 'legitimate' norm. This constitutes a basic 'emic' explanation of 'why things happened the way they did'. However, given the preceding discussion, it is less clear how informative this is as an account of why actor may have failed to meet or adhere to the otherwise notionally 'legitimate' normative standard. In effect, such an 'explanation' still leaves two key questions unanswered: firstly, whether the agent's 'reasons' reflected an adequate or notionally relevant interpretation of the 'legitimate' norm in its normative institutional context, and secondly, if they did not, how to describe and account for this divergence.

To answer these questions, and thus to more comprehensively and meaningfully account for the situation, the social scientist thus has the additional task of appropriately identifying and characterising the salient aspects of the norm in its normative context – its particular kind of 'normativity' - as well as the relevant 'resources and constraints' of the actors themselves (e.g. their evaluative and causal beliefs, knowledge, skills, dispositions etc.) in a way that supports such a fuller explanation. This requires attention to several closely related dimensions of the problem. Firstly, it requires an account of what is expected to be normatively (i.e. ethically) salient in a given 'social' or 'official' context - or how particular norms are

intended and expected to meaningfully ‘constitute’ ethical salience for actors in those institutional contexts - such that they may be ‘moved to legitimate action’ in accordance with a norm. This will of necessity include a descriptive account of the relevant normativity at work (not a ‘normative theory’ per se)⁷. Secondly, it requires a corresponding account of how actors are expected to be ethically constituted - or must work to constitute themselves - to recognise and respond to that normative salience in expected ways. Third, such accounts can then provide a basis for empirically identifying those specific features of the actors (i.e. their specific ‘resources and constraints’ as ethical agents) that may explain their success or failure to consistently act in accordance with notionally ‘legitimate’ normative expectations. That is, through empirical study, it can be determined if and how agents may be acting on the basis of understandings that are inconsistent with those that are ostensibly normative for the relevant domain.

However, this overall approach still leaves two further issues with respect to accounting for the ‘problem of the gap’. The first concerns how best to account for the origins of such ‘non-normative’ interpretations of representations, practices and their related agential capacities that may be operative within the official domain; the second concerns how they may be situated within an account of organisational effectiveness, so that an explanation can be given of how and why they may contribute to an organisation’s success or failure in achieving its explicit objectives.

With respect to the second of these concerns, empirical investigation will thus also need to be focused on tracing the practical effects of bureaucrats’ actions and

⁷ Another way to frame this point is to ask whether “what ‘is’ observed” (i.e. the study of ‘everyday practices’ in a given context) can be used to fully account for absence of what “what ‘ought to be’ observed” (i.e. the failure to meet a normative standard that is relevant in that context.) Here it is important to be clear on what is meant by this ‘ought’. ‘Ought to be’ is meant in this context in a sociological sense: that is, the kind of conduct, and express reasons for that conduct, that would normally be expected to be observed if relevant norms were properly followed. This may involve describing the moral or ethical dimension of the norm’s meaning for actors, such that some situationally relevant ethical or moral ‘meaning’ or ‘value’ may be expected to enter as a typically necessary factor in the subjective motivation or intention of the actor to properly adhere to the norm. However, it does not necessarily imply a moral or ethical ‘value judgment’ on that meaning (or its presence or absence in the motivation of the actor) on the part of the observer.

interactions in their organisational context, and how their deviations from or conformity to normative expectations contribute to the success or failure of an organisation meeting its explicit objectives. However, given the large number and wide variety of rules and norms associated with complex bureaucratic organisations, framing a relevant research agenda thus requires an account of which 'official' rules and norms, and their associated agential capacities, are most critical to the constitution of effective organisations, and what ways. However, such an account can be expected to overlap to a considerable degree with an account of how the 'normativity' of the official domain is itself constituted for and by agents, insofar as it will likely be the most generalised legitimating dimensions of actions in accordance with 'official' norms - rather than any specific types of purposive action specified by particular rules or norms per se - that will determine how they are key to organisational effectiveness. Developing a framing account of this nature – in effect, something like an 'ideal type' of the constitutive ethics of bureaucracy - will be focus of Chapter 4. The remainder of this section of the chapter will instead attempt to respond to the first of the issues mentioned above.

This first issue – accounting for the origins of 'non-normative' interpretations of representations, practices and their related agential capacities that may be operative within the official domain - is related to a particular concern motivating Olivier De Sardan's approach. As noted, his overall approach is partly driven by scepticism towards explanations that suggest the pervasive influence of 'social' norms derived from 'ancestral culture' on conduct in the official domain. In sum, Olivier De Sardan's proposed methodology is ostensibly designed to leave this question open in principle. However, I suggest that his proposed methodological approach works to foreclose opportunities to investigate the issue in practice. This tendency arises from a number of sources. Highlighting these sources, however, is useful in terms of suggesting alternative theoretical considerations and related methodological approaches.

Firstly, what Olivier De Sardan characterises as 'culturalist' explanations are, he suggests, partly an artefact of a particular conception of culture predominant among social scientists in a certain tradition. Specifically, Olivier De Sardan is highly critical of

theoretical approaches that conceive of culture as something like “a system of shared meaning and values”. He argues that by implying that culture is something like a coherent whole such approaches have tended overemphasise or essentialise the idea of ‘traditional culture’ as an influence on action, and thus foster ‘overinterpretation’ and ‘unwarranted generalisation’. The problem, he suggests, is that:

Meanings and values do not lend themselves to empirical verification, and are situated at such a level of abstraction that can include anything and everything. This makes the question of ‘commonality’ or sharing...impossible to answer (Olivier De Sardan 2015b: p83)

This is particularly problematic, he suggests, in “complex societies” that are evidently characterised by a degree of normative pluralism, such as those of post-colonial African societies (and by extension, Papua New Guinea) in which elements of indigenous culture co-exist alongside, and interact with, ‘imported’ institutions and cultural practices. In such societies, he suggests, social actors assume and move between a “multiplicity of roles” across a “multiplicity of worlds”, each with their own contextual referents. In such societies, he argues, the notion of “broad cultural sharing” no longer makes sense. (Ibid.)

In response to this problem, he suggests, culture may be better defined as:

a set of practices and representations that investigation has shown to be shared to a significant degree by a given group (or sub-group) in given fields and in given contexts. (p 84)

In specific practical terms, he suggests, this warrants a restriction on how the field of empirical study should be framed:

the question of sharing or commonality of practices and representations makes sense if we limit ourselves to certain specific areas, certain clearly defined contexts and certain clearly delineated professional and social groups. The sharing is a function of the roles, social worlds and logics at work. This reduced scale then enables us to apprehend common practices and representations which are constructed and reproduced in chains of concrete interactions that are observable and describable. (P 83)

Thus, he suggests, suitable contexts for study may be constituted by a 'professional culture' among Senegal Forestry workers, or a 'voting culture' in Niger, or simply an 'organisational culture', "without too high a risk of over-interpretation or excessive generalisation". (p 84)

Thus, in asserting 'normative pluralism' as a defining characteristic of contemporary African societies, Olivier De Sardan makes the case that they can no longer be viewed as possessing a coherent cultural 'system of meanings and values'. Here, however, it is necessary to keep separate two aspects of this concept of 'culture' which are analytically distinct, and which Olivier De Sardan's discussion has a tendency to conflate: namely, the notion of culture as 'coherent system', and the notion of culture as a carrier of 'shared meaning and values'. While his arguments against the former are evidently sound, his arguments against the latter are more questionable.

In arguing against a conception of culture as residing in 'shared meaning and values', Olivier de Sardan firstly suggests that the notion of 'representations' is preferable to that of 'values' because of its emic qualities in being grounded in local speech. He further seeks to anchor the notion of culture not only in shared or common representations, but also in particular in the shared or common practices associated with those representations. Unlike, 'meanings and values', practices according to Olivier De Sardan (including, presumably, 'speech practices') are "are observable", and thus lend themselves to empirical verification. Unfortunately, however, neither aspect of his argument is straightforwardly true, and they do not necessarily confer straightforward methodological advantages.

Firstly, it is self-evidently the case that representations with different outward forms may have same or similar meanings, such that different vocabularies may be used to refer to the same or similar objects or practices. Alternately, the same words might be interpreted and used in different ways, depending on their intended practical referents. In this sense, shared meaning is a function of normative interpretation by communicating actors. In a similar manner, an emphasis of the 'verifiable

observability' of shared practices neglects the central fact that the existence of a shared practice must be 'empirically verified' by participating actors themselves - no less than by social scientists - via processes of normative interpretation. In this sense, the existence of a 'shared' or 'common' practice' can only be 'verified' via the fact that the 'observable' effects of actions - specifically the reactions and responses of others - appear to conform to actors' shared normative expectations with respect to the causality, meaning and value of the action (Including speech acts). In this sense, neither the identification of shared 'representations' or 'practices' can be separated from the identification of the types of shared evaluations that enable actors to imbue them with a common sense and meaning.

Secondly, there is the related fact that, depending on their level of abstraction or general applicability, representations that facilitate or enable such evaluations are 'detachable' from specific, concrete forms of practice and may circulate beyond them, such that they may be applied in the context of what are ostensibly different kinds or forms of practices. Thus, for example, while in many respects the form and content of health care practices in hospitals and forestry management practices in forestry reserves are very different, to the extent that these practices are organised and administered in accordance with formal bureaucratic principles, they operate on the basis of the same or a similar set of generalised representations reflecting underlying modes of thought and evaluation that enable distinctively different practices to signify and be evaluated in similar ways. Thus, both health care workers and forestry officers can prepare 'official' reports of their actions – perhaps with quite different terminologies - that circulate and influence action by officials in other parts of government, such as central oversight agencies, that may have their own distinctive terminologies and sets of practices. However, both participants and observers will be able to claim that they are engaged in common bureaucratic practices to the extent the terminologies that inform their practices are consistently translatable in terms of their underlying intended referents. Notably, this is an example of intentional representations circulating and influencing distinctly different practices within the same broad institutional domain. The question at hand, however, is whether and how representations and their associated forms or modes of evaluation may cross

institutional domains, and what effects this may have – if any - on how practices are taken to signify in their ‘non-native’ domain.

In this sense, then, the fact that the ‘meanings and values’ embedded in representations and practices may be situated at a ‘high level of abstraction’ or general applicability does not create a methodological problem that can be solved by simply by restricting the field of study to a segment of the ‘official’ domain in the manner Olivier De Sardan suggests. Rather, such a strategy instead closes off detailed empirical investigation of the manner in which evaluative representations from the social domain may circulate among ostensibly unrelated normative practices in the official domain. Further, to the extent that this creates a methodological challenge around the ‘verification’ of the ‘commonality’ or ‘sharing’ of such representations, this is a problem that can be addressed simply by identifying types of practices that can be seen to widely operate in the social domain, and which might plausibly be suggested as influencing the way in which representations and practices in the ‘official’ domain may be interpreted and evaluated. Thus, for example, the continued widespread existence and influence of valued practices of reciprocity and mutuality associated with kinship and kinship-like relations across Africa – or Papua New Guinea – is an obvious example. In the Papua New Guinean context – perhaps in a manner that is similar in African societies - kinship relations are also closely associated with a broader form of sociality, specifically known in PNG as ‘wantok’ relations, which may be viewed as resting on similar normative foundations. Such widespread and pervasive forms of sociality, I suggest, involve characteristic ways of both constituting agency and interpreting and evaluating the significance of social action, and which - as noted in the introductory section to this chapter - have been shown in the PNG context to influence the way in which social action is meaningfully constituted in a range of institutional domains.

Thus, from a methodological point of view, this suggests that a study of ‘bureaucratic culture’ that aims to account for the ‘problem of the gap’ not only requires close attention to ‘everyday’ representations and practices that are evident in the workplace, but also to those that public servants encounter in their everyday ‘social’ or

‘private’ lives. Consistent with the points made previously, this should include specific attention to the kinds of ‘normativity’ associated with such representations and practices, as well as the characteristics of agency relevant to that normativity. In practical terms, this is simply to recognise the possibility that, while - as Olivier De Sardan notes - social actors assume and move between a “multiplicity of roles” across a “multiplicity of worlds”, each with their own contextual referents, the way they are socially constituted to interpret and respond to norms and normativity in one domain may affect how they interpret and respond to norms and normativity in another. This, I suggest, is simply another way of acknowledging with Knauff the possibility that social actors may “recontextualize traditions of cultural distinction”.

Finally, this approach to investigating normative influence across institutional domains also provides a framework for responding to the questions of cultural continuity and ‘tradition’ posed at the beginning of the chapter. An investigation of how agents are socially constituted to interpret norms and normativity can also help to reveal how they ‘make sense’ of and adapt to new and different practices, or how they evaluate and value them, in light of their existing normative orientations to social action. This principle may be applied on a social scale to assess the influence of ‘culture’ on wider processes of social change. To the extent that the underlying normative orientations characteristic of individuals in a particular society can be shown to have historical continuity across changing forms of practices, and inflect the adoption of such practices, they can be said to be constitutive elements of a particular continuing ‘cultural tradition’, or ‘tradition of cultural distinction’ in Knauff’s sense. These elements of a living and continuous ‘cultural tradition’ can in turn be described as connected to or derived from ‘traditional culture’ if it can be shown that they are meaningfully linked, both by participants as well as observers, to forms of practice and social organisation that pre-date the introduction of widespread social change. The validity of such an conception may be supported, *prima facie*, by the fact that recognisable elements of ‘traditional’ African or Papua New Guinean cultures – such as systems of reciprocity in family and kinship relations, and the ‘shared meanings and values’ associated with them - do persist in the face of change, even if the specific outward forms of contemporary practices – such as the use of money in customary

exchange practices, or the persistence of gift or gift-like relations of reciprocity in ostensibly 'commodified' market transactions - may be transformed in important respects by virtue of operating in a new context.

Chapter 4 – An outline of the ‘ethos’ of contemporary state bureaucracy

4.1 Introduction

Chapter 3 posed the question of how the ethnographic study of the ‘everyday practices’ of bureaucrats must be approached in order to enable an account of the influence of a distinctive ‘cultural tradition’ on the operational effectiveness of state bureaucratic organisations. The argument suggested that the method of inquiry would require the development of a descriptive account of bureaucratic ethics relevant to the effective functioning of state bureaucratic organisations - one that could both focus empirical investigation as well as support the interpretation and analysis of data.

This chapter aims to articulate such an account. What is being attempted in this articulation may appear to something akin to a Weberian notion of an ‘ideal type’. I suggest, however, that this ‘ideal type’ is in fact closer to a description of key features of an actual ‘ethical ideal’ or practical ‘ethos’ – one whose presuppositions are embedded, both explicitly and implicitly, in discursive representations of law and policy as well as administrative and professional-technical regulation in contemporary liberal democratic states, and which are intended to be constitutive of certain signifying practices. Moreover, I suggest, this discursive ‘ethos’, and the signifying practices it intends to normatively constitute, are also embedded or encoded, both explicitly and implicitly, in general discourse on ‘good governance’ in both policy and academic research domains. In this sense, the object of enquiry, while serving a methodological purpose and explanatory aim, is an attempt to characterise the general or common features of a dimension of actual discourse that itself is intended to normatively orient practical thought and action of government bureaucrats in a relevant manner. The aim of articulating an account of this discursive object is to examine and highlight how it does this.

Unsurprisingly, the most detailed theoretical accounts of this practical normative discourse are provided in the academic field of public administration ethics. This field

presents a contested object of inquiry, insofar as debate inevitably occurs about how best to characterise public administration ethics in terms of both form and content (see, for example, de Vries and Kim, 2011). Notably, however, it is perhaps the dominant view among participants in this ongoing debate that, despite difference in approach, accounts of public sector ethics tend to coalesce around a small core of key values or principles that are seen as central and defining - even if the precise list of principles or values is often differently described and somewhat contested. Thus, these accounts generally include, for example, some variation on a list of notions including impartiality/objectivity/fairness, accountability/responsibility/responsiveness, transparency/openness/honesty, dedication/diligence, selflessness/beneficence, efficiency/economy etc. Notably, a similar coalescence-with-variance is evident in actual public service codes of conduct adopted in countries globally. (Hellstein and Larbi 2006: p 137; see also, for example, Lawton, Rayner and Lasthuizen 2013)

However, this general convergence around a small number of similarly described key values or principles has also given rise to debates on their cultural universality. Haque (2011), for example, provides a critical perspective on this assumption, noting that

academic debates and practical policies related to ... problems of administration are often dominated by scholars and policy experts holding Eurocentric ethical assumptions and yet claiming the universal applicability of their ethical perspectives without adequate attention given to indigenous values and ethics embedded in developing societies and without much consideration for cross-cultural diversity in ethical standards. (Haque 2011: 71)

Parallel to such a view the widespread contention that institutions that are intended to be run along such ostensibly 'Eurocentric' or 'western' lines often fail to function effectively because of their lack of alignment with indigenous cultural norms and values. (Hellstein and Larbi 2006: p 137)

In response to this, Hellstein and Larbi have suggested that with respect to the ethics of public administration:

It is not 'culture' *per se* or the public service principles *per se* that are in question, but rather the institutions on which they are based. It is the institutions that do not fit the societal context, values and expectations. Consequently, institutions may work differently from their original home contexts. Making institutions fit their context may therefore require either redesigning/reforming them or changing societal values and expectations or both. (Hellstein and Larbi 2006: p 137)

However, to pose the problem of public administration ethics as a question 'institutions' is, I suggest, to focus the problem at an unhelpfully general level of analysis, insofar as it provides little practical basis for evaluating why and how well institutions 'work' beyond the situated perspectives offered by the competing sets of norms and values they ostensibly reflect. In this respect, however, it may be noted that public bureaucracies are essentially *organisations* that are embedded in a range of institutional domains beyond that of public administration *per se* — those of law, politics and the market, for example, each of which operate according to their own 'principles'. Making those institutional domains 'work' in large part relies on effectively functioning bureaucratic organisations, particularly those of the state. This focuses the question of public service ethics more narrowly on the manner in which they serve to support the functioning of the bureaucratic organisational form itself. This is implicitly acknowledged by Hellstein and Larbi when they note the substantial overlap between "core values" of public sector ethics in a democratic society governed by the rule of law, such as impartiality, accountability and transparency, with those of the ethic of "professionalism" — that is, values that are relevant by virtue of their function in a practical employment context (Hellstein and Larbi 2006).

In one sense, however, this may seem to simply raise the question of whether contemporary bureaucratic forms of organisation themselves embed normative presuppositions of 'Western modernity'. In this respect it is notable that Weber himself explicitly describes the ideal type presented in *Economy and Society* as a characteristically 'modern' form of administration (Weber 2019: p 343) — one that was raised to the form approximating its 'ideal typical' dimensions through the historical process of rationalisation that occurred first in the West. The broad historical process implicated a range of factors across interrelated institutional domains, including the

development of natural science, the rationalisation of law, the development of education, the democratisation of politics and – in particular - the development of capitalist property relations and large-scale production techniques. (Weber 2019: p350-352; *passim*.)

Notably, however, each of these broad processes was itself facilitated by the increasing refinement of the functionality of the bureaucratic form of organisation, in particular those that functioned as part of the state. In this sense, then, I suggest that focusing at the organisational rather than institutional level opens an alternative way of looking at this question of ‘universal applicability’ of public sector ethics. It does so insofar as it transfers the question to the organisational level, and the role of public sectors ethics in facilitating the effective functioning of state bureaucracies as organisations.

This question of functionality was itself a central feature of Weber’s analysis of the bureaucratic form. Weber was interested in studying the bureaucratic organisational form as a mechanism of domination or rule precisely because of its capacity to consistently obtain a wide range of large-scale intended practical effects, and to do so with a comparatively high degree of reliability and consistency. This was not a concern with ‘efficiency’ *per se*, as is often suggested, but a matter of predictability and intentional control: the manner in which policies and directives issued at the top are routinely and diligently followed by members of an organisation, and issue in coordinated action towards desired ends with minimal ‘friction’ or uncertainty and a high degree of technical precision. (Weber 2019: p 350; c.f. Gajduscheck 2003)

Subsequent to Weber’s analysis, many others have identified intrinsic issues with the functionality of the bureaucratic form. Most notably, perhaps, these include various issues relating to trade-offs between the rigidity created by a need for hierarchical controls, versus the practical need for discretion and flexibility in adapting means to the needs of particular circumstances. (Gajduscheck 2003) However, though these problematic trade-offs may be intrinsic to form itself, the form nevertheless remains open to optimising adjustment to circumstances. As such, these issues do not

invalidate the relative capabilities of the general form, or its practical indispensability to modern societies.

Centrally, with respect to the source of this ‘reduction in uncertainty’ in the outcomes of organised social action made possible by bureaucracy, Weber’s analysis focused on its features of ‘formal rationality’. (Weber 2019: p 350) As noted in Chapter 1, formality is often generally represented as comprising something like a regime of ‘impersonal rules’ (see, for example, Leftwich and Sen 2010). However, such a characterisation does little to explain how formality ‘works’ in an organisational context. In this respect, the relevant characteristics of formality highlighted by Weber can be perhaps be characterised as entailing two features: firstly, the specification of detailed, ‘rationally’ considered parameters for purposive or ‘means-end’ decision-making and action by bureaucratic actors (including matters of timeliness); and second, making such parameters the obligatory basis for their practical judgment and action. Together, these two features make possible a certain form of precisely and reliably coordinated cooperative action on the part of bureaucratic actors.

With regard to the first of these features, as sociologist Arthur Stinchcombe has highlighted, effective ‘formality’ ultimately rests on a foundation of ‘abstraction’ – a term that he uses as both a verb and a noun. Thus, ‘abstraction’ in Stinchcombe’s sense refers to both the active process by which relevant substantive features of a large amount of concrete data are conceptually identified or unified, as well the resulting concept or ‘abstraction’. In this sense, according to Stinchcombe, formality generally involves the representation of such abstractions in verifiable, communicable form (e.g. as material documents) for the purpose of *governing social action*. However, formalisations may in this sense be both general and particular. Firstly, a process of abstraction may formally identify those general or common substantive features of phenomena that are considered relevant for purposive action in relation to a large number of cases (e.g. a ‘rule’, a ‘law’, a ‘policy’). Secondly, the resulting general formalisation then may be evaluatively applied to new data to identify subsequent instances of the same general phenomena, resulting in a particular judgment of validity (e.g. an ‘authorisation’, a ‘verdict’, a ‘directive’) intended to guide further

action. As Stinchcombe points out, such a formal judgment itself reflects a summarising abstraction, insofar as it distils the result of the evaluation of the concrete evidence of the particular case. In addition, both generalised and particular formalisations are produced via processes of 'abstraction' that are themselves more or less formally guided. Finally, he emphasises that the effectiveness of formalisation is dependent of the 'adequacy' of formalisations with respect to their intended purposes – that is, that the process of abstraction that results in formalisations must precisely grasp the salient substantive features of reality that are relevant to guiding judgment and action in a manner that will reliably obtain intended results. (Stinchcombe 2001)

Importantly, however, the efficacy of abstract formality as a basis for governing purposive action rests equally on the second dimension noted above: that is, the ability to ensure the parameters defined by the abstractions represented in generalised formalisations are consistently treated by bureaucrats as a *mandatory* basis for practical judgment and action in particular cases – including those formalisations that guide other processes of formalisation. This requires that bureaucrats possess both dispositional motivation and general capability to recognise and respond appropriately to such mandatory obligations, and think and act consistently in accordance with the requirements specified in relevant formalisations in optimally selecting means to apply in the service of formally constituted or 'authorised' organisational ends.

In these respects, Weber noted that formality also implied or required from actors a certain normative dispositional orientation to their purposive action, particularly with respect to those with whom they interact. However, in *Economy and Society* he addressed these issues only in a relatively cursory way. This orientation was characterised by Weber in terms of both its 'means-end' or purposive rationality, as well as its 'impersonality'. By 'impersonality, Weber referred to social action that is unmotivated by personalised evaluative-affective considerations (such as love, antipathy, anger or enthusiasm), but is instead "impelled by concepts of simple obligation" or generalised abstract notions of duty; and which further requires treating others with "formal equality", or treating equally everyone "who finds themselves in

the same situation with regard to actual interest” by virtue of requirements abstractly specified in relevant formalisations, such as rules and policies. (Weber 2019: p353)

Implicit in these two dimensions of ‘impersonality’ (motivation impelled by ‘concepts of simple obligation’ rather than personalised value-affect, and treating others’ interests as formally equal in accordance with relevant formalised abstractions) is a key point. Here Weber is describing (albeit in a highly compressed way) not only a general form of normativity and related characteristics of individual ethical agency that he sees as associated with bureaucratic formality and its orientation to ‘means-ends’ rationality, but how that form of ethical agency necessitates a certain way of thinking about and relating to other persons and their interests in that normative context. In this sense, then, Weber’s account suggests that ‘rational’ organisational formalisation involves a certain dispositional ethical orientation among bureaucratic actors that constitutes a characteristic form of social relations. This orientation is not only expected to guide the conduct of bureaucrats with respect to their relations with those outside the organisation (such as ‘citizen clients’ or politicians), but even more importantly from the point of view of organisational function, also guide the conduct of relations inside an organisation among bureaucrats themselves.

In presenting his ideal type Weber did not analyse in detail how this dispositional ethical orientation, and the form of relations it engendered, operated in practice to contribute to the effective functioning of bureaucracy. The remainder of this chapter aims to develop such an account – one that is informed by contemporary discourses on bureaucratic ethics, law and public administration. In light of the previous discussion, then, I suggest that developing such an account requires an investigation of how the three aspects of ‘impersonality’ identified above (i.e. ‘obligations’, ‘treatment of interests’ and ‘relations’) constitute key dimensions of what is normatively salient for bureaucratic agents in the context of a specific kind of rationality, and in turn, how they are required to be constituted as agents to respond appropriately to that normative salience. Specifically, this investigation will examine and draw upon the contemporary lexicon of public administration ethics to identify key normative representations and signifying practices that are central to the constitution of effective

‘impersonal’ formality in public sector bureaucratic organisations in liberal democratic rule-of-law states, and identify the specific meanings of those representation and practices that must be intended by bureaucratic actors in order to constitute ‘effectively functioning’ forms of those organisations. Specifically, it will examine the meaning and functioning of the core ethical notions of ‘duty’, ‘impartiality’, ‘accountability’ and ‘transparency’.

4.2 Framing the discussion – the distinctive basis of ‘needs’ and ‘obligations’ in a professional workplace context

To commence this investigation, I begin with a brief excerpt from an interview with one of my Papua new Guinean public service informants, a middle-aged male officer named Jacob. Jacob talked to me about the distinctiveness of the workplace in terms of the kind of relationships it entails:

Like to have relationship with people, it comes with the different attachments, meaning you can have relationship in different ways. Some may be from tribes that you belong to, ... some may be family relationships, some may be a drinking mate, all different relationships...but coming to a workplace like this you must have the *professional* relationship.

Jacob here was clearly marking out a sense in which for him, workplace relations as ‘professional’ were different in character from the relations characteristic of his tribal, family and friendship connections. He then sought to explain how he saw this difference:

When you need - when I need anything – not personal, that is professional...
Seek assistance where it is due.

Here I would like to explore the significance of Jacob’s distinction between ‘professional’ and ‘personal’ relationships, and the differing basis for the sense obligation to engage in cooperative action that each typically involves.

Any form of cooperative action, whether in the context of ‘personal’ or ‘professional’ relations, can be said to involve normative evaluations by the parties of the legitimacy of an agent’s overall interest in having a specific actor cooperate with them. The legitimacy of this overall interest may in turn be seen to have several interrelated dimensions. These include: the legitimacy of the agent’s specific interests that the action of the actor is expected to serve (i.e. legitimacy of ‘ends’); the legitimacy of the specific action that is expected to serve those interests (i.e. legitimacy of ‘means’); and whether the specific actor may be legitimately expected to respond to the agent’s interest with the relevant action (i.e. legitimacy of ‘relational claim’). Taken together, however these dimensions constitute aspects of any ‘claim to entitlement’ by the agent with respect to the cooperative action of an actor. Notably, all dimensions of the situation must be evaluated as legitimate against some relevant set of shared normative standards in order for the action of the cooperator to be considered an ‘obligation’ by both parties⁸.

Overall, in this sense, the character of claims to entitlement and corresponding obligations that are constitutive of ‘personal’ relationships of the type identified by Jacob may be distinguished by virtue of how both are perceived by the agent and cooperating actor to be grounded. Firstly, I suggest, legitimate claims to entitlement are perceived phenomenologically by both parties as properties attached to the *particular person* of the agent: as entitlements that the agent and the actor in some sense perceive and feel that the agent ontologically ‘possesses’ as ethicalised properties of the their particular ‘personhood’, and which the agent values and evaluates ultimately from a first-person, ‘subjective’ positional perspective. Any corresponding obligation is similarly perceived by both the agent and the actor to be a property of the actor ‘directed towards’ the agent: an obligation they both perceive and feel the actor ‘owes’ to the particular person of the agent. However, it is by virtue this situation being recognised by both parties that they recognise that they stand in a

⁸ Alternately, if no relevant set of normative standards exists that establishes an obligation in relation to the entitlement, the cooperator may nevertheless choose to cooperate if they perceive the action to be in their interest. Notably, this in turn may establish a reciprocal obligation on the part of the agent if they subscribe to norms of reciprocity.

particular *personalised ethical relation* – a relation that is constituted by their shared recognition of the specific, particularised entitlement and obligation they each perceive as properties attached to their respective ‘persons’.

Given this background, what is also notably characteristic of the types of personal relations highlighted by Jacob, I suggest, is that they are ongoing cooperative relations based on principles of mutuality. In the manner outlined in the previous chapters, in the case of relations of mutuality, what is crucial from the perspective of an actor is that their motivation to consider as legitimate another’s interest in gaining their cooperation, and thus their motivation to act cooperatively in the other’s favour, is grounded in their normative expectation that the other can be legitimately expected to react in a reciprocating fashion (i.e. in some relevant way that serves their interests in return) – a normative expectation that as a consequence must also be *shared* by the other such that they judge and act in response also on the basis of a sense of personalised obligation. This mutual normative expectation gives rise to the mutual acknowledgement of the existence of an ongoing personal relationship constituted by continued interaction on the basis of mutually oriented expectations of personalised reciprocal claim and obligation. Over time, such normative expectations of mutuality are lent increased warrant and legitimacy by each actor’s own prior and continuing favourable actions towards the other, renewing and reinforcing bonds of mutual personal claim and obligation. Such bonds typically generate and in turn are reinforced by motivating feelings of subjective mutual trust, affect and ‘favour’, such that each feels positively disposed to act in the others’ interests in normatively appropriate ways.

The overall character of obligations constitutive of such ‘personal’ relationships of mutuality may now be contrasted with those that are expected to govern relationships in the ‘impersonal’ context of legally constituted bureaucracies. The character of ‘impersonality’ associated with such ‘professional’ obligations can be viewed across three dimensions. In the first instance, it arises from the character of bureaucratic rules, standards and policy aims themselves. Typically these have been intentionally formulated and documented (i.e. ‘formalised’) in a manner that is abstractly

generalised. As such, they together establish mandatory ‘impersonal’ obligations to think and act in specified ways in pursuit of specified ends for any actor who legitimately meets the contingent condition of being ‘employed’ by the bureaucratic organisation to perform specific tasks or functions constituted by the organisation’s rules, standards and policy aims. In this sense, they are addressed *anonymously* (and usually in the third person) to any relevant actor who meets such conditions. Second, these obligations are also ‘impersonal’ also by virtue of the nature of the entity which claims the entitlements against which the obligation is formally owed: an abstractly defined, formally constituted ‘agency’ that is recognised as a ‘legal’, rather than ‘natural’ person – in this case, the state, acting via the specific state organisation, as the actor’s ‘employer’. Third, and perhaps most fundamentally I suggest, such obligations are ‘impersonal’ in that their legitimacy is ultimately grounded in a form of rationality rooted in the recognition of person-independent or ‘objective’ logical, causal and ethical necessity; an ‘impersonal rational necessity’ that is recognised as being both legitimated and constituted by the logically valid and causally effective operation of person-independent, and thus ‘universally valid’, social and natural laws, principles or rules. Each of these dimensions of impersonality will be explored further in what follows.

Taken together, these impersonal dimensions of obligations have a range of implications for the way in which cooperative action is typically intended to legitimated in a bureaucratic context, and thus the character of relations they give rise to. In short, they result in an impersonal and ‘non-relational’ form of cooperative action in which considerations of personalised interest, and thus of mutuality, are expected to be formally eliminated from practical judgments as a substantive evaluative basis for motivating and legitimating action and its effects.

4.3 The impersonal ‘rational’ basis of bureaucratic ‘duties’ to cooperate

To begin, it is notable that despite the aspects of ‘impersonality’ described above, an actor’s obligation to generally comply with the state’s regime of impersonal and formalised rules, standards and policy aims is nevertheless grounded in the first

instance in their *personal* agreement (via an 'employment contract') with the state to do so. Importantly, however, the force of the duty to abide by such a personal agreement itself derives from a legally binding (and ethically valorised) abstract, general and thus impersonal principle. This principle recognises and asserts any 'rationally competent' individual actor's obligation to adhere to explicit promises that they make to any agent when they are made in certain valid legally constituted forms via formally prescribed procedure. In this case, in signing a valid 'employment contract', one voluntarily promises to one's impersonal employer to provide one's physical and mental labour in the circumstances and ways specified in the contract in exchange for specified remuneration⁹.

Significantly, implicit in the practices involved in interpreting and enacting a 'contract' is a certain mode of ethical reasoning associated with a particular conception of ethical agency. Specifically, in acknowledging a strict obligation, an actor is expected to recognise their personal ethical obligation to judge and act in accordance with the ways and circumstances specified in a contract as an *impersonally formal deontic necessity*. This 'responsibility' to act in accordance with this 'duty' is logically or abstractly derived from the underlying general and person-independent principle of valid 'promise making' that is seen to apply to any 'rationally competent' social actor who understands the meaning of a 'promise'. In this sense, a bureaucrat's binding 'duty' is addressed to them - via the practice of 'contract' - as an ethically 'autonomous' individual actor who is considered 'autonomous' by virtue of their 'rational' capacity to recognise the valid meaning of a 'person independent' ethical principle. Further, as an obligation constituted under the same formal procedure of contract, the general obligation is precisely the same for every bureaucratic actor in an organisation, and in principle is intended to be constituted as binding for each *independently* of others. In this sense, the motivating obligation ('duty') to abide by

⁹ Notably, one of the purposes of this remuneration, as Weber indicates, is to establish the bureaucrat as economically independent from the organisation, such that a clear practical basis exists for the legal demarcation between the use of resources owned and controlled by and on behalf of the organisation and those owned and controlled by and on behalf of the individual. In this sense, the notion of contract in relation to such property rights is also closely associated with the ethical principles of 'possessive individualism'

the terms of one's contract is not intentionally grounded in a sense of mutual obligation with other actors in the organisation.

At the same time, however, the personal character of this individual obligation creates a personal interest for the actor with respect to meeting the obligation. This interest may be grounded in practice for different actors in various ways, and may involve a range of motivations. For example, it may be grounded for an actor 'internally' in an ethicalised sense of 'duty' or 'responsibility', such that an actor may desire to think well of themselves for upholding their obligation to 'do the right thing' by autonomously abiding by relevant rules and policies. Alternately, or at the same time, it may be grounded 'externally' in a perception of the material or psychic-symbolic consequences of being evaluated by others as having succeeded or failed in meeting the terms of that obligation.

In either case, however, an actor's interest in meeting the terms of their general obligation requires that they both cooperate with others, and secure others' cooperation, in accordance with the requirements of the specific 'duties' as described in their contract. These specific mandatory 'duties' relate to the deontological obligation to exercise certain formally specified and conferred 'entitlements' to judge and act in certain ways in certain circumstances towards certain ends - that is, obligations to exercise specific positional entitlements related to the performance of specified organisational tasks and functions. Notably, these include positional entitlements for specific actors in specific circumstances to *authorise* rules, standards or policy aims on behalf of their employing organisation, and/or to issue *directives* or *requests* for specific actions, and/or to enjoy an *implied* entitlement to expect the cooperation of relevant others. Put another way, an actor's specific 'duties' simultaneously constitute entitlements to expect the cooperation of others in relevant ways implied or specified by various formalisations, as well as obligations to respect the similar entitlements granted to others.

Crucially, however, in this sense, in contrast to the underlying general mandatory obligation to exercise them appropriately, entitlements to perform specific authorised

tasks or functions - including their express and implied entitlements to others' cooperation in the performance of those tasks or functions - are not attached to the specific *person* of the bureaucrat, but to the functional role *position* they contingently occupy in the impersonal organisational regime. Put another way, while the *obligation* to appropriately exercise or recognise specific circumscribed entitlements remains the personal 'property' of the individual actors, the actual entitlements and the powers they confer are *intended* to remain the 'properties' of the organisation (in both a legal and ontological sense), rather than inhering in the specific individuals themselves. Individuals are only granted an entitlement to their 'use', and only the further condition that they are activated for use in the service of legitimately constituted organisational purposes or ends in accordance with relevant policies, rules and standards (i.e. those 'authorised' by actors recognised as validly occupying relevantly defined organisational positions). As such, an actor is expected to further recognise they are subject to their employer's entitlement - as formally conferred on specific agents by virtue of their organisation roles or positions - to evaluate the appropriateness of their conduct, and to subsequently apply and enforce formally specified measures to censure and or sanction them if they are validly determined to have breached their obligation to perform their duties and exercise associated entitlements in the manner specified in relevant formalisations. In this way, the regime of rules and policies is also designed to ensure that individuals' personal 'external interests' align with their obligations, increasing the probability that that they will be motivated to judge and act in accordance with their 'duty'.

Importantly, however, since each actor in an organisation is independently under a personal obligation to fulfil their specified duties, and such duties can generally not be fulfilled without exercising and responding to such express or implied entitlements to cooperation, each actor has a nevertheless a *personal interest* in both cooperating with and gaining the cooperation of others in various circumstances. However, this raises a question: given that each actor is working under a personal obligation to their 'impersonal' employer, not to other individual actors, what role, then, are evaluations of individuals' particular positionally constituted interests in cooperative action

expected to play in motivating and legitimating their own and others action and its effects? Further, what is the character of the relation that this situation implies?

Three things are relevant here. Firstly, as indicated by the preceding discussion of the impersonal character of obligations, the 'agent' whose 'claim to entitlement' is being evaluated by an actor is not the specific individual who has a personal interest in obtaining their cooperation, but the 'impersonal' organisation on whose behalf they are expected to act. In the same manner, any obligation the actor may have in relation to that entitlement is not owed personally to the particular individual agent, but to the organisation conceived as an abstract legal entity. It is this feature of the situation that constitutes the cooperative relation between the specific individuals not only as 'impersonal', but also somewhat paradoxically as 'non-relational', insofar as the ethical orientation of both agent and actor is not toward each other as particular persons per se, but to the 'needs' of the 'impersonal' organisation to which they both owe their obligation. In this sense, neither the agent nor the co-operating actor are expected to evaluate the legitimacy of the particular agent's claim or the actors corresponding obligation as if they were grounded in the agent's first-person, 'subjective' positional interest in gaining the actor's recognition of their entitlement. In short, these personal interests in cooperating with or securing the cooperation of another plays no formally valid part in legitimating the agent's 'claim to entitlement', or in motivating the actor's cooperation.

Secondly, in this sense, the normative standards for evaluating the legitimacy of each of the three dimensions of the agent's 'claim to entitlement', (i.e. 'ends', 'means' and 'relation') and thus the actors corresponding 'obligation', are those that are formally or abstractly specified in relevant rules, standard and policies. Thus, in order to claim a legitimate entitlement to cooperation, or to recognise a legitimate obligation to respond to that claim, both the agent and the actor must know and understand how to interpret and apply the relevant rules, standards and policy aims in order to legitimate cooperative action. That is, they must possess adequate capacity to evaluate the requirements of the situation by applying relevant 'abstract formalisations' in making practical judgments relating particular concrete cases involving decisions and

subsequent cooperative action. In short, both agent and actor are expected to evaluate the agent's directive, request or expectation - as well as the adequacy of the actor's response - from the point of view of whether they conform to situationally relevant formalised and 'impersonal' policies, rules and standards. That is, they are obliged to treat their own and other's interest positions from a formally abstract and impersonal perspective.

Third, however – and perhaps most crucially - it almost always occurs that 'formalisations' fail to provide complete guidance for action-guiding judgment (i.e. 'practical judgment') in all cases. In other words, not all decisions or actions are 'routine', and very few are 'routine' in all respects. Circumstances very often arise where formal policies, rules and standards must be 'interpreted' and individual discretionary judgment applied in making the most appropriate decision and formulating the most appropriate action. This applies to both the agent seeking cooperation – for example, in deciding to formulate and issue a 'directive or 'request' - as well to the actor expected to cooperate with such a directive or request. In these cases, a range of possible intentional actions may be in accord in with the existing rules, standards and policy aims. Any one of them may constitute a formally valid 'directive' or 'request', which in turn may be interpreted for action by the cooperating actor in an indefinite number of formally legitimate ways. The task of a bureaucrat, however, is to decide 'on balance' what is the best or most appropriate course of action in the particular circumstances. In this sense, bureaucratic action is expected to be oriented to an optimising, impersonal means-end or purposive rationality, one which involves the 'rational' consideration of the likely effects of any decision and its intended action in light of broad basic parameters or abstract, impersonal evaluative general 'principles' - such as 'efficiency', 'effectiveness', 'equity' etc. - that are most salient in the circumstances to the formal aims of the organisation.¹⁰ This 'means-

¹⁰ Note that the goal here is 'rational optimisation', not simply 'efficiency'. The point of 'efficiency' in this context is relative to the state's overall purposes, which always include aims beyond 'efficiency' itself. Thus, an 'optimising strategy' may or may not allow trade-offs between such aims, depending on the degree to which benchmarks for achieving those other aims are fixed or may be varied. This also applies to the discussion below in relation to the 'design' of policies and rules. For instance, as the example of 'natural justice' in administrative proceedings suggests, among the state's purposes in formulating rules may be an aim to ensure that its stakeholders (including its employees) are treated

ends' dimension of bureaucratic rationality introduces a further dimension of 'impersonality' to relations, insofar as it constitutes the meaning and significance of legitimate bureaucratic action and its effects in 'impersonal' causal terms.

In this sense, rather than being evaluated in terms of concrete, personalised interests, the actions and motivating intentions of individual bureaucratic actors – their own and that of others – are normatively expected to signify (be conceived of, evaluated and legitimated by the actors) in terms of their 'impersonal' causal role as 'optimal' means to the realisation of legitimate 'impersonal' organisational ends. That is, legitimate bureaucratic decisions and actions are expected to always have an adequate justifying 'rationale' that is grounded in valid 'impersonal', principle and fact-based reasons, cast in terms that both conform with requirements of situationally relevant impersonal formalisations (i.e. rules, standards and policies), as well as optimising considerations relevant to the specific requirements of the situation. In this sense, a bureaucrat's personal 'motives' or 'intentions' in judging and acting are expected to be evaluated and legitimated – and thus to signify - within this 'impersonal' causal perspective.

Indeed, it is this optimising 'impersonal' means-end rationality that ultimately legitimates the general imposition on bureaucrats of a binding or mandatory personal deontological obligation (via their contract) to consistently judge and act in accordance with the terms prescribed by authorised policies and rules. That is, the mandatory or binding character of obligations to conform to the requirements of such formalisations is rationally 'justified' (i.e. legitimated on the basis of impersonal principles and evidence) because of a generally valid causal belief that routine and general adherence by relevant actors to the modes of thought and action they proscribe, permit or prescribe is a highly reliable and thus desirable means to effect the optimal realisation of ultimate policy aims of the state. In colloquial terms, the general

with basic or unalterable considerations such as 'fairness' or 'equity' etc. As such, 'optimal' rules may be 'rationally' designed with more or less 'efficiency' or economy to take these other aims into account. Similar considerations apply with respect to the 'optimal applications of rules and policies in particular cases.

application of a binding obligation to follow the formal rules under conditions of rational optimisation is legitimated in large part because the use of rules in this way is known to ‘work’.¹¹

Some policies and rules, of course, may have a further legitimating basis in absolute legal and ethical mandates and thus also reflect ultimate ends in themselves. Examples of such policies and rules include those that proscribe misappropriation of state resources - which are rooted in fundamental legal and ethical principles of property ownership - or those which acknowledge fundamental other legal and ethical rights and obligations, such as procedural rules that serve basic principles of ‘natural justice’ of ‘procedural fairness’ in investigative or disciplinary proceedings. However, insofar as they are constituted within an organisational context, these kinds of policies and rules are also intended, both directly and indirectly, to serve the additional purpose of consistently coordinating action in a way that is considered ethically binding so as to ensure the ‘rationally’ optimal direction and use of state resources for legitimately authorised state purposes – which also include upholding such things as property rights as well as other fundamental legal and ethical rights.

It is thus a ‘rationally’ grounded orientation to optimisation of coordinated social action via the application of abstract, impersonal causal and ethical principles - in relation to both the *practical means* as well as *policy ends* of bureaucratic action - that ultimately gives legitimating form and content to the generalised rules, standards and policies as well as specific directives and requests that together constitute the routine and other tasks or ‘duties’ of a bureaucrat. It is in this sense, then, that a bureaucrat has an obligation to “seek assistance (only) where it is due” and to respond to perceptions of legitimate “need”: they do so insofar as their work – i.e. their action in service of their duty to exercise specific workplace entitlements – is done in a manner that ‘optimally’ serves, and is seen to serve, the rationally grounded and thus

¹¹ This, of course, does not preclude the possibility of badly formulated (i.e. sub-optimal) rules. Such rules simply reflect a ‘failure’ of ‘bureaucratic rationality’; they create an ethical obligation to seek ‘reform’ (i.e. re-formalisation).

legitimately constituted 'impersonal' purposes (or "needs") of their 'impersonal' employer, "the state".

4.4 The moral-epistemological basis for formal means-end rationality, and its associated implications for the character of ethical agency and personhood

This overall orientation has specific implications of the character of knowledge required in a bureaucratic context, which in turn has constitutive implications for the character of ethical agency. 'Rational' formalisation is intended to enable relevant actors to occupy a valid, 'objective', or 'impersonal third-person' ethical-epistemological position - one that is constituted by social recognition of a valid, publicly sharable epistemological and perceptual basis both for determining valid 'person independent' conditions for evaluative and causal knowledge and for motivating and guiding practical judgment and action via 'person-independent' deontic obligations. The validity of this epistemological and perceptual basis for both determining knowledge and informing, motivating and guiding practical judgment and action in turn rests on the recognition and acceptance of the validity of relevant general and abstract ethical, epistemological and evaluative principles (and principle-governed rules, methods and procedures) for formulating, evaluating and applying such knowledge. Such principles are in turn recognised as being validly grounded *independently of the particular interests of - or any obligations to – any particular persons*. In contrast to an ethic of mutuality, judgment and action is thus expected to be motivated and conditioned not by considerations of perceived personalised interests or obligations – either those of the actor or of others - but by considerations grounded in the 'impersonal' aims and principles embedded in or implied by relevant formalisations.¹² To the extent that this is the case, however, it implies an underlying normative expectation that bureaucratic actors constitute themselves in the workplace as 'rationally and ethically autonomous individual actors' – and evaluate both their own decisions and actions and those of others in this light.

¹² Among these, for example, are the basic principle of a legal and ethical duty to 'keep one's promises' encoded in the formalisations of contract law which was noted above.

Thus, for example, it is not expected that an actor's particular desires and expectations play a legitimating role in motivating their own or others' action simply because they belong to the actor, even though they may be otherwise legitimate in terms of the actor's organisational position in relation to others. In practical terms, this simply means that the actor should not consider their decisions and actions to be legitimate simply because their position entitles them to take any particular decision or action that is within the bounds of policies and rules, and which others are thus obliged to acknowledge as legitimate by virtue of the actor's organisational position in relation to them. Rather, actors are expected to decide and act on the basis of a legitimating fact-based 'rationale' grounded in valid, situationally relevant person-independent knowledge of relevant causal and ethical principles, and are ethically obliged to seek out such a person independent rationale as a basis for their practical judgments. Similarly, those who may be responsible for recommending a course of action to others or obtaining their approval to act have the same ethical obligation. Further, actors are also ethically obliged not to 'tailor' their judgments and actions, including their interpretation of the facts, to their perceptions of the positionally constituted desires and interests of themselves or others, if this is in conflict with their perceptions of optimising, person-independent rationality.

In 'seeking out' such an optimising rationale, an actor may in practice be motivated by a range of interests, including a desire to be evaluated well by others. In this sense, they may be motivated to act by their sensitivity to the 'evaluating gaze of others'. Notably however, such a desire to be evaluated well is somewhat paradoxically only ethically legitimate (i.e. exemplary or praiseworthy) to the extent that it reflects a desire to be perceived as a *rationality and ethically autonomous actor*, not a relational person responsive to the particular personal interests and evaluating gaze of others.

This is because, within a formal bureaucratic organisational context, any positional entitlement to expect an optimising rationale from another is not the 'personalised property' of an agent. and neither are an actor's correspondingly obligations to seek out and provide such a rationale 'personalised' and 'relational'. Consequently, others'

personal evaluations of an actor's motivating intentions and actions do not legitimately affect their personal relational standing, insofar as that relational standing is formally constituted independently of any particular personalised relation. Put another way, in general terms, the mutual relation between the actors as particular persons is not the fundamental intentional object of their workplace interaction - which is yet another way of saying that cooperative action is not expected to be motivated and legitimated by personalised considerations of mutual obligation.

Further, to the extent that they both desire to establish and maintain a 'professional relationship', the purpose of this relationship is to serve legitimate organisational purposes. Each is expected to evaluate the intentions and actions of the other - and the manner in which they enact their obligations by exercising their positional entitlements - from the perspective of their causal contribution to the achievement of these purposes, rather than their contribution to their own (or others') positional interests. As such, they are each obliged to relate to the other - and expect the other to relate to them - both as *autonomous* 'rationally optimising' actors and as 'means to ends', where each is obliged to judge and act independently on the basis of their knowledge of impersonal, abstract policies, rules and principles in the service of legitimate organisational purposes.

4.5 Key representations and practices: the intended meanings of 'impartiality', 'accountability' and 'transparency', and their role in constituting effective organisational formality

Crucially, the underlying moral-epistemological orientation characteristic of this 'non-relational' form of cooperative action is expressed in certain constitutive representations with quite specific intended meanings. In particular, rational formalisation is associated with the core bureaucratic duty to abide by, and to value, the ethical-epistemological principles of 'impartiality' and 'objectivity' in the exercise of practical judgment - in other words, to adequately occupy a valid 'impersonal third-person' ethical-epistemological position. These principles require that a bureaucrat judge, decide and act without cognitive bias or personal favour, consistently and

adequately discriminating similar cases, and making 'objective' evaluations of the relevant facts of those cases, only in light of the impersonal considerations that are specified or implied in relevant formalisations. (Cf: Rothstein 2011). Such cases always involve the interests of the actor, insofar as they are under an obligation to judge and act 'impartially' and 'objectively' and may be evaluated by others for how well they do this. In practical terms, however, this means that the actor is expected to strive to eliminate all other potentially motivating 'personal' interests from their considerations, and to 'objectively' and 'impartially' grasp and communicate both the relevant facts of the matter and the formally specified or implied basis on which those facts are expected to be evaluated.

Notably, in a modern liberal-democratic state governed by the rule of law, where all agents are considered formally 'equal' before and under the law by virtue of the possession of abstract 'rights' that inhere in them as individuals, these principles also have a specific meaning with respect to practical judgments that involve persons and their interests other than the actor. In cases that affect, or may affect, the interests of persons (including those of the actor themselves), exercising practical judgment 'impartially' involves optimisation under conditions of 'fairness'. This introduces a substantive ethical dimension to the formal epistemological basis of 'impartiality', which circumstantially (and historically) aligns the requirements of bureaucratic formality with the broader social and institutional context of liberal democracy.

In this regard, the principle of impartiality as 'fairness' relates to the notion that all persons are recognised as possessing certain basic, abstractly conceived rights and corresponding duties that are typically grounded ethically in the notion that human beings as both legal subjects and 'natural persons' should be formally considered as equally 'valued' (in some meaningful sense that is given abstract general form in ethical theory, such as human rights theory). As such, their impersonal (because abstractly generalised) legally and ethically grounded rights and entitlements are deserving of equal and impartial moral or ethical respect. These in turn involves related a requirement to recognise certain common and equally held basic legal entitlements with respect to the exercise of the law itself (e.g. principles of 'natural

justice' or 'due process', and related 'rules of evidence'). These give in turn rise to corresponding duties in the exercise and application of bureaucratic rules, standards and policies that are grounded in legal authority and which affect the interests of persons. Thus, to the extent that bureaucratic formalisations rest on legal foundations, these notions are expected to apply to the exercise of practical judgment in a bureaucratic context, such that duties to 'impartiality' and 'objectivity' – and the related principle of 'fairness' – are considered fundamental ethical principles reflecting substantive ethical concerns. In sum, an ethical bureaucrat is obligated to treat their own and others substantive interests from an abstractly formal perspective.

From a practical point of view, however, validating and regulating the form and content of thought and conduct to ensure its impartiality and objectivity – and thus its 'ethical and rational autonomy' - rests on a range of practices that are themselves guided by recognisable principles. Among the most important and general of these principles are those of 'accountability' and 'transparency'. In an organisational context constituted by 'rational' formalisation, discursive representations of these principles gain meaning by reference to specific signifying practices (and vice versa).

Accountability as a general ethical principle requires that, in relation to one's explicit and implied obligations as signified by relevant formalisations (one's 'duties'), one is liable to give an accurate and coherent written and/or verbal 'account' of the factual and evaluative basis one's actual practical judgments (one's 'rationale' for deciding and acting), as well the resulting consequences of those judgments (i.e. any subsequent actions and their effects). This 'account' is required so that one's rationale can be adequately understood and impartially evaluated by relevant others, and an impartial assessment made of the adequacy of one's performance in meeting one's obligations to conform in thought and practice to the situational requirements of impersonal optimising rationality. The principle of accountability also implies that, in the event of a failure to have and/or give adequate or 'valid' reasons for one's decisions or actions, one can be subject to appropriate correction (and/or censure or sanction) if necessary. Alternately, or in tandem, the formalisations themselves may be subject to revision ('reformalisation' or 'reform') if this is judged necessary and

appropriate. Notably, the principle of accountability rests on the related personalised notion of 'responsibility', insofar as an agent, as part of their account, is ethically obliged to identify themselves as the person causally responsible for the decisions and actions that are legitimately subject to other's evaluation, if this was in fact the case. Conversely, an agent who was not responsible for an improper or inadequate decision or action cannot be legitimately censured or sanctioned for it.

Transparency is an ethical principle that is complementary to accountability. It obliges actors to make the full basis of the rationale behind their decisions and/or actions, as well as evidence of results of any action based on that rationale (i.e. resulting consequences), publicly available for scrutiny and evaluation by others for whom the information is deemed legitimately relevant. Transparency in practice tends to facilitate coordination between actors, by enabling the circulation of information relevant to others' decisions and actions, ensuring that it is not kept unnecessarily hidden or obscured. However, it also facilitates coordination by directly facilitating accountability, by enabling an adequate factual basis for the evaluation of decisions and actions so as to encourage their alignment with organisational means and ends. In this sense, in giving an 'account', an agent is expected to be 'transparent' by fully and clearly revealing the motivating basis for their judgments and actions. In this respect, in the same way that accountability rests on the related ethical principle of 'responsibility', transparency relies on the ethical notion of personal 'honesty'. Both transparency and accountability together in practice facilitate impartiality (and hence fairness and objectivity), by ensuring that relevant facts are presented for evaluation by others. Ultimately, however, each is practically necessary to ensure the optimal realisation of the others: in practice, they are a 'package'.

The obligation to abide by ethical principles of impartiality, accountability and transparency thus give rise to certain general practical duties, aspects of which are themselves typically reflected in specific rules. Among the most fundamental and important of these are the duties to formally and verifiably *document*, *communicate* and *record* (i.e. keep on file) both the basis of relevant practical judgments and the results of those judgments (decisions, actions and their consequences), in a manner

that can readily enable the formal legitimacy and substantive efficacy to be impartially evaluated by relevant others i.e. those to whom one is formally 'accountable'. Record keeping thus enables actor to be impartially 'held to account'. Record keeping further serves organisational coordination, in that the ready availability of records serves the efficiency and effectiveness of decision-making and action.

Equally importantly, but in a manner that is not necessarily reflected in explicit rules, these principles also imply an obligation to ensure that all agents under one's direction are *subject to an adequate regime of impersonal formalisations*. This obligation to 'adequately formalise' implies an ethical duty to 'rationally' investigate the basis for, and clearly identify, the necessary and sufficient practical conditions that must be in place to ensure that others are able to judge and act in accordance with the intended purposes of the formalisations. In other words, *as a matter of principle*, one has ethical obligation (duty) to 'think through' one's analysis of any proposed basis for other actors' practical judgment and action to establish its practicality, and to communicate it to those actors in a transparent and publicly verifiable manner (i.e. usually in writing). Such a duty is owed not only for the primary practical purpose of optimally effecting legitimate cooperative action, but for substantive ethical reasons related to others' standing as rationally and ethically autonomous actors who are expected to be held accountable for their judgments and actions. In this sense, persons under one's direction are entitled to be provided with a clear, realistic and publicly verifiable basis for judging and acting in relevant situations if they are to be held accountable for their judgments and actions in those situations.

In general, therefore, in operating under the general obligation to 'rationally optimise', the principles of impartiality, accountability and transparency thus establish for a bureaucrat, where relevant to the exercise of their duties, an Impersonal ethical obligation to endeavour to *adequately (i.e. 'rationally') formalise* as a basis for legitimate cooperative relations. As such, the motivation and capability to adequately formalise is and must be conditioned by perception and recognition of the '*impersonally rational*' causal and ethical necessities inherent in the concepts of

impartiality, accountability and transparency that are constitutive of an effective impersonal principle and rule-based organisational regime.

4.6 Summary – what makes a ‘good bureaucrat’ and an effectively functioning bureaucratic organisation?

In summary, then: bureaucrats in modern democratic states are voluntarily subject to a regime of explicit and implied ‘impersonal’ deontic obligations (‘duties’) that are constituted and legitimated by the optimising purposive rationality that is expected to animate contemporary bureaucratic forms of organisation, one that rests on and presupposes an abstract conception of ‘rationally autonomous individual agency’ embedded in law and administrative regulation. A “good bureaucrat” - one who thinks, acts and communicates in accordance with the ethical requirements of their profession - is thus one who maintains and cultivates a dispositional willingness and capability to impartially and objectively subject themselves and others to such a regime by means of appropriate practices of formalisation, accountability and transparency, and seeks to cooperate in a coordinated way with others on such an ‘impersonal’ basis. It is this orientation, I suggest, that constitutes the normative (or ‘ideal’) ethical basis for conducting and evaluating ‘professional’ working relationships within a modern bureaucratic organisational context. Correspondingly, then, it is the generalisation of such an ethical orientation among bureaucrats that constitutes a well-coordinated and thus effectively functioning modern bureaucratic organisation – one that is able to optimally achieve its mandated aims and purposes.

This is not to say, of course, that relational considerations of ‘mutuality’, or indeed of personal interest, disappear entirely from any bureaucratic organisational context. On the contrary: a personal desire or interest to be recognised for one’s work, for example, or to have one’s personal or organisational ‘standing’ or ‘status’ implicitly or explicitly acknowledged, or to feel part of a likeminded and mutually-supportive ‘group’, ‘team’ or ‘organisation’, is obviously to be commonly expected among individuals in any bureaucratic organisation. Conversely, individuals for reasons of personal interest (e.g. ‘collegiality’, ‘friendship’) may also wish to be perceived and

evaluated by others as actively cooperating with them in the satisfaction of such personal desires and interests. In this sense, such considerations are always present in any bureaucratic context: they are an inevitable part of the fabric of workplace relations, and in many respects may be seen to facilitate (or in many cases diminish) organisational effectiveness.

The crucial point, however, is that such matters are *not expected to be the primary conditioning basis for motivating, shaping or legitimating cooperative bureaucratic action*. Rather, actions and intentions are ideally expected to be formulated, perceived, evaluated, legitimated and responded to primarily in light of conditions required by the impartial duty to ‘impersonal’ formal rationality encoded in relevant rules, standards and policies - not primarily in the light of their interpersonal-relational-affective motivating interests and effects. Attention may (and no doubt must) be legitimately paid to the personalised aspects of such interests, but from the perspective of organisational effectiveness, the attention given to them should also ideally be governed and regulated by evaluations of the degree to which their recognition is seen to ‘impartially’ and ‘objectively’ serve – or not significantly interfere with – the rationally coordinated pursuit of legitimate ‘impersonal’ organisational purposes, and the ‘impersonal’ obligations that they generate.

Put another way, for a ‘professional’ bureaucrat, within the context of workplace interactions with others, consideration of such ‘personalised’ desires and interests, and thus their discursive and affective expression, are ideally (in both an ethical and practical sense) expected to be subject in certain ways to ‘regulation’ by a prior sense of autonomous duty to the rationally optimising formalised regime of impersonal principles, rules, standards and associated purposes that constitute the basis for impartially interpreting and judging ‘legitimate organisational interests’. To impartially ‘regulate’ personalised desires and interests in these ways requires cultivating the necessary ‘impersonal’ dispositions and capabilities in oneself, as well as encouraging their cultivation by others. This in turn means cultivating, via an autonomous motivating sense of obligation, the capability to have and give legitimate and rationally ‘adequate’ person-independent reasons for one’s decisions and actions – and to

recognise and accept them as legitimate when given by others. It further requires that one exert - out of the same autonomous motivating sense of obligation - the necessary and sufficient mental and physical effort to ensure the practical adequacy and effect of one's decisions and actions.

These capabilities are all cultivated via participating in and observing relevant practices of accountability and transparency. Participating in and observing such practices in turn enables the cultivation of an appropriate grasp of the meaning of relevant principles and formalisations in different contexts, including the principles of transparency and accountability themselves. This, in turn, means that one can be increasingly relied upon to consistently judge and act appropriately in relevant contexts, further reducing the 'friction' of uncertainty, and contributing to overall organisational 'effectiveness'.

4.7 Conclusion

In conclusion, I wish to return to the remarks of my informant, Jacob. As Jacob recognised, the basis on which a bureaucrat is required to relate to others in their work context is very different to the basis on which Papua New Guineans typically relate to others outside that context. As he evidently appreciated, the two contexts involve different ways of understanding the requirement to evaluate and respond to 'needs' in a manner that is 'due'. Importantly, however, for Jacob to note that the two contexts involve different ways of understanding this requirement does not in itself explain the standpoint from which he understood the normative basis of that difference.

In this respect, in light of the preceding discussion, I suggest that that a notable feature of his formulation was that he cast it specifically in particular, 'personalised' terms:

When *you* need - when *I* need anything – not personal, that is professional...
Seek assistance where it is due.

This, I suggest, raises an important question: how did Jacob *interpret* the basis of his distinction between the personal and professional, and hence the ethical basis of his workplace obligations? In broader terms, this is to ask: how do Papua New Guinean public servants such as Jacob typically interpret the ethical imperatives of their workplace? Or, to put it another way, from what moral-epistemological standpoint, or what form of self-understanding, do Papua New Guinean public servants like Jacob engage in, evaluate and legitimate practices of bureaucratic formality? And how does this impact upon the way the capabilities of their organisations to perform their mandated functions are constituted?

The remaining chapters of this thesis will be devoted to investigating these questions.

Chapter 5 – Social position, cultural identity and ‘tradition’: the ‘customary’ ethos of Papua New Guinean public servants in the context of social and institutional change

ELITE - The group of educated PNGans who run the country. The elite includes the public servants, parliamentarians, managerial, entrepreneurial and professional men (there are few women) who make the economic, social and political decisions which influence the development of the country. The elite emerged in the late 1960s when the Australian government rapidly expanded the secondary and higher education systems to prepare PNGans to take over the management of the nation at Independence. In PNG usage, individual members of the elite are referred to as elites or the elites.

- Online Tok Pisin English dictionary

GRASRUT - ordinary people (term used in contrast to elites, variously describing rural village-dwellers, urban settlers, unemployed, operators in the informal sector, the ‘man/ woman in the street,’ etc.).

- Online Tok Pisin English dictionary¹³

5.1 Introduction

In my conversations with Port Moresby-based, university educated Papua New Guineans about their lives and culture they sometimes expressed a strong sense of being different to Westerners like myself. As one junior male public servant put it to me:

See, Papua New Guinean Melanesian society, it’s unlike western where you do your things by your own. Maybe your immediate family comes in. A Papua

¹³ <https://www.tokpisin.info/elite-papua-new-guinea/> accessed 30 November 2020

New Guinean is shaped and groomed by society and customs that we [have]. It's still in our blood system.

My informant's way of accounting for this sense of cultural difference was evidently rooted in his experience of extended family, kinship and clan relations, and the customary practices associated with such relations. Notably, however, a second younger male public servant attempted to explain this sense of difference in another way – not so much in terms of the abiding influence of constitutive ties of kinship and custom, but rather as a sense of the kind of personhood this seemed to involve:

We are somehow interwoven...We are not sort of individualistic, people here, we are more connected.

Understanding this Melanesian sense of being 'interwoven' with others, of being 'connected' – or of being constituted as a person in the context of certain kinds of relations – has been a central theme of Melanesian anthropology. The now classic figure of the Melanesian 'dividual', a person constituted wholly in and through their reciprocal relationships with others, has been one of its most celebrated, if controversial, contributions to the broader field (see particularly Strathern 1988; for a critical reading see LiPuma 1998, and particularly Josephides 1991). The striking contours of this figure – drawn in dramatic contrast to Western conceptions of autonomous individual personhood – have, however, been outlined largely in the context of customary Melanesian social orders and their characteristic epistemologies, institutions and practices. It is thus against the background of changing institutional contexts and their constitutive practices that new and emerging conceptions of personhood have themselves been drawn.

A significant aspect of this changing context, along with the changing character of social relations and conceptions of personhood that are seen to be associated with it, has been identified with the emergence of an increasingly stratified Papua New Guinean society from its more characteristically egalitarian pre-colonial forms. Gewertz and Errington's (1999) study of emerging class, for example, highlights the introduction of class-based distinctions grounded in unequal access to economic and

cultural capital, where social and economic differences between the educated urban elite and the 'grassroots' are increasingly legitimated by moral and economic ideologies of individual effort, achievement and worth. In contrast, more recent scholarship has focused more closely on the contested moral and ethical dimensions of these social changes. Thus, rather than simply highlighting processes of stratification and emerging discourses of 'individualism', these studies have instead drawn attention to the strength and persistence of indigenous norms of reciprocity, kinship solidarity and group membership in shaping both public and personal evaluations of individual worth, standing and status.

In his study of reconstruction efforts following the devastating volcano eruption in Rabaul in 1994, for example, Martin (2010; 2015) develops the themes of Gewertz and Errington by highlighting the emergence of an ideology of 'possessive individualism' (cf MacPherson 1962) among the indigenous elite of the island Province of East New Britain. Here, however, his focus is on the ways in which monied individuals seek to mobilise their wealth to negotiate reciprocal claims of kinship and *kastom*, and how their attempts to represent themselves and others as the autonomous "owners of their own capacities and resources" against communal expectations of everyday and ceremonial reciprocities often lead to contested moral evaluations of prestige, status and cultural identity. Similarly, in their examination of the social and personal dimensions of remittance practices among Manus Islanders, Dalsgaard (2013) and Rasmussen (2015) highlight the persistence of local moral economies of reciprocity in shaping remittance relations between urban migrants and their rural kin. Both emphasise the central role of financial and other contributions as a means for Port Moresby-based salaried workers to maintain their practical standing and status among - and relations with - village-based kin and community.

Consistent with these findings, if the statements by my public service informants can be taken to reflect a more general perspective, characteristically 'western' images of autonomous, individual personhood would not appear to be dominant in the self-understanding of contemporary educated, urbanised Papua New Guineans. Indeed, for at least one person I spoke to – a young female civil society activist and former public

servant who worked in the area of youth leadership – this was in fact a significant problem. As she expressed it to me, one of the main challenges facing her country was the need for young people to orient their morality to ‘principles’, and develop a stronger sense of their ‘autonomy’. For most of my informants, however, the pursuit of autonomy – to be an ‘individual’, free of the binding constraints of the relational expectations and obligations of kinship and custom, to become and be recognised as the ‘independent authors of their own actions’ and the ‘individual owners of their capabilities and resources’ - seemed in many ways not to be so much undesirable as simply wrong, as well as unrealistic. As I shall seek to describe further below, many of their most central personal purposes and challenges were evidently framed as a question of managing, rather than repudiating or qualifying, those manifold relations and their attendant expectations and obligations.

The remainder of this chapter seeks to examine and discuss the experience of urban-based public servants in the context of their relations with the predominantly rural-based families and kin. Firstly, I will seek briefly to place Papua New Guinean public servants in their general demographic, economic and social context, highlighting their distinctive social and economic position as members of the country’s so-called ‘educated elite’. Subsequently, building on the work of Martin, Dalsgaard and Rasmussen, I draw on interviews with current and former public servants as well as other informants to examine how the distinctive educational and employment positions of individual public servants impact upon their positions in the moral economy of family and kinship relations. Third, through the lens of a more detailed examination of a representative case study, I seek to place my informant’s experience of this moral economy, and the relational obligations and expectations it engenders, within the context of broader life concerns that arise as a result of their privileged positions in the ‘modern’ Papua New Guinean institutional context.

In presenting the case study, however, I also seek to reflect on questions of ‘culture’ and ‘ethics’ and their explanatory role in the context of social change. I do this by highlighting the role of ‘culture’ in the lives of my informants, and its constitutive role of culture in shaping their understandings and experience of the everyday domain of

the 'ethical'. By highlighting aspects of change and continuity in cultural and social values and practices, I seek to show that the influence of 'traditional culture' for my informants is primarily located in that which persists because it is both valued and taken for granted as part of an 'everyday' relational ethos; an ethos of 'mutuality' that is constitutive of personal meaning and identity in the context of personalised reciprocal social relations.

Before proceeding to the presentation and analysis of my primary data, I provide in the next section an introductory analysis of the socio-economic position of public servants in Papua New Guinea that aims to provide context for subsequent discussion.

5.2 The general socio-economic position of public servants

In 2019, according to official figures, there were approximately 109,000¹⁴ public servants on the Government's national payroll. (GoPNG 2020; Howes 2020). In an overall estimated population of nearly 8 million – around 5.2 million or 65% per cent of whom are estimated to be of working age (i.e. 15-64) – the position of public servants is nevertheless extremely significant. On the assumption that the majority of public servants reside in the towns and cities where they predominantly work, they make up nearly one in ten of PNG's 1.2 million strong urban population. In contrast, around 85-90% of the working age population are estimated to be engaged in rural-based subsistence agriculture and/or the informal economy (ADB 2020), with around 75% dependent on subsistence agriculture for their livelihood, and 40% living on less than 1USD per day (UNDP 2014). Thus, while public servants likely comprise less than 3% of the nation's entire working-age population, they comprise significantly more than one

¹⁴ According to recent Government figures, of those approximately 109,000 public servants, more than half (57%) are classified as teachers. Slightly more than an eighth (13%) are engaged in the 'disciplinary forces' (i.e. police and armed forces), and a slightly smaller figure (11%) are designated as health workers attached to hospitals. The remainder - around 24%, or some 20,873 individuals - work for agencies attached to the National (12,198 or 12%) or 23 Provincial-level (8,675 or 8%) governments: that is, in core public administration positions. (GoPNG 2020)

in five - and perhaps closer to one in four - of the fewer than 500,000 Papua New Guineans thought to be in formal salaried or wage-earning employment¹⁵. (ADB 2020)

Public servants thus make up a significant proportion of what in popular discourse is often referred to as the country's 'elite', that segment of the mostly urban-dwelling population who are defined in counterposition to the country's so-called 'grassroots' - rural villagers and urban settlement dwellers who generally occupy positions in the overlapping subsistence and informal economies. As Cox (2014) points out, however, "this loose popular usage includes many who are not at all 'elite' in the sense of being wealthy, politically powerful or culturally sophisticated." (p1) Rather, faced with difficult realities arising from growing costs of living, deteriorating services and the inadequacy of ordinary wages to meet many basic needs, Papua New Guinea's emerging middle class increasingly refer to themselves as 'working class'. As such, they distinguish themselves both from their rural kin and the urban poor - the 'grassroots' - as well as "those who wield real influence in PNG: senior public servants and powerful political patrons or the landowner rentier millionaires who capture the benefits of resource development". (p1)

In at least one respect, however, the continuing broad use of the term 'elite' has a firm basis in socio-economic reality. Indeed, as Cox also notes, in Papua New Guinea "it is common to hear the term 'elite' applied to almost anyone who has completed their secondary education" (2014). Such an appellation is perhaps unsurprising in a country where fewer than 60% of the population have completed 9 years of primary school (ADB 2020), and where basic literacy rates in both Tok Pisin (57%) and English (49%) are marginally lower again (DoE 2016). In 2013, according to Government figures, given low secondary school completion rates, a total of only 18,250 school leavers exited Grade 12 nationally. Of these, only 4,074, or about one fifth, were selected for post-secondary education, with only 50% of these - or around 2000 individuals - selected to attend one of PNG's six universities (Kavanamur, Baki and Baird: 2014). For

¹⁵ This ratio has declined over recent decades. Gewertz and Errington (1999), quoting Millett (1993), note that in 1990, the then 50,000 public servants comprised over a quarter of all wage earners, in a population of 4 million (p 4-5)

public servants, many of whom must hold university degrees as a basic eligibility requirement for their positions, their formal education - and the formal employment opportunities it enables - is thus an exceedingly rare mark of social distinction.

The following sections seeks to explore the impact of this distinctive social position on public servants' relations with their 'grassroots', village-based kin and communities. This will involve exploring why and how their position 'matters' - or gains personal and social significance, meaning and value - within the framework of a particular moral economy, and the sense of self and identity that this moral economy involves. Appreciating this, however, begins not just with understanding individuals' connections to people and practices, insofar as this sense of self and identity also rests upon a simultaneous connection to *ples* (Eng: "place").

5.3 Ties of kinship and 'ples' – relations with village and kin

With more than 97% of Papua New Guinea's land mass under customary ownership, ties of kinship are almost always coextensive with family claims or connections to ancestral land. Indeed, a number of the male public servants I interviewed described themselves as 'landowners', having customary access to clan land in their village, or being in a position to claim such access: a not uncommon situation in PNG, but one holding definite status. To describe oneself as a 'fourth generation landowner' is to lay claim to a respected place in the village, and its kinship-based customary social order. Ties to land are thus also ties to *kastom*, kin, clan and *ples*.

The strength of Papua New Guinean's connection to their *ples* was described in the following terms by David, the male public servant I quoted in the Introduction:

Where we come from, our originality...it's very deep, it's a default setting within our system, that I cannot get away from. Probably in the next 100 years, probably if you ask someone he will still be from [my Province]. My great-grandchild will still say he is from [my Province]...

David's remarks were notable in a number of respects. Firstly, only his father was from his home Province; his mother was of not only of different ethnic parentage, but her parents were themselves from two entirely different Provinces. This in itself wasn't entirely out of the ordinary - I observed that inter-ethnic marriages were not uncommon among the parents of my public service informants, or among public servants themselves. David told me his parents had met in Lae when his dad was working there. However, he himself had been born not in Lae or or his home Province but in a third province, while his father was employed on a mine. Moreover, his early childhood was spent in Port Moresby under the care of his grandmother. It was only during his years of primary education that he was resident in his home Province, in his father's family's village, when he had lived under the care of his elder brother. Subsequently, as with most Papua New Guineans who seek to pursue extended formal education, his senior high school and university years were also spent away from his immediate family and home.

Nevertheless, he vividly described to me his sense of continuing connection to his *ples* and people:

I'll just tell a story from my experience, and ah... that's how deep it goes. It was some time before my national examination back in... while I was doing my grade ten. At some point I was just lying on my bed, and all these thoughts of the forest, where I used to go around with my brothers and nephews and all this... and even at some point from my mind think that I was swimming with all those small fish in the stream. So what happened was I just took my bags and I head home. And my dad was very angry on me. I didn't tell him that this was my... just feel I had to come home at some point...So it's a very strong feeling over you.

David's evocative story was unusually intimate. Most often, when I asked people whether they maintained connection with the village, they answered with a straightforward "yes" or "of course". As one of my younger male informants put it:

You know, Papua New Guineans, you know, we maintain these close family ties, so I still have family connections....I still have a place in the village.

Most indicated they travelled back home as often as possible: at least once or twice a year, sometimes on work-related travel (if circumstances allowed), usually at Christmas and also at other customary occasions (such as family funerals or marriages).

However, the value placed on such connections of kinship and *ples*, as well the attachment to the way of life they represented, was generally evident. One of my informants reflected on his good fortune at being forced by circumstances when at secondary school age to return with his family to his home village. Donald, a senior public servant who was born on Nissan Island in Bougainville Province, had spent his primary school years away from his home village while his father worked at the copper mine on Bougainville Island. When the civil crisis in Bougainville closed the mine in 1990, his family had been forced to return to Nissan. When I asked whether he maintained connections with his village, he replied:

I do. But then, during the crisis – I think it was a blessing for me, the crisis – I stayed there [in the village] on Nissan for the two years without school, ...and then the four years for high school ...six years... I kind of understood much more my culture, the people and the way of life and I think, I'm so happy that it happened that way.

Another informant told me they were starting to embrace cultural practices that they had previously understood little about, and had come to think of as holding little practical value. Lazarus, a thoughtful and quietly spoken young middle manager who was recently engaged to be married, told me of his prior misgivings about the costs and obligations associated with customary marriage practices:

Previously, my thinking that's...like... bride price, and all that.... It's not...It's not important... we shouldn't do this, it is just a waste of resources, as well. You'll be looking after your family, and then even, family of your wife, like...they'll be there, sometimes you'll be going to them. We don't really need this. That was my thinking, yeah....

However, he explained that he was in the process of changing his views. Coming to be convinced of their practical and cultural logic, at the urging of his mother's family he had agreed to participate in customary engagement and bridewealth ceremonies:

but no! [laughs] I'm beginning to be persuaded back that it's important... So now, I'm starting to think again. Maybe, this as well, it's good as well....So, and then so like...going back there again and then discussing. When going through this they're saying, we need to do this. And then they, my family, would say it's because this, this, this...these are the reasons why, like, we need to do this....So now it's making me caught up again within the different way of thinking. I have to accept this as well, no, this is correct as well.

He further explained how he had also come to see the 'correctness' of other customary practices, such as returning a deceased family member to the village for burial:

Or maybe just like, you have a family member who passes away...maybe your dad, and then you want to bury him close by so you can visit. But the family in the village, they would say "No", bring the...to his *p/les*. And then the cultural reasoning is also that, when you bring him back to the village then you have access to the village, he is buried back in the village, resources here in the village, you are able to... yeah.

For Lazarus, as for others, such practices were evidently important in cementing ties of practical value as well as emotional significance.

For many of my informants, the practical as well as affective value of maintaining relations with relatives in the village was underscored by their intention to eventually retire there. Others expressed a desire to retire in the city, if they could afford it. For the few, usually older individuals I spoke to who maintained houses and access to garden land in the village, however, maintaining such relations was of both immediate and long-term consequence. As one older male former public servant, Harold, explained to me:

To operate successfully in the village you have to have all these relationships you've got to maintain, support. They will help you build your garden, and your harvest...All these things.

Notably, however, unlike most of my informants, Harold was not well-disposed to village life, and did not value village relations highly: village ties were seen as more of

an encumbrance than a blessing. For Harold, as with some others I spoke to, the burden of maintaining such relationships not one he wished to carry – an attitude that had gained him a reputation among his fellow villagers for being distant:

So, in my case, I rarely associate with people from my village. And people from my village, that's what they tell me, that I don't...I keep to myself.... It's basically because I don't just want to have the baggage that comes with those kinds of relationships.

Nevertheless, despite his efforts at avoiding such entanglements, his concluding reflections emphasised the importance that he still placed on conducting himself properly – that is, in a way that maintained his standing with others from the village, and thereby avoiding any breakdown in relations:

So, I keep that space clear. And up to now I've successfully managed that. And people have respected the way I conducted [myself].

Moreover, neither did his attitude signify a rejection of relations with family and kin: on the contrary, in a situation that was not uncommon for older, more economically established individuals, he had 14 younger members of his extended family from the village – his 'wantoks' - living at his home in Port Moresby, all of whom were unemployed, and whom he was financially supporting.

I will discuss the significance of such situations in more detail in Chapter 7. For now, however, I will use the example as a means to point to a further aspect of relational ties with village and kin experienced by my public service informants: the status and respect that comes from success attaining formal qualifications and employment, along with a sense of expectation and obligation from family and kin to provide material and financial support for both personal and customary needs.

5.4 Education, income and status: local moral economies of respect, belonging and reciprocal obligation

Relations between the educated urban elite and their rural families and communities in Papua New Guinea have most often been studied through the lens of remittances - a significant resource stream for many rural people, and a vitally important aspect of social relations between members of the educated urban elite and their rural kin. In his summative study focused on Manus Island, for example, Dalsgaard (2013) focuses on how remittances provide a major means by which rural people engage with the capitalist economy via the maintenance of long-term exchange relationships with emigrant family members, while at the same time enabling migrants to maintain social ties and position in their home communities over time and distance. Thus, on the one hand, strategies adopted by Manus Island families in relation to children's education, mobilization of wage labour and subsequent remittances give them access to the consumer goods and "development" associated with modernity, while remittances themselves afford a central means for migrants to secure their eventual return to the village and possibly a position of status and leadership. As with Martin's East New Britain elites, however, Dalsgaard notes the sometimes fraught and contested moral terrain on which such exchanges occur. Thus, although wage or salary-earning migrants can gain upward social mobility at home through remittances, the social position they may occupy upon their return depends on "the manner in which they have committed their wealth, and the attention they have given to kin while away". (p281)

Similar broad themes emerged clearly in my conversations with my public service informants. What I wish to focus on, however, is the overall character of the moral ethos in which remittances play a part. In particular, I seek to examine the specific ways in which formal education and employment – and the particular status that they afford to migrants - involve particular effects in the context of the moral economy of family and village life. I seek to highlight certain aspects of the dynamics that generally

govern this moral economy: firstly, the way in which formal education and employment affords enhanced status to individuals within the village, a status which is connected to a perceived 'capacity to contribute'; and secondly, how financial and other contributions to family, kin and community tend to be framed not so much as acts of 'giving' or 'sharing', but of expectations or obligations to 'give back'.

As described above in section 4.2 above, attaining a university degree is a mark of rare distinction in Papua New Guinea. Among my Port-Moresby based informants, very few indeed had university-educated parents. Those that I knew or met, perhaps unsurprisingly, had all grown up in Port Moresby (or in the case of the children of diplomats, abroad). They often seemed as a result more 'cosmopolitan' in their outlooks and interests, and seemed to me to be less committed to maintaining a strong sense of connection to their ancestral village or 'grassroots' relatives. Among first generation university graduates who comprised the majority of my informants, however, connections with the home village were generally more evident. Most had parents who had obtained at least a basic education and had had jobs in the formal sector, and who now resided in the village. A number also had one or more siblings with university degrees and professional or business-related occupations who lived in towns or cities, though most had one or more siblings who had stayed in the village. It was not uncommon to learn, however, that an informant had been the first in their family – and often the very first in their village - to attend university. In many cases they had also been the first to complete Grade 12 high school.

Understandably, for first generation graduates in particular, the journey to higher education in Papua New Guinea is often arduous and expensive, involving a significant commitment of effort and resources from the individual, their families and often the broader local community. While various National Governments have at different times adopted the policy of abolishing of tuition fees for primary education, the cost of securing a basic education for children has nevertheless continued to be a major and often prohibitive impost on many rural families with limited exposure to the cash economy. Further, proceeding on to high school (Grades 11 and 12) - for those who manage to do so - usually involves costly travel away from home, either to one of the

newer but growing numbers of boarding high schools based in a Provincial town or capital, or if fortunate to be selected, to one of PNG's six regionally-based and highly competitive National High Schools. Additional time away from home is then necessary to attend one of PNG's six Universities. While the availability of government-funded scholarships enables many to afford the expense, significant personal effort - as well as committed support from extended family and friends - is also required.

These practical realities were forcefully described to me by Ernest, a 39 year-old administrative officer from a Highlands Province who had studied political science and law at the University of Papua New Guinea. Ernest impressed upon me the investment that was often necessary to enable people like him to reach their positions as members of the educated 'elite':

You see, the commitment, the effort and time and expenses we put through to be who we are...

He emphasised the adverse practical conditions that had to be overcome, and the persistence required to do so:

In Papua New Guinea our village settings are not that advanced. In order for you to study we don't have light. We use torch, traditional torch. And studying environments are not conducive. We struggle.

Mostly, however, he emphasised the personal effort and sacrifice, as well as the sacrifices and support of family, that had been required to arrive at his present position:

Peter, to be frank, to do my high school, secondary school, I cut down hooch [brushwood], and shouldered it to the nearest road to sell it...as I've said, I have spent so many time, I have made so many commitments with parents in the village, just to get a certificate, just to graduate from Uni, we sacrificed a lot of efforts and time and expense...

Such themes of sacrifice and effort were echoed, though perhaps not as vividly, by other informants. In many cases, informants simply spoke of being cared for during their school years by extended family members or family friends while their fathers travelled away from home for work, commonly in the forestry, plantation or mining

sectors. Other spoke of being sponsored by relatives, or living with or being looked after by city or town-based family members, while at University.

One important effect of this effort and achievement is reflected in the way in which status and recognition is afforded to those who are 'educated'. Ernest, for example, acknowledged the recognition from came from being a university graduate:

If you are a university graduate you have a high respect [and] status. You get high respect from that.

Another junior officer told me:

I was the first in the village to come up and have some education...They hold the highest respect.

Similarly, a third remarked:

You know, being someone who's actually went as far as University level of education, you have people [in the village] looking up to you as... I would say, you have your place there....You definitely have some status there.

More specifically, a number of my informants reported how theirs had become a valued voice in the community, their knowledge and contacts seen as a resource for others to draw on in matters of matters of both private or public importance. For women in particular, including those who grew up in matrilineal societies, this a was a notable experience. Thus, for example, Paula, a middle manager in her late 30's from a matrilineal clan in a northern coastal Province, spoke of how her degree and job had transformed her standing in the eyes of people at home:

Educated, what not, you go back, you know...you are seen differently from... yeah, the treatment is totally different. Like, when I was in high school or university, going back home, it wasn't like really much, I was a female, like, OK. But once you started working and then, the people that were, you know, hardly around and what not, every time I go home it's like, they come, and they want to talk about something in the village, it's not just like village stuff, OK, I might know something, I might be able to help with the solutions and what not...

Donald, the Deputy Secretary from Nissan Island, put it more straightforward terms:

That's the thing, when I go back home, they want to treat me as somebody...just because you are coming from outside, they see you as a ...like a head, a head...

However, as Donald's further remarks sought to make clear, people respond to such evaluations by others in different ways.

Donald himself expressed a degree of discomfort with the way people wished to treat him. Though holding a senior executive position in the national public service, he said he did not like to be treated as a 'big person', but as a normal member of the village community:

So I tell them, I have a position but that's at work; here our system is different. If you are my uncle, I respect... you are my elder now, and you're family, or you're my friend. For them, they want to respect me more than I'm supposed to [be].

Notably, however, his attitude to maintaining 'proper' customarily-ascribed status relations was observed by his family to be in marked contrast to others who returned to visit the village:

And they've been telling me, "Hey, you're very different from these guys, when they come..." I was hearing feedback from my family: "These guys when they come they do this, and this, and people... everybody comes and gives them things, like food... But you don't do that. And you come, and...". And in terms of rank, of positions, they're not even people who have position like we do. They're just office clerks. Just people here, but when they go home...probably they feel...Probably it's natural to some people.

He concluded simply: "But then, I don't treat them that way. I just try to fit in with the community, and my family."

Interestingly, Donald's modest attitudes and conduct regarding others' apparent desire to treat him as a 'head' themselves seemed to reflect Nissan' Islander's own reported expectations of a headman (Bachman 1982)¹⁶, while others acting in the

¹⁶ According to Bachman (1982), "The traditional pattern of leadership on Nissan becomes meaningful within the context of the markedly egalitarian sentiments islanders reveal in their words and actions. Social institutions, such as those relating to leadership, both express these sentiments and represent efforts to accommodate interpersonal behaviour to them." (p 203) Thus, he continues, "an effective big man should, at the very least, come to terms with the ambiguities of his position as leader in a society that recognizes no man's right to dominate another. To succeed, he must first convince his followers

status-seeking manner Donald described appear more akin to those labelled as “Big Shots” (in contrast to ‘big men’), as reported by Martin in his ethnography of East New Britain (Martin 2007).

Understandably, perhaps, no one I spoke to described themselves as, or admitted to aspiring to a distinctive position of local status and leadership. Nevertheless, other informants also pointed to the existence of similar general attitudes, particularly – though by no means exclusively – among males from the Highlands Region, where considerations of ‘name’ and ‘fame’ brook larger in the cultural ethos. Paula, for example – herself a graduate in anthropology and sociology – contrasted the behaviour of Highlanders with her own coastal people:

I think for coastal I think we are more level headed and...more relaxed. A laissez fair attitude. Up in the Highlands it's a bit different, 'coz it's also...it's mostly to do with status. The educated ...they'll expect you to be like... and, for men that's even bigger. And then...they will contribute [financially], and what they say goes, and they have a pool of followers, and all this. Also for the females, because the bride price increases with the level of education. Yeah. And the higher educated you are...

But she also acknowledged it was a more general phenomenon: “I mean even on the coast, too. Some of this will come into play.”\

Importantly, irrespective of the particularities of local culture, Paula’s and Donald’s observations suggest the ways in which such ascriptions of prestige and status, and the evaluations of individual worth and worthiness which they reflect, are based not only on a recognition of individual effort and achievement, but are closely linked to a perceived capability to contribute in significant material ways to family and village life. Further, however, what was evident in my conversations with my informants was the way in which community recognition of an individual’s status and concomitant capacity to contribute was often expressed and experienced to a greater or lesser

that he is disinterested, that unlike other men he is neither proud nor possessive nor jealous, but, instead, is one who embodies higher ideals and serves only as their executor. These ideals derive from islander’s notions of the perfect community wherein men live peacefully together, co-operating with one another for their mutual benefit and for the good reputation of the group. Ultimately, there should be an identity between the big man and his followers, one that resolves any ambiguities connected with the leader's position. “ (p207)

degree as generalised sense of expectation or obligation – expectations or obligations that are understood, moreover, as being proportional with career success and the recognition this is afforded. As one of my informants succinctly expressed it:

The higher you get up, your status rises, and then your people expect you to give back. Commensurate with your status.

Further, what is also notable is the sense here in which such contributions were viewed not so much as a case of ‘giving’, but of ‘giving back’. In short, such considerations of status, respect, contribution, expectation and obligation are rooted in a moral economy of mutuality and reciprocity: an ethos in which the status, standing, capacities and resources of the individual – indeed, the individual person themselves - are seen in an important sense as owing their existence to the efforts of the family and broader community, and in which reciprocal recognition of these realities by both the individual and their family and community is both afforded and signified by the valued act of ‘giving back’.

David, for example, expressed this sense of being expected to ‘give back’ in terms of ‘compensation’:

You have to compensate for their efforts in helping, contributing to where you are now.

Moreover, as his further remarks indicated, such a sense of expectation to ‘compensate’ others often extended beyond those who were immediately and tangibly responsible for contributing to his personal success. Further, his account of his actions in ‘giving back’ seemed also to involve a performative dimension in which broader family and community recognition of his social standing was based upon his continuing to demonstrate his willingness and capacity to contribute more widely, particularly in times of need:

And even if they haven’t contributed [to where you are now], they have to be given something, so that recognition or appreciation of why you are successful. Even though they haven’t given you something... And especially in times of need. It extends probably as far as first cousins, and at times it extends further than that.

David's further remarks, however, highlighted additional aspects of the ethos that generally seemed to govern local relations. How far the 'expectation to give' extends, he suggested, "depends on my family status back in the village". His own family's status was a partly reflection in his father's position as a recognised community leader:

My dad is, I would say he is, because he came out and worked and have some form of education, and have some money also, so he's been looked as a leader, not just in the clan, but in the village....

As a result, however, the expectation to contribute or 'give back' was commensurately wider. As he put it, there was "more expectation from everyone, in the village or from the District, sometime responsibility extends [that far]....".

David's references to need, recognition and individual and family status point to an important distinction that was either implicitly and explicitly made by nearly all of my informants: that between sharing one's wealth with other individual family members as an individual member of the family, and giving in relation to, or on behalf of, the corporate family, kinship or community group. As I shall discuss in more detail in the next chapter, such a distinction generally reflected a difference in the purposes for which a financial contribution was made: giving within the family often reflected responses to personal needs that related to 'modern' practices, such health, education and livelihood expenses, or in response to gifts of hospitality and respect when visiting home; whereas examples of contributing on behalf of the family were most typically related to ostensibly 'customary' practices, and the forms of public recognition of family and clan status and standing that these involved.

Significantly, however, for David - as for most of my informants - both kinds of practices of giving and sharing served in important ways to performatively constitute the individual giver as a recognised and valued member of their family and community groups: a person in 'good relational standing'. In this sense, while achievements that signify one's capability to generate wealth (such as formal education and a job) may elicit status, respect and standing within the community, the maintenance of that status, respect and standing is conditional upon one's demonstrated willingness to continue to share the fruits of that capability. In this way, the reciprocal 'sharing' of

one's success thus marks an individual as one who belongs properly to and in the family, clan and community, who is seen to recognise and respond appropriately to the wants, needs and intentions of others to whom they are significantly related. In return, they are granted respect, standing and status as a member of the community – often signified, for example, by 'gifts' of food, hospitality or visits by relatives on their return home. Importantly, however, such respect is offered by others not only in recognition of the individual's contribution - and their possession of the valued capabilities and proper motives it displays - but can also be seen as a symbolic means to elicit their continuing contribution. In these ways, the underlying ethos of 'mutuality' is characterisable in sociological terms as involving reciprocal exchanges and transformation of material and symbolic capital (cf: Bourdieu: 1990) that are based on perceptions of their equivalence in value. That is, one receives (or is granted) symbolic capital (e.g. status, respect, standing) in 'equivalent' or proportional exchange for one's demonstrated capability to produce and share valued material capital with members of the group, with the 'reward' of symbolic capital (including the sense of 'status' and 'belonging' that it signifies and evokes) acting as an incentive to continue to do so.

Importantly, however, 'belonging' to the community in this way also means, in an analogous sense, that an individual's capacities and resources – including their labour time and its fruits - are not seen as simply their own: others, too, may make a legitimate claim of 'ownership' in relation to them. As one of my informants put it, one practical corollary of this ethos is that:

Your salary is not only your salary, your salary is your extended family's salary, and sometimes goes as far as your tribe.

As can be imagined, given such an understanding, the demands and expectations for financial support placed on public servants by their kinfolk and communities can often create significant practical challenges, both in the short and long term. In simple terms, the demands and expectations that are generated by such a conception are confronted by the practical realities of 'modern' urban life in a market economy: need to meet costs of housing, food, transport, communications, entertainment, health,

education expenses for one's own children – along with the desirability of accumulating and investing in order to 'get ahead'. I discuss aspects of these issues in more detail both in the case study in the following section, as well as in the next chapter. Here, however, I wish to focus on how they are generally thought about and responded to.

Notably, this informant, John, emphasised the likely long-term practical and relational considerations for anyone in a position like his who gained a reputation for refusing such requests:

Look, if I say no, what will I be perceived back home? How will they perceive me? When I finish my work, when I reach 63 or 65, reach retirement age, go home, I burn all my bridges. How do I settle back into the community?

John's remarks emphasised the potential negative consequences of gaining such a reputation. Importantly, however, such evaluations of potential negative consequences make sense only against a positive background: one involving the active desire to be perceived by others in a certain way, as a certain kind of person. As John's statement suggests, being recognised and evaluated by others in the right way is a necessary means for maintaining the relations that make an eventual return to a life in village practically possible. This desire certainly involves instrumental considerations, no doubt magnified by the relative and often unaffordable cost of retirement in a town or city. However, as the various accounts by my informants suggest, such a desire cannot be viewed as merely instrumental. Underlying a fear of negative practical consequences for acting in a way that would harm one's reputation and relations is also the intrinsic value one places on those relations, a valuing that makes a return to the village something desirable for reasons beyond the practical considerations of economic necessity or convenience.

Notably, as the accounts given by my informants also indicate, the desire to be evaluated in a certain way is not necessarily tied to ambition, or an aspiration to a position of prestige, status or leadership - even though this is how others one's family and community may seek to constitute the relation. Instead, this valuing of relations can simply rest on a desire to belong, to 'fit in' and to feel respected – that is, to be

visibly and publicly evaluated well by others whose relational evaluations matter most because they are in a valued social relation. Further, and equally notably, neither did my informants question the legitimacy of those kinds of relational evaluations - or seek to justify a refusal to contribute - on the basis of an alternative conception of personhood potentially available to them via an ideology of 'possessive individualism'. That is, their accounts of themselves and others' actions in the context of their kinship relations were not oriented to an abstract conception of themselves and others that constituted individuals as 'autonomous owners of their own capabilities and resources': a conception entailing, on the one hand, a perceived generalised individual moral entitlement to, as one chooses, accumulate, consume or exchange the wealth that one produces with those capabilities and resources; and on the other, a corresponding generalised individual moral responsibility to develop and use those individualised capabilities and resources to produce for one's own needs by means of one's own efforts. (cf Macpherson 162; see also, for example, Robbins 2007) As such, as I shall describe in more detail in the next chapter, despite the financial and social pressures typically associated with such expectations and obligations, my informants' main focus was on managing those pressures, rather than repudiating or qualifying the relations that generate them. As a practical matter, this involved finding ways to balance the demands, expectations and opportunities presented by participation in 'modern' urban life and those associated with inherited cultural values and ostensibly 'traditional' practices of kinship, *kastom* and *ples*.

In terms of the questions posed by this thesis, however, this last statement raises a series of issues that I wish to address here. Firstly, in a context of social transformation, where the 'traditional' forms of 'customary' practices have themselves been subject to change – or in many cases even lost their 'traditional' significance - in what way does it make sense to describe what is inherited via culture as 'traditional', such that its influence on people's lives and actions can in some sense be meaningfully ascribed to 'traditional culture'? Second, how might the 'influence' of culture on people's lives and actions be best described or accounted for, particularly in a context of social change? Where is this influence located? Thirdly - and centrally - how does this link to concerns about the ethical?

In order to explore these questions, I turn to a case study. The case study helps to respond to these questions in three main ways. Firstly, by building on the accounts already given, it helps to place the issues examined thus far in a broader life context. In this sense, it helps to show how remittances and financial contributions are only one element - albeit an important one – in a much broader moral economy or practical ‘ethos’ of mutuality and reciprocity; an ethos that is centred on the production and reproduction of contemporary forms of family, kinship and social relations, in which aspects of both ostensibly ‘traditional Papua New Guinean’ and ‘modern Western’ ways of life are mutually implicated. Second, it aims to show how this ethos operates for my informants as an implicit ‘background context’ in shaping the way they perceive and evaluate the practical life choices that arise in this social context - choices that I characterise as constituting the practical domain of ‘everyday’ ethics. Finally, it aims to show that it is the persistence of the overall ethos itself - rather than the persistence of specific ‘traditional’ cultural practices - that serves to meaningfully constitutes a continuing link between my informants and their ‘traditional culture’, while at the same time serving to mediate the influence of that culture on broader processes of social change. It does this, I argue, by constituting them ethically as ‘persons’ in culturally distinctive ways.

5.5 Leah’s story – reflections on ‘culture’ and change: ‘everyday ethics’ and the continuing influence of the ‘traditional’ ethos of mutuality

One Saturday afternoon I met up with my friend Leah at one of Port Moresby’s harbourside cafes. Leah was formerly a primary teacher in the public sector – technically a public servant employed by the Department of Education - and had worked in schools in various Provinces. She had left the public service some time before, and was currently working as teacher at a private primary school in Port Moresby. She is in her late thirties, and a single mother. She was born into a matrilineal-matrilocal clan and raised by her parents in her mother’s ancestral village near a major city on Papua New Guinea’s northern coast.

Over coffee, we got to talking about Leah's family relationships and kinship obligations. The background was that Leah's mother had recently passed away. In Papua New Guinea, following the death of a close relative, the immediate family of a deceased person typically organises a gathering, known as a *haus krai*, to mourn the loss of the deceased and to gather resources to meet burial costs - including the repatriation of the body to the place of burial - as well as the costs of related customary arrangements.¹⁷ Leah talked to me about issues surrounding these events. The following is a lightly edited version of my contemporaneous notes of her story, modified to remove identifying details. The story is rather long, but I quote it in full because of the range of issues it serves to illustrate and bring together:

Leah explained that her relationship with her twin sister has broken down. They no longer speak. It's a long and quite involved story centred around events that occurred at the time of her mother's funeral [some months earlier]. Upon her mother's death, a number of her mother's relatives had let it be known to Leah that her mother wanted her rather than her twin sister to be in charge of arrangements for the *haus krai*. This had put her sister's nose out of joint, as her sister was living in her home city in the Province [near her mother's village] and was ostensibly caring for their mother. Leah was at that time based in Moresby. However, Leah claims that her sister had not been very attentive, and was more focussed on her job and her own kids than ensuring their mother was well looked after. Leah had gone back to her village to take on the carer's role some time before her mother's death, but had been required to return to Moresby for her own work and family reasons. Her mother died not long afterwards.

On the day of the *haus krai*, with relatives and friends assembling for the ceremony, Leah's sister had gone out in the car to attend to some work-related

¹⁷ An excellent description of the contemporary practice is given in Bablis (2020): "A *haus krai* is where people gather to grieve for the loss of a deceased person and accumulate support and resources to go towards the customary arrangements and funeral costs. Physically, the *haus krai* is usually a large tent or makeshift shelter without walls which acts as an extension to a house to shelter those expected to gather each evening."

matters. Her sister had asked for events not to be started until she returned. However, with people arriving, Leah had felt forced to make a decision to commence the ceremony when her sister was late returning. This had apparently upset her sister so much that she had arranged for a cousin-brother to represent her later in the ceremony. The sister was aware that Leah had been involved in a traumatic personal incident with this cousin-brother some years earlier. For this, Leah feels unable to forgive her, and no longer speaks to her. She doesn't understand her sister's motivation in doing this.

Leah also states that her sister no longer seems to care very much about her family's customary obligations, and no longer contributes to village life financially. Leah is left carrying the can. Most recently, this has involved repeated requests from her father's relatives for Leah to finance the purchase of a cow to give to her mother's side of the family in accordance with expectations around a post-mortem commemorative feast. She explained that the cow is required because of her mother's status as the daughter of a 'chief' [Leah's word], 'kind of' as a final payment of bride price. Not providing the cow would be seen as shameful and disrespectful.

At the moment Leah doesn't have the money to finance the purchase of the animal. Leah says that her father's family understand it is difficult and will give her time. However, if the cow is not provided, and pigs are provided instead, her immediate family will be shamed and be the subject of gossip and laughter. She acknowledges that this is unfair on her in a western sense, but this is how it works in PNG. She does her best to contribute to such customary practices. This can get quite intense, and right now she has shut herself off from the requests and asked that her father be an intermediary. However, while she often also gets requests from extended family members for other kinds of financial contribution, such as education and health costs, she says she usually says no to these and this is understood. She also says that people would usually be expected to pay these back in some form if they can.

She says that her sister is seen by the wider clan to have turned her back on customary ways. Her sister is called 'white skinned' by people in the village. She is seen as 'greedy'. Leah tries to help out. She says she does this simply because her family in the village need the help. She is also conscious of the fact that she needs to maintain these connections if she is ever going back to live in the community after retirement. She sees a stark choice: her sister seems to have committed herself to a salaried, urban life focused on her nuclear family. She sees this as highly risky. She also doesn't want to retire in Port Moresby. Apart from the cost of paying rent, she wants a 'quiet life' close to her extended family and relatives. This is where her relationship with her sister is problematic.

A few years ago Leah financed the purchase by her father of a plot of formerly customarily-held clan land near the provincial city's airport. She was not in the Province at the time of the transaction, and the title deed records her father's and her sister's names, not hers, despite her father stating that the land is hers to inherit. She doesn't know now how to broach this subject with her sister in order to resolve it. She thinks her sister is angling to take ownership of the land.

Leah's story is notable both for its specific concerns and its general themes, which were reflected widely in many conversations I had during my fieldwork. At one level, her story simply reflected the common situation of being a salary earner subject to frequent claims on one's income by relatives from the village. Many of the specifics of her story are recognisable in the accounts given by my other informants: for example, her distinction between some of these claims as discretionary or non-negotiable; the degree of flexibility afforded to the timing of a contribution; the need to sometimes 'shut off' or hide from requests. Similarly, it highlights the manner in which being seen to meet or fail to meet important obligations and expectations is understood and experienced publicly and personally as matters of 'reputation', 'status', 'respect' and 'shame', both for the family or clan group and the individual. These are matters that I shall return to in the next chapter.

At another level, however, her story effectively encapsulated the manifold and often deeply felt challenges faced by professional, salary-earning Papua New Guineans that are associated with the production, maintenance and management of contemporary forms of family, kinship and social relations - relations that are rooted in varied claims and expectations of reciprocal obligation and recognition that may be putatively associated with 'traditional' Papua New Guinean culture. Further, it highlights the way these challenges arise precisely at the problematic intersection between these 'cultural' claims and expectations with more 'individualistic' obligations, entitlements and opportunities arising in the context of the 'modern' institutions of the market, the nuclear family and the state.

In these respects, for example, just as Leah's job in the formal economy enabled her to 'maintain relations' with her extended family and kinship network through meeting her obligations to make contributions to customary and other needs, it was her individual obligation to attend to her job in Port Moresby that constrained her desire to fulfil her reciprocal filial obligation to engage in care work for her mother. Similarly, while it was that job that enabled her to finance the purchase of a plot of land near the village that would enable her to maintain those valued relations in retirement, it was a breakdown in relations with her sister that threatened her retirement plans by undermining her claim to individual, state-sanctioned legal title to the land. Significantly, this breakdown itself seems to have had its origins in a sense of sibling rivalry, involving conflicting claims to status and standing that were precipitated by the twin sisters' different orientations to these two institutional and cultural contexts. Firstly, Leah's sister's focus on her job and nuclear family over her obligations to care for her mother seems to have motivated her mother's decisions to grant Leah and public standing to represent the family at the *haus crai*. Subsequently, by inadvertently highlighting her sister's absence in front of the assembled *haus crai* guests – many of whom would have been aware of her sister's previous lack of attention to her mother - Leah's decision to start proceedings without her seems to have been interpreted by her sister as a further slight on her evidently damaged reputation. This, in turn, led to retaliatory action designed, it would seem, to return

shame on Leah. Here, however, it is also notable that the final breakdown in sibling relations was itself precipitated by Leah's sister's decision to prioritise her work obligations rather than the social and kinship obligations attendant to her presence at her mother's *haus krai*.

However, looking at Leah's story this way - as a juxtaposition of 'traditional culture' and 'modern' ways of life - raises a number of key questions. Firstly, in describing Leah's various social obligations and expectations as being associated with 'traditional Papua New Guinea culture', what precisely is it about them that may be identified with a notion of 'traditional' culture? In what sense is the notion of the 'traditional' meaningful here? Secondly, how is this related to the way these obligations and expectations mattered to Leah and my other informants? In what sense did their putatively indigenous 'culture' - 'traditional' or otherwise - influence the ways they conducted their lives? Finally, how might the way these 'cultural' expectations and obligations were meaningful to my informants be accounted for in a way that helps to explain (in a sociological sense) their persistence in the face of alternative ways of life?

In the first instance, any notion of 'tradition' implying strict 'continuity' is made problematic by the bare facts of Leah's account, which highlight immediately obvious ways in which aspects of Papua New Guinean culture (or cultures) are changed and changing. This is evidenced most notably in the changed outward material and symbolic forms of 'customary' transactions such as the *haus crai* or the commemorative feast: the fact that that money is now such a vitally important if not central factor in such transactions (rather than, say, shells or pigs), or the fact that the specific requirements of a particular transaction involved the purchase of an animal not native to PNG (i.e. a cow). This point is made not to highlight the specific character of these kinds of adaptive changes; nor to highlight the ways in which the very notions of '*kastam*' or 'tradition' are themselves ostensibly 'non-traditional' representations that have arisen as a consequence of the introduction of new and alternative forms of life, and may be mobilised politically to either discursively defend or advance particular interests and outlooks (see, for example, Keesing 1982; Filer 2006; Martin 2013). Rather, I seek to point to the sense in which for Leah, as for many 'educated' Papua

New Guineans in her situation, such questions of culture and tradition are not primarily thought about in such 'political' or 'ideological' terms or contexts, but are understood and experienced primarily as practical questions relating to the meaning and value of their particular way of life; that is, within the broad context of practical decisions, actions and strategies in relation to their own life concerns and those of others.

In this respect, it is notable that Leah herself rarely, if ever, spoke to me of '*kastam*' or 'traditional practices'. Rather, she simply talked about the way things were done in the village, and her relation to this. This is not to say that she showed no sense of this way of life as having some relation to the past, or that changes had not occurred to this way of life. What often seemed significant, rather, was her own evident uncertainty with respect to the precise facts of the matter, as with her somewhat vague reference to her mother's father as having been some kind of 'chief', her unclear sense of the rationale for the post-mortem commemorative feast for which the cow was required, or her puzzlement at my own mild surprise at learning that a cow could now be considered a status item in customary exchange.

In fact, Leah often indicated a strong awareness of her own lack of specifically 'cultural' knowledge. As with some of my other informants, she had at other times talked to me of her desire to learn more about her culture's ways and traditions. She shared with me stories about being introduced to the secret fertility and love magic practiced by certain eligible women of her village, and her decision - despite an admitted excitement and fascination, and her desire to develop a stronger sense of her clan heritage and identity - not to get further involved. She was pleased to have learned of it - and the secret places in the forest that were associated with it - but decided it wasn't right for her. For a range of reasons she wasn't able to fully articulate, she didn't feel entirely comfortable becoming involved in practicing sorcery.

However, Leah's decision not to take up the opportunity to be initiated into secret women's magic provides a notable point of contrast to her decision to care for her mother, her dispute with her sister or her struggle to find the wherewithal to finance

the purchase of a cow. This contrast serves to highlight the important fact that for Leah – as for most of my informants - matters of ‘culture’ and ‘tradition’ are most often and most unavoidably encountered at the level of familiar and largely taken for granted “everyday” social practices. Moreover, as other aspects of her story also serve to indicate, these matters are also often unavoidably encountered, either explicitly or implicitly, as practical challenges and opportunities – challenges and opportunities that often arise precisely at the variously problematic intersection of putatively ‘Papua New Guinean’ and ‘Western’ practices and ways of life.

Thus, what presented as most salient for Leah – as it did for many of my informants – were the implications of the strategy adopted by Leah’s sister in distancing herself from village life and focusing on her job and her nuclear family needs; implications that including related moral evaluations made by villagers of Leah’s sister as ‘greedy’, and the links between this and characterisations of her as ‘white skinned’. However, as with my other informants, this is not to suggest that Leah herself necessarily shared such evaluations; while she may well have agreed that her sister was selfish, I doubt that she saw skin colour as a marker of significance in the same way as her relatives (although I never asked her about this), and she certainly could appreciate the economic basis of her sister’s motives and actions in focusing on the economic wellbeing of her nuclear family. Nevertheless, it points to the relevance of these considerations for Leah’s own different and quite varied motives: wanting to help out simply because her relatives needed support, her desire to maintain affective relations with her relatives and continue and to enrich her sense of connection to her *ples* and culture, and her mindfulness of the risks to her long-term future and security if she damages her standing and connections with her relatives by following her sister’s path.

In this light, then, I suggest that what makes these kinds of decisions, actions and strategies culturally distinctive - and links them to more obvious ‘cultural’ practices more readily associated with *kastom* and ‘tradition’ - is the general character of the sociality or ethos that underlies how they are generally interpreted, evaluated and enacted. That is, an ethos of mutuality and reciprocal interaction - involving matters of ‘reputation’, ‘status’, ‘respect’ and ‘shame’ - that operates for my informants more or

less reflexively as a taken for granted, everyday 'background' sensibility grounded in their experience of their most important and valued social relations. The abiding influence of this ethos is primarily seen in the kinds of considerations and challenges involved in the practical question of how – rather than whether or not - to engage in the type of sociality it constitutes.

Thus, I suggest, this connection with the 'traditional' values and principles of their culture is primarily encountered by my informants within the general context of the everyday domain of the ethical. For Leah, as well as my other informants, the fact that such considerations may or may not be consciously thought of as 'ethical' is beside the point: the fact that they involve considerations of what is right or good or best to do, to have and to be, means that they are ethical considerations. In other words, as anthropologists of ethics (e.g Keane: 2017; Laidlaw: 2014) as well as ethicists themselves (Taylor 1993) have repeatedly stressed, this is simply what it means to talk about 'the ethical'.

However, as philosopher Charles Taylor has notably emphasised, the domain of the ethical is precisely that domain that is constitutive of identity and personhood. In other words, the ethical is concerned with how it is that you orient yourself toward, think about, evaluate and enact what is right or good or best to 'do, have and be', and how this constitutes you as the kind of person you are. (cf Taylor: 1993) In this sense, through their everyday participation in an ethos of mutuality, my informants constitute themselves in the context of their family and kinship relations as 'relational persons', ethically oriented to evaluating and enacting their practical life choices primarily in terms of a moral economy of reciprocal expectations and obligations involving considerations of relational standing. It is this orientation, I argue, that constitutes their primary ongoing connection – and their sense of that connection – to their 'traditional' culture. At the same time, as the quotations at the beginning of this chapter suggest, my informants' awareness of such an orientation also serves in important ways to define their understanding of themselves as distinctively 'Papua New Guinean' in a 'modern' or 'Westernised' contemporary context.

The remainder of this thesis is devoted to tracing the influence of this self-understanding – and the ethos of mutuality it is grounded in - within those ‘modern’ institutional contexts. Specifically, I ultimately seek to explore how their ‘relational personhood’ influences the ways my public servant informants think about and conduct themselves in their public sector workplace, and the manner in which this impacts upon the ways those workplaces operate. However, before arriving at the workplace, I wish to first examine in more detail both the Melanesian ethos of mutuality and the character of relational personhood and ethical agency it entails. This provides the substantive focus for the next chapter.

Chapter 6 – Reflections on the Melanesian ethos of mutuality: its formal character and everyday context

6.1 Introduction

The previous chapter sought to illustrate in general terms how public servants encounter their 'traditional culture' in the context of 'everyday life', by highlighting how they are constituted as relational persons with respect to their kin and communities in the face of challenges and opportunities posed by alternative forms of life made available by putatively 'modern' and 'Western' institutions and practices. This experience of relational personhood was described as occurring within a general cultural ethos of mutuality, involving a moral economy of reciprocal exchanges and transformations of material and symbolic capital between and among those related by ties of kinship and community. This chapter aims to illustrate and examine in more detail the general features of this 'traditional' Melanesian ethic of mutuality and the ethical character of the relational personhood it entails. My intention here not only to gain an appreciation of the general character of the ethos, but also to further illustrate its persisting strength and vitality in the face of competing practical demands, as a prelude to later examining its broader role in Papua New Guinean society, and ultimately in the bureaucratic workplace context.

My examination of the ethos of mutuality proceeds once again primarily within the context of remittance practices. I firstly present accounts of two informant interviews that focused on my informants' experiences of a sense of obligation to cooperate with requests from family members to make financial contributions to others for both personal and customary purposes. For the purposes of the discussion, 'cooperating' is broadly taken to mean an actor or actors (person or group) intentionally acting in a manner that serves, or conforms to, the express or implied needs, wants or intentions of another. To the extent that such needs, wants and intentions reflect something that

the other perceives (or is likely to perceive) as desirable or valuable, acting in a way that is perceived to serve those needs, wants or intentions can be construed as acting intentionally in the other's 'interests'. For purposes of the discussion, such interests are characterised as both 'material' and 'psychic-symbolic'.¹⁸

The subsequent section presents an overall summary analysis that aims to formally describe the ethic of mutuality that is exhibited in my informant accounts, and to demonstrate its continuity with accounts of Melanesian ethics from the pre-Independence period. This analysis focuses specifically the ways in which expectations and obligations for cooperative social action are constituted in the context of relations of reciprocity and mutuality from the perspective of the positional interests they involve. This involves describing and analysing manner in which in which such interests, expectations and obligations are ethically constituted within the context of shared matrix of norms, values and related practices, via a formal analysis of the general character of these ethical considerations and the modes of practical thought they exhibit.

Cutting across these discussions, however, is a continuing concern with the ways in which such expectations and obligations of reciprocity and mutuality with regard to their kin and communities are experienced by public servants as practical matters. As such, it is also intended to provide further insight into the meaning and significance of the Melanesian ethos of mutuality in their day-to-day lives.

6.2 Expectation, obligation and the experience of “pressure”: a formal analysis of the ethos of mutuality in the context of remittance practices

As noted in the previous chapter, among my informants, remittances were generally made in two distinct contexts: giving to, or 'sharing' with, individual family members,

¹⁸ This distinction corresponds broadly to Weber's distinction between 'material' and 'ideal' interests. However, as Weber's notion of 'ideal interests' has been subject to a fair deal of confusion and misinterpretation (for discussion, see Eastwood 2005), I have adopted the language of 'psychic-symbolic' interests to convey the intended sense in which they are attached to evaluative representations with broadly subjective or psychological significance and effects.

and giving for or on behalf of the corporate family or kinship group, typically for customary purposes. Where giving to individuals was concerned, a certain degree of latitude and discretion was typically experienced as normal and accepted - though even here, depending on the circumstances, individuals often reported their sense of obligation to respond positively to requests for assistance, or even to give in the absence of any request. Significantly, however, how this obligation was variously experienced and interpreted evidently reflected local variations in protocol around the reciprocal ethos of 'giving'. In contrast, expectations in relation to a contribution relating to a customary purpose – such as bride price, funerary ceremonies and compensation claims - were most often said to be seen and felt as obligations that could not be legitimately refused without suffering significant practical, reputational and other consequences. Here, however, a variation in the degree of expectation was dependent on the extent to which such customary practices were viewed as important aspects of local cultural life.

At one extreme was an account given to me by Marcus and Gordon, two local government advisers who were from the Highlands region but worked outside their home Provinces. Between them the pair had decades of experience working within Provincial and District administrations across Papua New Guinea, and I had sought their views in particular in the hope of gaining an appreciation of the particular issues facing regionally-based public servants. However, in offering examples of their own experience, they made clear that they thought the situations they described applied more generally to anyone who was 'educated and employed'. Specifically, they highlighted the often frequent explicit requests for support from their kin, and the ethical and practical dilemmas and pressures involved in managing them.

In relation to giving to individuals, a typical scenario was offered by Gordon:

I just got a phone call from my niece, she needs 600 kina for the outboard motor. She wants to fix it, an then I've got my daughter's school fees due last week, and I didn't [pay that yet]...so, now I got this...

Despite his cash-flow problem, Gordon nevertheless made it clear that he felt an obligation to respond positively to his brother's daughter's request. This sense of

‘obligation’ can be construed ethically as corresponding to a ‘claim to entitlement’ posited by his niece that Gordon act in her interest (i.e. cooperate) by giving her the money for the outboard motor. In relational terms, the putative legitimacy of both her claim, and Gordon’s corresponding sense of obligation to cooperate with her wishes, derived both from his ascribed standing as her uncle and his earned position as a person of material means relative to her – both grounded in the normative matrix they shared by virtue of their social positions in their extended family and community.

Gordon emphasised that his willingness to accede to her request and act in favour of her interests was related in part to the fact that she did not consistently seek to rely on him for help:

She doesn’t usually ring me for help, this is the first time. So in this situation I feel a bit obligated to do that... Yeah, feeling like morally obligated, like, just for the first time.

In contrast, and with pointed humour, he marked his willingness and ability to refuse similar requests from other members of the family who frequently pestered him for assistance:

But there’s a difference between somebody who calls you every week!
[laughs]. I have no hesitation in telling them “I think you better stop it!”
[laughs].

In humorously comparing these claims of other family members to that of his niece, Gordon implicitly indicated his lack of respect for their conduct and perceived personal qualities – evaluations that signified his sense that they were showing themselves to overly reliant on expectations of his generosity, and had lost their entitlement relative to his own normative expectations. In doing so, however, Gordon was not only acknowledging that his niece’s more restrained and self-reliant conduct earned his respect for such an entitlement, but by emphasising that it was a special, ‘one-off’ circumstance – as well as his willingness to refuse other requests - that he was also motivated by consideration of his own material interests.

Importantly, however, beyond his immediate sense of obligation to support his niece, he viewed acceding to her request as a means to signify something important to both to his niece and the extended family, who would inevitably learn of his generosity:

I just want to show them that I, OK, I still...

In trailing off his remarks, Gordon seemed to be gesturing to something complex and not easy to articulate. In context, however, it seemed clear what he was referring to: his conscious desire to continue to be recognised and respected by both his niece and extended family as a member of the family and village community in good standing – that is, to maintain such an identity and its attendant relations – as signified through his demonstrated willingness to share his material wealth. In this sense, in terms of the schema advanced above, Gordon was thus also motivated to cooperate by considerations involving his own psychic-symbolic interests.

Rasmussen (2015) offers an illuminating account of the relational moral economy underlying such situations in his detailed ethnography of contemporary remittance practices in Manus Island, which is specifically focused on the character of social relations reflected in remittance practices and the forms of ethical and communal identity they reveal. Noting the decline in importance of ceremonial gift exchange in Manus (relative to many other parts of Papua New Guinea), following Sahlins (1972) he highlights the particular character of remittance practices on Manus as a form of “generalised reciprocity” – a form of “demand sharing” in which small but frequent requests for material assistance, such as phone credits or small amounts of cash, are experienced by those with resources as an ‘obligation to give’ without expectation of material return. For both receiver and giver, he shows, such demands and their responses reflect constitutive evaluations and valuations of relational personhood. Thus, just as making a request for assistance reflects an acknowledgement of the existence of a valued relation, and acts as a signifier to the migrant of others’ recognition of their continuing place within networks of family, kinship and community solidarity, the migrant’s choice to accede similarly signifies to the requester that they have been similarly recognised by the migrant. In this way, Rasmussen also shows that, in the absence of the existence of such ongoing claims and obligations, the

relation itself is not perceived to exist. Acceding to a request thus performatively reaffirms the migrant's recognition of a valued relation with the requester, and validates their identity and standing as a valued member of the family or community group. Conversely, refusal may often be interpreted as an act of individual 'selfishness' or 'greed', leading to evaluations of the migrant as a person who is 'apart' or 'alone', sometimes accompanied by the invocation of curses and almost always with reputational consequences in damaging talk.

In Gordon's case, an ethos of 'demand sharing' was evidently less pronounced, insofar as he felt able to refuse requests that he considered unreasonable - perhaps because the requests themselves, such as money for an outboard motor, were often larger than small gifts of phone credit or money, and also perhaps because his normative expectations about what constituted 'reasonable' claims to entitlement were more widely shared among other members of the family and community. Nevertheless, in the circumstances, his cash-flow problem meant that his sense of obligation to respond favourably to his niece placed him in a difficult situation. In practical terms his solution was thus to indicate to his niece that he would eventually make good on her request:

So, I tried my best to explain my situation. I said, "Ok, good". I said "I may not be able to send it this week, I'll put you other cousins as want to do, and I'll see – I cannot promise you – But I'll see how I sort out these other ones, and then I'll look at your request. But, I assure that I will, but not immediately." So in that way I buy a bit of time, and gives me a bit of [leeway]...

Despite his ability to 'buy time', however, he nevertheless stressed the significance of making such a commitment:

When you give your word, a commitment, you've got to honour it. Otherwise, it comes and bites you...

In emphasising the importance of fidelity to one's commitments, Gordon thus highlighted the importance of visibly demonstrating one's dispositional character and *bona fides* through valued, concrete actions rather than the expression of good intentions, and the key signifying role that actions with concrete, tangible benefits hold in providing the basis for evaluating and validating an individual's reputation and

standing with family members. Breaking such a commitment, both he and Marcus agreed, meant that your credibility was “shot”. Notably, however, this too was conveyed as a matter of the consequences for one’s own interests: “otherwise, it comes and bites you...”

Similar themes emerged when our conversation turned to customary practices. Here, however, what was notably different in Marcus and Gordon’s accounts was the absence of a sense of personal volition – indeed, a strong sense of external compulsion – that characterised specific acts of giving. Further, expected contributions to customary practices were clearly tied to the distinctive social position of those who were formally educated and employed. As Marcus put it:

Like in any community, tribal communities or clans, they have a number of individuals well educated, who has got business, or who has got jobs. They know them. So tribal obligations, these people are expected to put more. They’re forced. Regardless whether they like it or not.

Gordon immediately echoed Marcus’s point: “When you’re high paid, you got to put in, proportional to your earnings”. Marcus concluded simply by emphasising the consequences for one’s positional interests of failing to comply with such expectations: “So the public servants are always pressured like that. If they don’t give something they’ll lose status in the community as well.”

I asked Marcus and Gordon whether they felt that families and communities had unrealistic expectations on individuals like them. Marcus replied without hesitation: “Yeah, definitely. Absolutely.” Gordon concurred:

Yeah, that’s right. They know that you’ve got a family to support, they know you’re gonna put your kids through school, you gotta pay for the rent and the fuel and whatever. But to them that’s your problem. [laughs] “Don’t tell me about your problem!!”

Marcus echoed Gordon’s point:

You got a cultural obligation to...to fill, no choice. “How you find money, find money! [laughs] It’s not my problem!” You gotta fulfil your cultural obligation.

In effect, as Marcus and Gordon saw it, their family perceived their entitlement to expect their cooperation in such customary matters as unconditional. As a result, so was their corresponding obligation. Gordon concluded: "You see, it's unreasonable, but that's the way it is."

To illustrate his point being 'pressured' or 'forced', Marcus related a current situation he was experiencing - one that Gordon indicated he was also presently facing. The situation Marcus described revolved around the death in Port Moresby of a member of Marcus's extended family. Gordon sought to explain the importance of Marcus's attendance at the *haus crai* in terms of the moral economy of reciprocity. As he put it:

It happens like this. If I do this [i.e. make a contribution] to this family [i.e. the family of the deceased], if anything happens to my family, because I contributed, they will know who contributed, so they will also come on board, and you know...they'll support and so...it's a reciprocal sort of thing, yeah.

In other words, contributing to the other family's *haus crai* established a reciprocal claim to entitlement for Marcus's family – one which the other family would in future be obligated to recognise and respect. The reverse implication was left unstated: failure to contribute to the needs of other's families would obviously mean that, in future, they would not provide support when your own family was in need, and your family's material interests would be damaged. As a corollary of this, one's own family name and standing, and thus the family's psychic-symbolic interests, would also suffer – and the cooperative relation as such would effectively cease. Thus, given the kinship relation between Marcus's immediate family and the deceased - and Marcus's position in his immediate family - his family therefore claimed an entitlement to expect Marcus's cooperation. Marcus was therefore obligated to attend the *haus kraai* in Port Moresby, and to make a substantial contribution on behalf of his extended family in the village.

His problem, however - as Gordon's previous example had already established - was that his children's school fees were due that week. Marcus summed up his both his situation and his response to dealing with it:

I've got a serious problem! And you know, I'm hiding away from my relatives now because...and they.. "Where's Marcus?" They're calling up and asking [my wife]. And I've got no money to go to that...funeral haus crai...

For my case, I'm trying to hide away. The haus crai is here in Moresby and I'm trying to hide away.

He dramatically, and with desperate humour, emphasised the sense of strain he felt:

It's like, I looked at my wife, and I said ... I mean the pressure that they ... "We don't have the money to..!!!"

Significantly, however, he then highlighted his family's ongoing efforts to draw his attention to the unavoidable social consequences of being seen to evade his unconditional obligation, and their continued exhortations upon him to attend:

But my sister is calling from home, and the body's gonna be flown home. "Are you going to contribute? You have to. Because they will see you, back home they will see you and they will call your name. You've got to get there".

Marcus readily admitted dreading the implications that 'calling his name' had for his reputation and standing in the family:

That's a bad thing to us...So, now I'm very, very fearful...

Further, when I asked specifically whether he would feel ashamed if this happened, his answer was unequivocal: "Yeah, absolutely, absolutely. Absolutely."

Several things are notable here. Firstly, as I shall explore further below, even though Marcus understood that his family perceived that his obligation was unconditional, his sense of 'being obligated' did not seem to derive from a sense that that the norm involved was a constituted as a deontic 'rule' that was to be considered as morally 'binding' on his action in a way that made his choice of action mandatorily prescribed. Nor was his sense of being 'forced' to contribute apparently a result of any authoritative 'command' or 'directive' from anyone in his family. Rather, his sense of being 'forced' or 'obligated' arose from their urgent exhortations to voluntarily comply with, or 'live up to', his customary obligations, and their reminders to him of the consequences for his interests if he did not. Second, and consistent with this, those

consequences – both material and non-material - were themselves connected to the social dynamics and moral experience of shame. Here, I wish to further draw out some further implications of these points.

The central place of the phenomenon of shame as a dimension of moral experience across Melanesia, and its role in promoting social conformity, been subject to a range of studies. These have often emphasizes the varied contexts in which shame and shaming practices may occur, and the related ways in which shame may be represented and spoken about (see, for example, Epstein 1984, Strathern, A. 1975, Hogbin 1947). A commonly noted aspect of the character of shame as a moral emotion, however, is its link to the experience of exposure: shame is a discomforting emotion often related to the sense of some negative or undesirable aspect our conduct and character being exposed to the evaluating gaze of an actual or imagined other (see, for example, Fussi 2015). This notion of ‘exposure’ is evidently reflected in Marcus’s talk of “hiding away” and being “seen” by those “back home”: his undesirable conduct being subject to the ‘evaluating gaze of others’. What I wish to highlight here is the way in which relations of mutuality grant significance to this ‘evaluating gaze’.

Firstly, in this respect, Marcus’s language echoes in an inverted way Rasmussen’s (2015) analysis of the language of ‘visibility’ around remittance practices on Manus island. On Rasmussen’s account, conceptual metaphors of ‘seeing’, ‘vision’ and ‘visibility’ are central to the ways in which Manus Islander’s represent and evaluate their relationships, and make judgments about each other as relational persons. Giving something or acting in a certain way makes relations and persons ‘visible’ in tangibly, concrete form, such that both the giver and receiver are each said to ‘see’ and ‘be seen’ by the other as being in a mutually desired and valued relation by virtue of the act. That is, they mutually evaluate and recognise each other as being persons in a reciprocal relation that is intrinsically valued as a relation on the basis of its mutuality, made visible and tangible by the transaction and its effects (p 55-76). In Marcus’s case, the reverse dynamic seemed to be in play – his failure to contribute, and act in the family’s interests, would reveal him to others as the kind of person who does not

appropriately value his kin and kinship relations, a personhood that is made visible and tangible in the proper performance of the customary obligations those relations entail. As such, in failing to properly instantiate those relations, he would be exposed as worthy of shame. Importantly, however – though Marcus did not make it explicit – such exposure, and the loss of standing involved, I suggest, not only involved just potential consequences for his material interests or implications for his ‘status’ in the community, but implications for his core sense of personhood and identity.

In this sense, Marcus’s reference to the calling of his ‘name’ was likely a reference to his ‘big name’ – the secret clan name males in many Highlands cultures are given at birth that may only be properly used in appropriate ceremonial circumstances, usually as a mark of respect (for a literary example from the Eastern Highlands, see Bina 2015: p200). In this circumstance, the ritual public use of his secret name – revealing his innermost, private identity – would instead apparently serve to announce and expose his shame in the eyes of the family and village community, in a manner that would have also been intended to attract further negative spiritual and material consequences by revealing his identity to unseen, and potentially malevolent, immaterial forces. Though Marcus didn’t specifically mention sorcery, or spell out these consequences, such an interpretation is nevertheless consistent with Rasmussen’s account of similar practices on Manus Island (Rasmussen 2015: p77 ff), as well as being consistent with accounts of other informants I spoke to.

One such informant, for example, specifically highlighted the potential ramifications associated with the failure to provide money to meet customary obligations. As he put it:

If you are saying, “I don’t have money, I don’t have these material things to help you”, so you hiding away...We have traditions, we have beliefs, that are very strong, customary beliefs. And then, even the elder flocks will curse you. You get what I mean? That is something like a ...charm, or a spell. Traditionally. They will say, “His life will not be good, because he don’t want to come and see us.” Basically. It happens! It is a belief system that it will affect him. He might lose his job, his wife might lose him, children get sick, all sort of things happen.

This informant's explicit discussion of sorcery practices was unusual - typically my informants either claimed not be concerned by it or generally avoided the subject. Nevertheless, a few of my informants attested to the widespread general belief in sorcery among educated Papua New Guineans¹⁹, including public servants. As one such informant put it:

We know that if something happens to us then always...the possibility...it has to be related to some sort of or sorcery...it's common...It's not bad luck, nothing in PNG that's happen [is a result of bad luck]...There's always some process, or someone [responsible].

Whether this was indeed the case for Marcus, he readily admitted 'fearing' the implications of his relatives 'calling his name'.

However, Marcus's admission that he would also be shamed if this happened suggests that, rather than its specific material consequences – whether sorcery-induced or not - what was perhaps most important about the practice for him was its consequences for his psychic-symbolic interests. At one level, for Marcus, this evidently was a matter of a loss of reputation and status within the community – in itself, a potentially significant blow to both his material and psychic-symbolic interests that would no doubt affect his ability to maintain and establish valued cooperative relations in future. However, his admitted fear and shame at the prospect of others 'calling his name' suggests a much deeper level of concern. Specifically, such a loss would also seem to mark a concern with a fundamental withdrawal of others' recognition of his relational standing. In short, the practice was one that apparently signified that others no longer

¹⁹ The widespread practice of sorcery among rural Papua New Guineans is extensively documented. [See, for example, Forsythe and Eves 2015]. Less attention has been focused on sorcery beliefs among the tertiary educated middle class. One notable exception is Anderson (2017). Anderson focuses on nursing students in a Highlands college, noting the interaction between their experiences of sorcery practices growing up in the village with their nursing education and Pentecostal Christian beliefs. She notes, "students and teachers learn that witchcraft and sorcery are real and dangerous, but whether they are personally threatening depends on one's location and relationships—not simply their beliefs." As a general observation, this seemed true of my public service informants: sorcery was often seen as something to be respected and feared, but was a phenomenon that existed in the context of family and village life, not within the public service itself.

wished to cooperate reciprocally in protecting and serving his interests, and that as a reciprocal consequence of his failure to meet his obligations, his interests should be exposed to harm. In this sense, Marcus's reciprocal 'claims to entitlement', grounded in others' relational obligations circumscribed by the normative expectations of *kastom* and community, would no longer be seen as legitimate and valid – such that the family's mutual obligations to protect and support those interests could no longer be taken for granted. In effect, irrespective of his belief in the efficacy of sorcery, Marcus would no longer be 'seen' as a legitimate (i.e. relational) person by his relatives. It was the psychic-symbolic consequences of this loss of personal recognition and standing, as much as their possible material consequences, I suggest, that Marcus feared.

However, the fact that this would also be experienced as shame may be seen to have two further related implications, the first specific to the sense of self and personhood involved, and the second to the mode of ethical thought. These dimensions may be brought out by reference to aspects of the phenomenon of shame highlighted by Deonna, Rodogno, and Teroni (2011). According to Deonna et.al., "in shame, we apprehend a trait or an action of ours that we take to exemplify the polar opposite of a self-relevant value as indicating our incapacity to exemplify this self-relevant value even to a minimal degree." (ibid. p102) By a 'self-relevant value', Deonna et. al. refer to one that contributes to our sense of self-worth; the feeling of shame is a result of the negative self-evaluation that occurs when we perceive in ourselves the incapacity to exemplify or 'live up to' it. In this sense, Marcus's sense of the shame involved evidently did not arise from the any concern that his failure to meet his obligations would reveal his incapacity to find the necessary money – an expectation that from his perspective he considered 'unreasonable'. On the contrary, I suggest, the "self-relevant value" that was involved for Marcus in a perceived failure to meet his customary obligations, and having his name 'called' as a consequence, was the state of *being in desirable relations of mutuality with others* - a value that rests on an ethicalised understanding of himself as existing as a person in the context of such relations. By 'ethicalised', I mean a sense in which being a 'full', 'worthy' or 'complete' person is understood to require that one cultivate and maintain such relations, and

where failing to do so means one is in some sense a 'diminished' , 'unworthy' or 'incomplete' person (cf Taylor 1993). In this sense, then, to possess legitimate relational standing with his extended family and clan constituted for Marcus a central ethical marker of his identity and measure of his sense of self-worth.

Notably, however, in a context of mutuality governed by norms of reciprocity, possessing relational standing with others is a state of affairs that is dependent on other's evaluations, and their corresponding valuations, of oneself (via their evaluations of one's conduct in reciprocal relation to them). In this sense, then, to be subject to others' negative evaluations of one's relational standing not only signifies but in practice *constitutes* one's incapacity to exemplify one's relational standing, insofar as such evaluations change (and ultimate may 'de-constitute') the relation. Put another way, others' evaluations with respect to the normative legitimacy of one's relational conduct are understood in a *tangible and practical way* to be *constitutive* of those relations. In this way, to the extent that one values such relations as important to one's personhood, perceptions of others' evaluations thus provide a tangible basis by which a person may define their identity and measure their own sense of self-worth. More strongly still, one's perceptions of others' evaluations of oneself may be said to be directly constitutive of one's sense of identity and self-worth: what you perceive to be the case about the way that others think and feel about you, matters in a fundamental way. This obviously includes matters of one's reputation and status, but goes beyond it. To lose the respect of others is to have damaged the legitimating basis for ongoing, meaningful (that is, reciprocal) relations, and is thus intrinsically damaging to one's sense of personhood and self-worth, and a cause for shame. To be a 'relational person' in a context of mutuality - and to be subject to the risk of shame - is thus in this manner to be constituted socially and ethically as a person under the 'evaluating gaze of others'.

Further, the account of shame by Deonna et. al has related implications for the mode of ethical thought involved in normative conduct regulated by shame. As they point out, the experience of shame is not related to a sense of infringement of a mandatory deontological obligation (i.e. permission, prescription or proscription) associated with

a norm or rule, in the sense that conduct in relation to the norm is judged 'wrong' or 'right' per se. Rather, shame is oriented to the values implicit in norms, and specifically one's perceived capacity or incapacity - as revealed by relevant traits or actions - to exemplify those values. This is, I suggest, is entirely consistent with the way in which Marcus and his family perceived his obligation to contribute the *haus crai*. In this sense, then, even in a context where a norm may be perceived as 'unconditional', the 'unconditionality' of the obligation signifies *how strongly it is valued*. Put another way, the sense of 'necessity' to comply is not derived from a normative 'rule' as such, but rather because compliance is seen to be of utmost or fundamental importance to the tangible material and psychic-symbolic interests, and thus identities, of those involved. This valuing is in turn further signified by the consequences that may be inflicted for a failure to comply. Finally, I suggest, the non-deontic character of the obligation - and its orientation to values - is also consistent with the notion that actions are thought about (i.e. practical judgments are made) in terms of considerations of consequences for one's own and others legitimate, valued interests – interests that are grounded in the desirability of the values that a norm is oriented to, and which are seen to be served by actions in compliance with the norm.

Overall, then, Gordon and Marcus's account emphasised the sense of being 'forced' to comply with one's customary obligations, and the kinds of pressures involved. Notably, however, a different emphasis came out in my conversations with another informant, Ernest. Like Jon and Gordon, Ernest also hailed from a Highlands Province. Also like them, Ernest emphasised the family and community expectations faced by individuals with education and means, and agreed that such expectations were more strongly felt in relation to customary practices than individual giving. And like Marcus and Gordon, he framed his understanding of 'giving' both as a matter of 'expectation' and 'obligation':

Not in everyday, like giving money and all this ones, like special occasions...Like ceremonial occasions. Initiations, bride prices, and all these...compensations. And they expect you make a bigger contributions. Not really by post [i.e by virtue of your formal position or job], but you as being part of that community,

you as being an educated, that's your...responsibility. And that's your obligations. Your community obligations.

Further, like Gordon and Marcus, Ernest attested that a failure to meet such obligations attracted specific negative and extended reciprocal consequences. On the one hand, as he explained: "It boils down to the family history":

Like, if my mother... during my father's bride price giving ceremony to my mother, and if another family did not give anything, then why would I go? Payback system. "You haven't done anything to my mum! So I'm not coming! " That's genuine.

Thus, he indicated, an individual who is seen to avoid their community obligations will suffer damage to their reputation, and their conduct will not be forgotten by others:

And it will go down in the record of the community... Said, "He doesn't come around". So if you initiated something for your own family, no-one will come.

Further, Ernest also emphasised that the failure to meet such an obligation would be "a very shameful" thing, and that such a person would indeed be "cursed" by family elders. In summarising, Ernest then explicitly pointed to the underlying character of the ethos, and the types of considerations involved: "So that type of morality. Consequence. Long term consequence."

However, in apparent contrast to Marcus and Gordon, Ernest did not emphasise the prospect of negative consequences in explaining a person's motivation to cooperate. Nor did he emphasise the external origins of the sense of 'pressure' that Marcus described:

It's like, if you are the only one in the family [who is educated and has a job], you belong to that tribe, you belong to that community, and when everyone from that tribe contributing to that particular event, and you being educated, you are not doing anything, there won't be any demand, the villagers will not demand, but psychologically automatically you will know that I am not doing the community obligation that I am supposed to do. You yourself will put yourself in pressure.

Here, Ernest's insistence that others will not 'demand' on first glance seems at odds with Marcus's account of his family's insistent behaviour. However, this difference may perhaps best be seen as one of degree: as noted, Marcus's sister was not so much 'demanding' that he comply but rather *exhorting* him to. In this sense, both Marcus and his family evidently understood that they could not command or direct his conduct or 'demand' that he comply. Further, in contrast to Marcus, the kind of 'pressure' Ernest identified was generated by an active desire to 'live up to' one's ethical obligations, constituted by one's position as an 'educated' member of the community. Recognising one's positional obligations in turn implies a recognition that that a failure to meet those obligations would be a failure to act in a way that served one's family's or community's legitimate interests - interests that *matter* precisely because one values one's standing as a member of the community, and as consequence share those interests. Thus, when I asked Ernest why individuals placed themselves under pressure when faced with such an obligation, he replied simply and almost self-evidently: "Well, you belong to the community".

In this sense, Ernest's account emphasised the way cooperation could also be primarily motivated by the active desire to act in others' interests that may be generated by ties of mutuality. Consistent with this, Ernest also highlighted the way ties of mutuality made available further options to those who lacked the financial capacity to meet a customary obligation:

For example, if you don't have money, you just simply get a ticket and go to the village. It's very important. And people will start saying "He is here, genuinely". And they will accept.

Here, Ernest again highlighted the importance making oneself visible via one's actions, rather than 'hiding away'. However, going to the village and showing one's respect - i.e. one's continued valuing of relations - was simultaneously to acknowledge one's potentially shameful position. Ernest pointed to the manner in which such actions can help draw upon the sympathy of one's extended family members to gain their support in meeting one's obligations:

You talk to them and say, “You see, I can’t afford”. Then, not that you are only one person from that family. You have got cousins, and blood, sisters and all this ones there. They will feel sorry for you, being you is educated and you are the one that most respected in the family. They will come and help. They will give you two or three pigs.

By openly admitting one’s predicament, one can thus draw upon one’s earned status position of ‘respect’ to make a claim of entitlement to other’s support in a time of need. Ernest further emphasised that such assistance could also take the form of financial support with a promise to repay:

You can do pledge for them....Say, “I will give you the money, but later..., when I have it”.

Finally, Ernest stressed that such an approach to meeting one’s obligations was a common occurrence: “It happens in so many instance.”

Overall, then, despite their common Highlands background, Ernest’s account was notably different in tone and emphasis from that given by Marcus and Gordon. However, in stressing the importance of being open and honest with family members, and the possibility of turning to them for support in times of need, Ernest’s account nevertheless implicitly underscored several contingencies underpinning such an approach. Firstly, it highlighted the importance of the need to maintain good relations with individual members of one’s immediate and extended family – not only, perhaps, through individual acts of giving in response to their occasional requests, but more broadly in terms of consistently recognising their interests by affording them appropriate interpersonal recognition and respect. Secondly, it assumed that other family members would not only be willing but capable of providing support – an assumption that, for many village-based family members would presumably more likely hold in a case where offers of pigs rather than money was at issue. And third, in cases where the availability of money was at stake, it presumed that other family members with financial means would themselves see meeting customary kinship obligations as an important and valuable use of their resources. As Leah’s story in the previous chapter shows, however, these conditions may not always hold.

Thus far, to summarise, the discussion has traced a shift in perspective from the accounts of Gordon and Marcus to that of Ernest. This shift has largely involved a change in emphasis in the motivating considerations for cooperative action away from express expectation, a sense of ‘overt’ pressure, and the risk of negative consequences to one’s positional-relational interests, towards a greater emphasis on the role of subjective attachment to shared values of mutuality and reciprocity, and the positional-relational sense of standing, identity and belonging that acting in accordance with these values confers. However, despite their difference in emphases, these accounts reveal the outlines of a common ethos, grounded in principles and practices of mutuality.

The following section will attempt to formally analyse and characterise salient general features of this ethos, highlighting continuities with observations about Melanesian ethics made during the pre-Independence period.

6.3 The Melanesian ethos of mutuality – a formal analysis

Anthropological studies focusing specifically on the ethical dimensions of Melanesian culture are few (for a relatively recent survey of the literature, see Barker:2007). This situation has mirrored the general situation of the discipline as a whole (Barker: 2007), which has only in the past decade begun to explicitly focus on the ethical as a focal domain for both ethnographic and theoretical attention (Laidlaw 2014). A number of notable recent Melanesian ethnographies have followed this more general ethical turn. However, they have tended focused relatively narrowly on specific thematic and ethnographic concerns.²⁰

Two statements from pre-independence period, however, are notable for their attempts to make more general claims. Kenneth Read, in an influential article from the 1950’s, sought to analyse the ethical systems of the Gahuku-Gama in comparison to a generalised ethical understanding he proposed as characteristically “Western”. Read’s

²⁰ Robbins, for example, focuses on the ethical dimensions of Christian conversion among the Urapmin (Robbins 2009); Kuehling on the ethics of exchange among the Massim (Kuehling 2014)

analysis focused on a contrast between what he saw as typically Western conceptions of the person and those of the Gahuku-Gama, highlighting the socially constituted, positional nature of Gahuku-Gama conceptions of personhood and its implications for the overall relativism of their ethics. Westerners, he argued, tend to view the person as a “unique centre of rationality and free-will”, and tend to approach the domain of ethics in terms of being subject to a set of principles that transcend particular social relationships (Read 1955, 247). The Gahuku-Gama, in contrast, experienced themselves as embedded within and constituted by their social relationships; their sense of what is ethical thus being dependent “on the position they hold within a system of inter-personal and inter-group relationships” (ibid: p 260). In sum, Read argued that ethical thinking among the Gahuku-Gama “is primarily contextual. The moral judgment does not operate from the fixed perspective of universal obligation for the moral assessment of behaviour varies in different social contexts, according, that is, to the different values placed on different individuals in different contexts” (ibid: 262). Lacking a system of norms or rules grounded in over-arching, abstract moral or ethical principles, ethical reasoning according to Read thus focused upon the practical consequences of actions in specific situations. In this sense, rather than holding themselves and others accountable for their actions in terms of an abstract conception of moral or ethical order, people were accountable to each other for their actions in terms of the normative expectations associated with their socially circumscribed relational positions. (ibid ,p271)

Though Read did not explicitly suggest the general applicability of his analysis to Melanesian ethical systems, the broader relevance of his insights to Melanesian cultures was noted by others. In contrast to Read, Lawrence, writing in the 1960's, sought explicitly to generalise about Melanesian ethics. Noting Read's analysis, in a brief statement in a longer paper he described the overall character of Melanesian ethics in the following straightforward terms:

Statements about good behaviour are phrased generally in terms of moral obligation: ‘It is good to support your clansmen and kinsmen, distribute pork to them, and help them clear their gardens’. Yet they are really short-hand phrases for considerations of interdependence and mutual self-interest’ (Lawrence: 1973)

Read's and Lawrence's insights, I suggest, remain relevant to contemporary Melanesian society. In light of the accounts of my informant interviews given in the preceding section, the broad terms of Lawrence's characterisation can still be seen to be applicable to my informants in the context of their contemporary kinship and clan relations, where money can stand in for 'pork', 'helping them clear the garden' may instead mean sending money to help them buy a new outboard motor. Overall, the evidence presented in my informant accounts suggests that, in the context of contemporary Melanesian kinship relations, 'obligations' with respect to expectations for cooperative action - whether they arise in response to a specific request or not - primarily involve the actor's consideration of *their own and the other's relevant positional interests* in an ethical context of mutuality. Further, consistent with Read's observations about the Gahuku-Gama, it seeks to show that - even though people's identities may no longer be as comprehensively embedded in their relations with kin and clan - the positional character of their identities and interests in the context of these relations has important implications for their ethical self-understanding and mode of ethical thought.

Here I would like to articulate this argument in more formal terms. As suggested earlier, 'cooperating' may be broadly defined as an actor or actors (person or group) intentionally acting in a manner that serves, or conforms to, the express or implied needs, wants or intentions of another. To the extent that such needs, wants and intentions reflect something that the other perceives (or is likely to perceive) as desirable or valuable, acting in a way that serves those needs, wants or intentions can be construed as acting intentionally in the other's 'interests'. Such interests may or may not be specifically shared by the actors concerned. Nevertheless, in a situation of mutuality, an actor will generally be motivated to cooperate with another if they perceive that the other will as a result view it as being in their interest to cooperate in return, in a way the actor sees as appropriate to their own interests. A situation of interdependence may be said to practically exist to the extent that actors over time rely in this way on each other's cooperation in order to realise their own perceived (individual or shared) interests

Consistent with Lawrence's formulation, I suggest firstly that in the Melanesian context, legitimate expectations of cooperative action in the service of such perceived interests may in effect be construed ethically as reciprocal 'claims to entitlement', and to which putative 'moral obligations' correspond. Consistent with Read's analysis, I suggest that such claims and obligations are relational in that they are 'personalised' and positional. That is, firstly, they arise within the context of specific forms of reciprocal relations between and among specific persons (or groups of persons), and are perceived to be 'attached' to those persons (or groups of persons) as ontological properties, or constitutive features of their identities. Further, it is the recognised existence of such reciprocal entitlements and obligations that constitute those relations, insofar as in the absence of active reciprocal claims and obligations between those persons (or groups), those involved no longer recognise the existence of a 'relation' as such. In addition, the interests that give rise to particular reciprocal claims and obligations arise in the context of the specific positions that persons and groups are seen to occupy in the broader social context. In this sense, such entitlements and obligations (and their underlying interests) are practically and (thus) ethically grounded in a matrix of shared normative values, understandings and expectations (inflected by contemporary forms of *kastom*), that are generally acknowledged to govern and enable valued reciprocal practices among persons and groups in that context. Finally, it is in reference to this shared normative matrix that particular relational claims to specific reciprocal entitlements (and their corresponding obligations) may be ascribed and/or earned by persons or groups, and it is against this shared matrix that evaluations of their legitimacy are made.

In this sense, I suggest, recognising an obligation to cooperate thus involves in ethical terms the cooperator recognising as legitimate another's particular positional-relational claim to an entitlement to expect their cooperation. Crucially, however, these claims to entitlement and related obligations - and their underlying interests - are of both psychic and symbolic import as much as material value. This is the case to the extent that the value to another of acknowledging and acting in their perceived interest includes not only the 'material' value of the action to that other, but in the

‘psychic-symbolic’ value residing in the other’s desire to have their legitimate or normatively grounded positional-relational reciprocal ‘standing’ (both ascribed and earned) recognised and signified by the cooperator’s action in recognising their ‘entitlement’. This ‘recognition’ of another’s positional-relational standing signifies and confers valued psychic-symbolic capital - both publicly and privately/subjectively - in the form of personal ‘respect’ for their integral sense of personhood and identity; conversely, the failure to confer such recognition may be construed and experienced by the other as ‘shame’.

Similarly, for the co-operator, I suggest, acting in accordance with their perceived ‘obligations’ is also inextricably bound up with their own psychic-symbolic as well as material interests. This is the case insofar as they also possess a desire to have their own standing reciprocally ‘recognised’ (and thus be ‘respected’) in return by the requester – as well as by relevant observers who have an interest in the conduct of the relation – for having appropriately acknowledged the requester’s relational and social standing via their action. Being ‘recognised’ here means that the requester (and observers) evaluate and signify that the cooperator’s action is perceived as legitimate i.e. they evaluate and signify that the cooperator’s action is perceived to conform to relational expectations of mutuality grounded in the matrix of shared norms and values that are perceived to govern relevant practices. This return ‘recognition’ serves to confirm to the co-operator the legitimacy of their own continuing positional and reciprocal standing in the eyes of both the requester and observers – that is, that the co-operator has through their action earned or maintained others’ ‘respect’, and is thus able to validate their continuing claims to entitlement with respect to other’s future cooperation.

This mutual and reciprocal conferral of positional standing (‘recognition’ and ‘respect’) by actors (and observers) serves a further psychic-symbolic interest, however, insofar as it enables each of the actors to make *positive ethical evaluations of themselves*. This is the case insofar as – within an overall situation of mutual interdependence of interests - they each desire to be the kind of person (or group) whose social standing is recognised as legitimate by relevant others; that is, as a person (or group) who is

evaluated by others, through evaluations of their actions against the shared normative matrix, as possessing ethically valued capabilities, motivations and dispositions required of a reliable and trusted reciprocator. In this sense, at the individual level, one's sense of self and personhood (including one's sense of identity as a person belonging to a group that shares a normative matrix of reciprocities) is constituted relationally 'under the evaluating gaze of others'.

This mode of ethical self-evaluation, I argue, is a characteristically constitutive dimension of personhood and identity in the Melanesian ethos of mutuality. On the one hand, it serves as an intrinsic motivating factor that works to both support the individual's and group's instrumental pursuit of their own individual and shared interests (e.g. via a desire to enhance their 'reputation' and standing as valued reciprocators by being seen to cultivate and express appropriate capabilities, motives and dispositions, and thus attract and retain the cooperation of others in serving their interests). At the same time, it also serves to regulate the pursuit of those interests (e.g. by acting as a restraint on actions that are likely to be perceived and evaluated by others as unduly 'selfish', 'greedy', 'disrespectful', 'lazy' or 'overly dependent' etc.). (cf. Lawrence on 'self-regulation', 1973: p 19-20) In this way, an individual's motivation to comply with their normative 'obligations' – and thus cooperate with others - may be experienced as ostensibly 'voluntary' or 'uncoerced' (i.e. motivated both intrinsically and instrumentally by a positive desire to fit in, to belong, to have one's 'standing' be recognised, to gain and maintain the 'respect' of others, to continue to attract their cooperation) or may be experienced as 'forced' or 'coerced' (i.e. motivated similarly by a negative desire to avoid risk of overt sanction via withdrawal or threat of withdrawal of reciprocal standing and of cooperation; to avoid 'shame').

Further, I suggest, the mode of thought that informs actors' practical judgments under such an ethos is primarily focussed on making ethicalised evaluations of the of actual or likely *consequences* of actions (i.e. the benefits or disbenefits perceived to be inherent in an action's effects), specifically as such actions impact upon the particular, concrete material and psychic-symbolic interests of those (including themselves) affected, or expected to affected, by the actions. Moreover, in such circumstances,

with respect to their own as well as other's action, a person primarily evaluates their own interests relative to the likely or actual consequences of those actions for *others' perceptions, evaluations and relational valuations of them* – and acts (or reacts) accordingly. In this sense, one's practical judgments are typically motivated by and made relationally under the 'evaluating gaze of others', rather than as a putatively 'ethically autonomous' actor. As a corollary of this, I further suggest that practical judgments arising in the context of relational ethics are typically not made in terms of the 'morally binding' character of deontic judgments concerning how and why action may be ethically 'permitted', 'proscribed' or 'prescribed' by norms as such (that is, whether such action is considered 'right' or 'wrong' per se relative to a normative expectation). Rather, they are made in teleological and consequentialist terms via evaluating the likely or actual practical effects of actions on the particular personalised interests (including one's own) that are perceived to be legitimated by the shared values and evaluative standards implicit in those norms (i.e. whether the action may be generally considered 'good' or 'bad' among those who putatively share the normative matrix.)

6.4 Conclusion

The outline of the Melanesian ethos of mutuality described above presents a significant contrast to the orthodox ethic of bureaucracy presented in Chapter 4. Here I wish to briefly summarise a number of key differences between them, both in terms of their general normative character as well as the character of agential capabilities appropriate to that normativity.

Firstly, in a legal-bureaucratic organisational social order, the evaluation and legitimation of agents' decisions, actions, and their anticipated and actual consequences occurs under the auspices of a regime of formalised rules (and associated formalised policies, plans, positions, directives etc. whose legitimate operation is grounded in such rules). Agents are expected to conduct this process of evaluation and legitimation 'impersonally' and 'non-relationally', via a mode of thought and practice mediated via the application of a range of general ethical

principles. Such principles include 'duty', 'impartiality', 'accountability', and 'transparency' (which tend towards the ethically formal rather than the substantive aspects of cases), as well as principles such as 'efficiency', and 'effectiveness' (which tend more toward evaluations of the ethically substantive than the formal). Importantly, the underlying legal and ethical obligation to consistently think and act in such a manner is socially constituted (via the mechanism of an employment contract) as an 'individual' obligation via a deontological mode of thought. This obligation is in turn abstractly grounded in the presumed authority of the state and the legitimacy of its regime of formalisations. In such a context, bureaucratic agents are expected to judge and act with respect to their own and others' interests from a formally abstract perspective rather than in personalised positional-relational terms. As a corollary of this, their positional claims to entitlement to expect the cooperation of others remain the 'property' of their employing organisation, and their corresponding obligation to recognise the claims of others is similarly owed to the organisation. Thinking and acting in such a manner constitutes legitimate 'professional' relations between bureaucratic agents and their clients, and among bureaucrats themselves, as 'impersonal' and 'non-relational', such that individual ethical agency is not expected to be constituted relationally under the personalised 'evaluating gaze of others'. Rather, bureaucratic agents are expected to think and act as 'ethically and rationally autonomous individuals'.

In contrast, in contemporary Melanesian communities governed by an ethos of mutuality - where formal rules are generally absent and informal social and cultural norms typically prevail - the evaluation and legitimation of decisions, actions and their anticipated and actual consequences occurs via 'personalised' and 'relational' evaluations. These processes of evaluation and legitimation are guided and mediated by value expectations established by the prevailing social matrix of 'informal' norms (including norms of reciprocity) and involve agents' considerations of their own and others' personalised positional-relational interests in the context of these norms. The social and cultural obligation to think and act in such a manner is socially constituted as a 'mutual' obligation under teleological and consequentialist mode of thought that frames the obligation as an 'ideal' to 'live up to', rather than as an abstract

deontological obligation. As such, ethical agency is constituted relationally under the personalised 'evaluating gaze of others'.

The significant differences in character displayed by these two moralities thus poses a central question: how do Papua New Guinean bureaucrats typically interpret, manage and resolve the evident tensions between these two moralities in practical situations where both are operative? More concretely, how do they respond when they are required as agents of the state to relate and respond to their kin, in circumstances where their own interests and those of their kin are at stake? To what extent do they think and act in accordance with the 'orthodox' ethics of their profession? The next chapter seeks to explore these questions, by examining a range of practical situations in which these two moralities come into conflict.

At the same time, the chapter also aims to show that public servants often encounter these issues within a wide range of situations that extend well beyond interactions with their rural kin. It will seek to show how the Melanesian ethos of mutuality extends beyond 'traditional' forms of sociality characteristic of kinship relations into the modern, urbanised Papua New Guinean context via the idiomatic ethos of 'wantok' relations. As part of this, it will argue that the phenomenon of 'wantokism' represents a recontextualisation of the principles and practices of the 'traditional' Melanesian ethos of mutuality within a 'modern', urbanised context.

The subsequent aim of Chapter 7 will be to examine tensions experienced by public servants when particularised obligations and expectations that arise from outside the workplace in the context of such widespread social relations of mutuality conflict with those that arise by virtue of their positions as 'impartial' agents of the state. It will aim to examine the manner in which particular public servants interpret and respond to these tensions, and the ways in which this is influenced by their ethical orientations as relational persons. It will illustrate the ways in which they draw upon these indigenous cultural resources to formulate and negotiate solutions. At the same time, it will also show that the manner in which they think about and respond to these challenges does not always accord with the expectations of an 'orthodox' bureaucratic ethos; rather it

reflects an *interpretation* of the requirements of that ethos that is inflected by their relational self-understandings and sense of identity.

Chapter 7 – Between Wantoks and the State

7.1 Introduction

During my fieldwork a Papua New Guinean friend told me jokingly of a new word she had recently heard used to describe her country: “*ruban*”. For her, it seemed to sum up the somewhat idiosyncratic character of her nation and its people - somehow neither fully rural but yet not urbanised: an admixture of village and town that seemed to result in an overall sensibility, a way of doing things, that never seemed to clearly demarcate one from the other.

What later struck me was how closely the humorous insight she had offered was matched with one recently presented in academic literature. Writing on the sociology of rural kinship and urban wantok relations, and the ways in which principles of the former provide a basis for the latter, anthropologist Stuart Schram (2015) has remarked:

rural villagers of PNG are transforming cities and towns into new kinds of spaces which are neither urban nor rural in any classic sense, but something new. They are using the principles of their traditional sociality to do so. (p17)

Villagers come to town and relate to each other, and their town-based kin and clan, in the idiom of ‘wantoks’ – a ubiquitous Papua New Guinean terminology that, Schram argues, recapitulates the reciprocal, binary logic of segmentary kinship relations, but simultaneously recontextualises it, in contrast to the customary, within the decidedly different context of urban life. As others have noted, however, the appellation of ‘wantok’ can often extend well beyond those related by customary ties of segmentary kinship or affinity to incorporate newer forms of relation that have arisen in the context of Papua New Guinea’s colonial and post-colonial development, driven particularly by the experience of economic migration and urbanisation. (See, for example, M. Strathern 1975; Levne and Levine 1977; Monsell-Davis 1993; Schram 2015)

The *tok pisin* term ‘wantok’ is generally thought to have originated in pre-war coastal plantations, where both migrant workers and their foreign overseers required a terminology for classifying individuals from geographically diverse language groups (Namu 2011; Monsell-Davis 2013) The informal generalised term ‘wantok’ had by the time of independence come to denote, according to Levine and Levine (1977),

a category of relationships that effectively combines kinship, ethnicity and more individualistic friendship in a new, pervasive social idiom. (p70)

Situating their account of wantok relations within the context of their broader study of urbanisation processes in the post-war period up to Independence, Levine and Levine focused on the ways in which the establishment and recognition of such relations served to orient and support new rural migrants in adjusting to life in the town, as well as constitute ongoing community-based networks of security and support among those who had made the transition. Noting the impracticality of simply reproducing customary forms of kinship, clan and affine relations in the urban environment, they highlighted ways in which both a variety of pre-existing kinship connections (61ff), as well as emerging conceptualisations of language and place-based ethnicity rooted in expandable spatial referents to geographical place of origin (p66ff), served both as signifiers for possible recruitment to membership within urban mutual security and support networks, as well as a means to ascriptively identify members of other such (often rival, and thus potentially ‘unsafe’) groups. Relations within such community networks thus became generalisable as ‘wantok’ relations, a terminology that included specific individual friendships formed on such a basis. (p70ff)

Importantly, and consistent with Schram’s more recent observations, Levine and Levine emphasised the role of ‘generalised reciprocity’ in establishing a basis for individual wantok relationships. Thus, they noted:

“Anyone with whom such reciprocity is developed is a wantok, but some people are probable wantok by ascription (through facts of birth), while others may become so idiosyncratically in the course of urban life.

In this sense, their usage denotes how the term itself may be used in two ways: one’s wantoks can be said to be both those in general whom one knows can be normatively

expected to be positively disposed to engage in relations of reciprocity by virtue of some feature of shared experience and identity (e.g. members of one's broader kinship or ethnic group, or those from the 'same place'), as well as the specific individuals with one whom circumstantially forms such relationships, whatever their actual basis.

Levine and Levine's historical observations have been reinforced and extended by more recent scholarship. For example, it has been noted that contemporary wantok relations may be grounded in almost any practical or institutional context which confers a background sense of community, common identity and personal affinity, and against which everyday practical relations of mutuality may emerge among participants. Thus places of work, education, domicile or worship may give rise to forms of wantok relations, not necessarily grounded in primary signifiers of language, ethnicity or place of origin, but in relation to such referents such as *wanskul* (same school), *wanstrit* (same street) and *wanlotu* (same church). (Hukula 2017) Overall, however, wantok networks are generally recognised as primary means by which urban residents are able to establish a degree of safety and economic security as well as a sense of community solidarity in the urban environment, operating as both as a form of social 'safety net' and as a basis for pursuing forms of collective action. (Namu 2011; Monsell-Davis 2013; Philip et al 2012). They thus provide access to resources and opportunities that in many cases are not able to be effectively provided by the state.

From the point of view of public administration, however, wantok relations have been a focus of study primarily from the perspective of their impact on corruption. Thus, for example, contemporary corruption scholar Grant Walton draws attention to the various ways in which wantok relations, by both incentivising and legitimating 'favourable' or 'preferential' treatment by agents of the state, often systematically influence the political and administrative distribution of state resources at all levels of government in Papua New Guinea (Walton 2013, 2018, 2019). Notably Walton draws attention to wantok relations as examples of the global phenomenon of "informal reciprocal networks" (ISNs), defined as "informal social networks underpinned by

reciprocal obligations linking families, friends, colleagues, and associates”, and which “are an essential part of social interaction in all societies”. (Walton and Jackson 2020: p1). He notes that globally ISNs often serve important welfare functions in contexts where the service delivery and administrative capacity of the state is weak. At the same time, however, he notes that when ISNs dominate public administrations they can “reinforce particularism, meaning that the treatment citizens receive is based on their connection to informal social networks rather than on their rights as citizens. This can result in rule bending, collusion, fraud, nepotism, and other practices that help redistribute resources to a public servant’s or politician’s supporters, friends, and kin.” (Ibid. p3)

The widespread existence of ISNs in developing country contexts has given rise to debates about their causal role in contributing to corruption. Given that ISNs often constitute a significant and distinctive feature of local ‘culture’ – as they do in Papua New Guinea - this debate has also often focused on the role of ‘culture’ itself as a causal factor in explaining corruption. In broad terms, this question has often focused on the specific ways in which ostensibly ‘corrupt’ practices are interpreted and legitimated in different cultural contexts (see, for example DFID 2015). Notably, however, in the context of ISNs, Hellstein and Larbi have warned against attributing ‘corruption’ to ‘culture’ per se, arguing that people primarily turn to their social networks in circumstances where the state fails to deliver services ‘impartially’. Thus, they suggest, it is the failure of public servants to act “ethically” – or in accordance with the requirements of a “public morality” underpinned by “professional” values of “impartiality, accountability and transparency” - that lies at the root of the problem. (Hellstein and Larbi 2006).

Importantly, however, Hellstein and Larbi also acknowledge the tension that often exists between these “public” values and the requirements of “private morality” more generally, and that this tension “is more evident in collectivist cultures, where public service values and the institutions on which they are based tend to be disconnected from their cultural contexts” . (Ibid p 144) Thus, in cultures where strategies of reciprocity and mutuality are closely tied to valued dimensions of identity and group

membership, the values of 'impartial' public service may be placed under additional strain, particularly where the legitimacy of the state itself is undermined by its inability to effectively provide services 'impartially'. However, noting this tension raises an important question, in that many public servants in fact do consistently endeavour to act in ways that are not ostensibly 'corrupt'. In short, do such 'ethical' public servants in some sense have to 'step outside' their 'culture' in order to act 'ethically'? Alternately, what role can and do indigenous 'cultural' understandings play in practice in legitimating 'ethical' action by public servants, both for themselves and for others?

The remainder of this chapter aims to examine these questions in the Papua New Guinan context. Through two case studies, I explore everyday tensions and conflicts that public servants often experience when confronted with demands and expectations from their wantoks seeking their favour and support. The discussion will seek to highlight various ways in which such expectations and obligations are experienced, interpreted, contested and managed. In particular, however, I begin to highlight the ways in which the Melanesian form of reciprocal sociality characteristic of 'wantok' and kinship relations, and the related modes of thought and practice that attend them, inflect public servant's understanding and interpretations of their ethical obligations as agents of the state. As a preliminary to this discussion, I shall first highlight generalised perceptions of wantokism among my informants. This commences with a brief discussion of how expectations and obligations generated by kinship relations can impact upon the daily lives of my public service informants in an urbanised context - a context that, by changing the balance of the underlying moral economy, often places additional, and often unwanted, demands upon them. Specifically, it examines what happens when one's family members do not stay in the village, but come to live in the city.

7.2 Beyond remittances: kinship obligations arising in an urban context

Life in a city like Port Moresby may obviously be perceived as more desirable than life in the village for a range of reasons. Perhaps most centrally, it offers the prospect of

finding employment, and earning money. However, a relative's decision to move to the city may be driven by varied motives. As one informant succinctly put it:

[It's a] hard life in the village where you don't have...[modern amenities]. I mean there's like...to fetch water, go to the toilet, all those luxuries are not there.... there's fear of sorcery, you know...

Whatever a migrant's motives, however, life in the city is at the same time expensive and full of its own challenges. Nevertheless, a migrant knows they can rely on their city-based relatives for support in meeting their basic needs, and come to the city with expectations that their city-based kin will share food, shelter and other resources. Conversely, their city-based relatives understand it as their relational obligation to share what they have, and provide to such support to their kin.

For 'elite' Papua New Guineans of relative means, such as my Port Moresby-based public service informants, these obligations can however become long-term and often burdensome commitments. For those with well-established careers who are fortunate enough to own their own homes, the obligation to take in their relatives means they are often required to share their house with a large number of extended family members. One of my informants, for example – a career public servant of relatively junior rank but near retirement age – had 22 members of his immediate and extended family living with him. This informant, however, was relatively fortunate – several household members, including two of his own children, were themselves tertiary educated and held good jobs, and could therefore contribute substantially to the household economy. For others, however, the situation was not so favourable – their relatives typically lacked the educational qualifications or skills that would get them any but the lowest paying jobs, with the availability of any jobs, whether well-paid or not, severely limited.

My informants commonly noted that in the face of such difficult choices, public servants often instead choose to protect their relations and advance their positions by using their public service jobs to their advantage. One obvious way to do so – if opportunity was available – was to seek to recruit one's relatives to jobs in the

bureaucracy. Harold, the former mid-level public servant whose case was described in the previous chapter, explained to me the considerations involved in such a strategy as a matter of “bringing the village into the office”:

If somebody was going to be employed, and I was in the position of authority to make the final [recruitment] decision, if I was bringing my village in, I would look at how bringing this person in enhances my position in society, because there will like, if I recruit him, it brings the burden down on the demands to support my community. By getting formal employment, we can share the load, in terms for demands for bride price, in terms of demands for school fees, demands on meeting expenses around funeral arrangements, and things like that. ...but at the same time, I know he will help me build my alliances, alliances and my networks and standing in the community....

Notably, Harold also highlighted the potential benefits of such a strategy in the workplace itself, where building one’s ‘alliances and networks’ could also work to one’s advantage:

Because within the bureaucracy, when you need support, or when you are under threat, leadership and stuff like that, you know you can rely on the backing of a kinsman. And I know a lot of... public servants think that way.

While Harold acknowledged that he himself had never been in a position of sufficient authority to make recruitment decisions, he also made it clear that he felt strongly such conduct was inappropriate and unethical. He acknowledged it was in contravention of both the requirements of “good governance” and a public servant’s duty to apply merit principles that aimed to “serve the national interest”.

Nevertheless, given his own household situation, he admitted he could appreciate why those who acted in the manner he described were motivated to do so.

Here, however, Harold’s example, while focusing on a particular kind of opportunity afforded to public servants by virtue of their positions of authority, points to a broader set of issues. Firstly, a public servant does not necessarily need to be in a senior-level position to find opportunities to supplement their income, or provide their relatives with valued advantages, so that they can meet – and be seen to meet - their ‘cultural’ obligations to respond to their relative’s needs and expectations. Nor do they necessarily need to be motivated by interests internal to their positions in the

bureaucracy, insofar as their relational interests may provide a sufficient motivating basis for them to comply with others' expectations. Secondly, in the 'modern' urban context, expectations generated by relations of mutuality are often themselves not simply restricted to basic questions of food, shelter, money and work – but expand to include other 'needs' and 'wants' that public servants are often in a position to provide access to. In this sense, relations of mutuality may be relied upon as part of a generalised cooperative strategy in the service of a range of pressing practical interests. And third, just as the 'modern' urban context establishes new kinds of needs and wants, and thus new grounds for the generation of expectations and obligations between and among kin, a general reliance on cooperative strategies grounded in relations of mutuality in a 'modern' institutional context itself opens up the question of who, in practical terms, one may relate to as 'kin'.

7.3 Wantokism and the ethical position of public servants – an overview of common perceptions

In talking to Papua New Guinean public servants about their perceptions of wantokism, they universally acknowledged wantok relations as an integral part of their culture and society, and often as something that distinguished their way of life from that of 'Westerners'. Like other 'educated' Papua New Guineans', however, they also acknowledged this as having both positive and negative dimensions. Thus, for example, while the social welfare benefits of wantok relations were consistently emphasised, so were the difficulties they often posed for the country's governance. This was often admitted as something that challenged them personally. Notably, all of my informants understood that it was notionally wrong to 'break the rules' to favour their wantoks, and insisted that this was something that all public servants understood – the challenge, however, was how to manage such situations in practice.

A typical description of the character, benefits and obligations of wantok relations was given by one informant:

In western society...in western society, you don't care. You do a job and you are paid, and your job is important, it looks after you. You are paid wages and

salaries. In PNG society... it is the wantok system. Not even you are working. You are not earning any fortnight [*i.e. a wage or salary payment every two weeks*]. But your wantoks, you can ask them, and say “Can you help me [...]?” We live in a society that we depend on each other. We live in a society that your people must come first.

Another informant summarised one of the main reasons why she thought public servants were motivated to “turn to their wantoks” in a way that was ‘against the rules’. Partly it was a sense of obligation derived from status:

sometimes, when you are the only one coming out of that particular tribe, being educated, and being in a higher office, like that, everyone looks up at you, and so you are obliged to [favour them with support]...

Notably, however, this informant then went on to describe what she saw as the motivating (material and psychic-symbolic) interests that lay behind such a sense of being obligated:

And then I think the other thing is that you are also thinking about your safety and security. If I don’t support them, they can turn against me. That’s another thing that triggers people to turn to their wantoks...

And the other thing is pride. Pride can be so...if you’re from Sepik, and I’m from Sepik, then we help each other and build this...our network... so we become much more stronger than the other ethnic [groups]...

Here, notably, the emphasis on ‘ethnic pride’ as a motivating factor highlights the manner in which wantok relations were most often (though not exclusively) thought about by my informants primarily in terms of ethnicity, place and language, rather than simply kinship (though this did not preclude the notion extending to other signifiers, such as church, school or street). However, it also highlights the way in which this informant, like many others, understood the collective dynamics at work in an ethic of mutuality, and her awareness of how membership of a group constituted by an ethic of mutuality can implicate a sense of competing interests between and among such groups. Put simply, to promote the interests of individual group members is to strengthen the standing of group in relation to its competitors, which in turn promotes the material and psychic symbolic interests of all group members. For this

informant, as for others, however, such particularistic notions of 'ethnic pride' were to be frowned upon. Like others, she understood that as a public servant she should think of herself first and foremost as a "Papua New Guinean" and work in the "national interest" – or perhaps more concretely, in the interests of all Papua New Guineans - rather than the interests of her ethnic group as such. However, maintaining such an orientation was problematic when others in one's group did not necessarily think the same way.

In this sense, ironically, thinking and acting as a "Papua New Guinean" in service of the "national interest" could often see one labelled as a "westerner". Thus, another informant highlighted the personal reputational consequences of being perceived as not prioritising the concerns of a wantok:

Someone you know, you will not ignore. So, he comes back and say "can you do this one"? I say "I don't have time for you. Come tomorrow". Answer is, that person who is coming...he has got a reason...maybe uncle. Then you are disconnected to the community. He might go and say, "When I went to go visit he was acting as a European". .. Like Westerner...These type of things. Whatever character he is. It's a big issue in the community. It really degrade your character and attitude in the community level.

Thus, even a gesture as small as not prioritising a relative's immediate concerns over one's existing work obligations could risk damage to one's reputation and relational standing.

However, as the examples in the case studies below will show, attending to or prioritising a wantok's concerns in this way could involve a range of substantive matters beyond simply taking the time to attend to a visiting relative. It might include performing small favours such as photocopying or helping with a job application, to more significant issues involving favoured access to government services, job opportunities or contracts. In all cases, however, the pressure experienced by public servants rests on the perception of one's wantoks that their interests should be favoured by virtue of their particular relation to the public servant.

Notably, a number of informants highlighted their awareness that such a desire was in some sense dispositional, or intrinsic the very character of Melanesian relationships of mutuality. As one put it:

But, you see, we come from a society where we are more lenient to our wantoks. It's inbuilt. That's inbuilt. So subconsciously, subconsciously people will want your relative to treat you differently to the other...

As a corollary, however, one's wantoks were not always consciously aware that what they were expecting or requesting might be considered inappropriate – particularly if they were not 'educated'. This in turn could lead to problems in explaining one's inability to cooperate with their expectation or request.

For example, one informant explained the challenges he had faced in explaining to his job-seeking relatives why he could not simply give them a position in the public service:

Well, it makes me feel terrible that I have to pick the side of governance, pick the side of objectivity, based on what the government procedures and guidelines are for recruitment purposes. So what I do is I explain to them that, you're looking at it in terms of the cultural obligations that I have, which is to look after our family, and give somebody a job so they will be able to contribute to the whole...family support if there are demands that arise. But I have to operate to preserving my integrity in the public service that I don't exercise favouritism or nepotism, but that I will in the public interest recruit somebody who's got the qualifications and experience that will contribute to the overall health and progress of the country.

I asked this informant how his relatives responded to such an explanation, and whether they accepted it. He replied:

No. They can't understand it. They just can't grasp what [is] this big public good that I'm talking about. Yeah. So, you have to...no matter how hard you try to explain it, the rationale doesn't make sense. It's always really hard.

He concluded with a wry observation: “We have a saying in my area that... however educated you are, your education can’t compete with the person in the village. He knows more than you do.”

I asked another informant whether he thought people generally understood why that a public servant needs to treat everyone ‘fairly’ or with equal consideration. He responded:

I think they do. They do....They understand, but it’s the practicality of it. And they [i.e. the public servants] need to be consistently doing it. People understand basic fairness principles. But it’s the practicality of it.

The following cases studies aim to explore various dimensions of this ‘practicality’ from the perspectives of two individual public servants, one former and one current. The case studies illustrate a range of examples in which these individuals describe encountering the expectations of their wantoks, and how they interpret and respond to these encounters in a way they consider ‘ethical’. The presentation and analysis of these examples aims to show how norms such as ‘fairness’ or ‘equal treatment’ are interpreted and legitimated in practice, and how cooperative social action is made possible in a manner my informants seek to interpret as consistent with the expectations bureaucratic ethics. In so doing, however, the presentation will also highlight the specific ways that my informants interpret notions of ‘impartiality’, ‘transparency’ and ‘accountability’ in a personalised manner that reflects an underlying ethos of mutuality and a relational sense of ethical agency and personhood.

7.4 Case Studies

Case study 1 – ‘accountability’, ‘transparency’ and ‘fairness’: when wantoks seek favour

Philip is a former public servant in his mid-50’s. He was born in a province in the Highlands Region. Trained as a teacher, he taught in high schools for some years, then joined his local District Administration as an education officer, eventually rising to the

position of District Administrator. Subsequently he became a trainer at the (then) national Department of Provincial Affairs, and travelled widely across PNG providing mentoring and training to District-level officials following the decentralisation reforms of 1993. Since leaving the public service some years ago, he has worked with various Provincial and District governments across PNG as a capacity building adviser.

I had approached Philip to discuss his perceptions of the role of ethics in public service performance, the ethical challenges that faced local-level public servants in the performance of their work, and how such challenges are responded to and managed. Early in the interview I asked Philip what he saw as the main day-to-day ethical issues and challenges public servants needed to think about and resolve in relation to their work. Philip's response was in line with what I had expected to hear:

Main issues are how to deal with client that come in from the community. Some come in with different concerns. And then, within the public that comes in, if the public servants are local people, some would be their relatives, some would be different. So the challenge is: how can they strike the balance between relative then being an officer. That's the challenge....That's the number one challenge. How can they be neutral and make transparent decisions. Sometimes the situation their relatives are in ...will challenge them, whether they will make a decision that will be for the good of the relatives or the bad of the relatives. When they are that situation it's a big challenge.

I asked Philip what the consequences would be if a public servant made a decision or took an action that was unfavourable to his relatives' interests. Again, the answer was unsurprising:

And then you know, this public servant after hours will go back to the community...That decision that he make affect his decision after hours. Sometimes they are rejected. Sometimes they are not supported when they are in need. Yes.

Overall, Philip's answers broadly reflected others' perceptions of the challenges faced by public servants in dealing with their wantoks. Here, and in discussing the remainder of our conversation, I wish to focus on the way he articulated the 'central challenge' that he had identified: how public servants can "strike the balance" or "be neutral and

make transparent decisions”, and the importance of others’ perceptions of this in legitimating the public servant’s claims for their cooperative action.

At the start of the discussion I asked Philip what general role he saw for ethics in the performance of the public service. In his response, he drew upon the common social science distinction between the ‘formal’ and ‘informal’, which he used to roughly characterise the way in which he approached the question I had posed:

Ethics, it is formal and informal aspect of it. Formal, we got formal laws, we got...Public Service Code of Ethics and other formal policies that come into play. And the informal is, how people behave outside of their work hours. And so in PNG society, I think the crunch of it is the informal part of it plays a lot into the formal part.

Much of the subsequent discussion focused on Philip’ account of how he perceived this dynamic between the ‘formal’ and the ‘Informal’ – though without specifically referring to these terms. Only once did he again bring them up, when he noted towards the end of the interview:

Playing the game according to the rules is very difficult in PNG. Because, as I say, there are two forces at work. The informal force, and the formal force. The formal force is the policies and the laws that are outlined by the government, that public servants should abide by these. The informal forces is the people around.

In this respect, what was most notable about Philip’ interview was the extent to which he saw the ‘informal forces’ of ‘the people around’ (or more specifically, the *personalised relations* between public servants and the people around them) as constituting the enabling conditions for the ‘formal force’ (i.e. the authority of ‘the policies and the laws’) to have effect.

Having established the distinction between the ‘formal’ and ‘informal’ – and identifying the latter as ‘how people behave outside of their work hours’ - Philip continued his initial answer by focusing on questions of the motivation and out of hours conduct of individual public servants:

Yeah, so, at the District level and at the PHQ [Provincial Headquarters] level, as I've said, there are formal policies, formal established code of conduct for public servants to follow. And people can follow just because they want to work. People can put the...they can follow because their heart is not at it. Just they want to keep their job they come in on time at 8 o'clock and finish at 4, they dress up.... Then after hours that individual is completely different, outside. He's a drunkard, he's...all kinds of things outside. So...

At one level, Philip appeared here to simply be saying that that poor public service performance in PNG could be explained by individuals' lack of proper motivation – shown by self-serving minimal compliance with the conditions of their employment contract - and that their motivation at work in turn was linked in some way to their personal conduct out of hours. That is, he seemed to be suggesting that the problem for PNG was essentially that public servants were often poorly motivated, perhaps that they lacked proper motivating 'values'. However, further discussion revealed that Philip was also implicitly making a wider point: one concerning the particular way in which other people's perceptions of the motives and values of individual public servants – including perceptions based in part on their out-of-hours conduct - in turn affected the operation of the formal system.

In response I asked Philip whether he saw such things as Codes of Conduct as important in enabling public servants to do their jobs properly. He responded:

It is very important. Those Code of Conducts is very important. The intention is very good. It's for the public servants to conduct themselves professionally, transparently, accountably, so they can express their work, they can perform their job.

Once again, at a surface level this appeared clear enough: things like codes of conduct provided standards for professional, transparent and accountable conduct that oriented public servants to the proper performance of their jobs. Indeed, throughout the interview Philip often used the words 'accountability' and 'transparency', and particularly stressed the importance of the latter. Eventually, however, it became evident that Philip was often using both words in a particular way. Much of the

remainder of the discussion was spent illuminating what Philip meant by them - as well as the way in which this sense illuminated the point Philip had been trying to make in his initial example describing a poorly motivated public servant and the relevance of their out of hours conduct.

At this point in the interview however, Philip introduced a theme that would become central to the discussion: the importance of personalised relationships of trust in enabling the work of a public servant. In introducing the theme, he again emphasised the particular character of the ethical conduct required to establish that trust:

If they [i.e. public servants] do their job properly, accountability is there, transparency is there, then people trust them. Other people that work under them, or the community they work in, they will trust them. That trust is very important. Trust in the workforce is very important, because if they do not trust them, people will not comply, people will not cooperate, they'll face a lot of problems. So public servants conducting themselves ethically is very important at the local level.

Again, the central point here seemed clear: personal trust was vital to ensuring relations of compliance and cooperation, both within the public service and with members of the public, and was in turn dependent on a public servant's ethical conduct in displaying 'accountability' and 'transparency'. Notably, however, Philip's use of the words in this context made his meaning clearer. Where previously 'accountability' and 'transparency' had appeared to adverbially describe aspects of a public servant's conduct, here they seemed to take the form of properties of the person and situation that were made to 'appear' via that person's conduct i.e. if a public servant does their job properly, then 'accountability' and 'transparency' are 'there'. Further, this 'appearance' was seen to occur against a more or less articulate or inarticulate background of normative claims and expectations regarding the public servant's conduct (i.e. being seen by others to do their job 'properly'). Thus, in Philip's view, an 'ethical' public servant is one who is motivated to speak and act 'accountably' and 'transparently' in relation to their own and others' notionally legitimate normative claims and expectations; that is, one who makes these motives and associated properties simultaneously 'appear' to others via their conduct and its

effects, and in so doing legitimates their own reciprocal claims to cooperation by establishing a personal basis for relations of trust.

I then asked Philip how he would distinguish or characterise a public servant who performs ethically. Notably, Philip again focused immediately on the importance of particular outward signifiers:

Ah...person who turns up on time, at 8 o'clock, and who finish on time. Person who does not get drunk during office hours...Sober habits. A person who is always there, and then also dressing...people look at how they dress. And their approach: how they serve people. They can be at work, but they're not working. How they serve their clients, so...If their clients are satisfied, then that measures...that tells a lot about the performance of this person. And that comes to ethics.

On a surface level, Philip seemed to be listing a catalogue of 'objective measures' of individual performance. However, in specifically noting that 'people look at how they dress' – and replacing the word 'measures' with 'tells' – Philip was also indicating a different perspective, one that pointed to the ways in which these various outward signifiers – an officer's punctuality and regular attendance, drinking habits, dress, and approach to engaging with others etc. – provided a basis for other people's evaluations of the appropriateness and propriety of the officer's conduct, and thus also evaluations of the officer's underlying values, evaluations, attitudes and motives. Specifically, they enabled evaluations of an officer's evaluations, attitudes and motives *in relation* to others, as well as to them. In short, in the context of his previous remarks about trust, cooperation and compliance, the 'ethics' of 'accountability' and 'transparency' that Philip was describing was primarily a personalised, relational one.

This came out even further in Philip responses to my next question. Given that his previous response had emphasised outward signifiers as a measure of ethical conduct, I was interested to know what role he thought a public servant's decisions played in characterising their ethics:

If a person is ethical, the decision that that person makes will be transparent, and people will see he's a good leader, he's a good DA [District Administrator] or whatever. Because he's making transparent decisions. His decisions are fair. So the decisions that public servants make at the District are very important, and it tells how ethical that person is.

Here Philip's response again emphasised the role of 'seeing' and 'telling': a 'transparent' decision 'tells', or enables people to 'see', that someone is a good leader or officer. A notable condition of this, however, is that his decision is seen to be 'fair'. In response to my question about what he meant by fairness, Philip replied:

Oh, fair means...like it...a decision is made taking all sides into consideration.

In other words, an ethically motivated public servant is recognised as one who is able to demonstrate that they afford appropriate recognition and respect for the relevant claims and entitlements of all those affected by their decisions. In being seen not to unduly favour the interests of some (including themselves) over others, the public servant's motives are 'seen' as 'neutral' and 'transparent': no illegitimate or 'unfair' advantage to particular interests is seen as being intentionally conferred by the decision or subsequent action for reasons or motives that are hidden, or not made explicit.

Consistent with this understanding, Philip boiled down what he thought 'being transparent' amounted to in practice for a public servant:

If things are made clear [to others] that we've got rules, we got this and that, we need to stick to it.

In effect, 'transparency' involved a public servant clearly articulating the notionally legitimate formal basis for their own and others' claims to entitlement as specified by government policies and rules, and that these claims needed to be respected.

Crucially, however, Philip stressed, that the perceived authority of a public servant's decisions, directives and recommendations for action - and thus others willingness to

cooperate with them - come *not from a prior respect for the intrinsic authority of the rules themselves*, but from the public servant's personal 'credibility' in consistently living up to them and applying them. Such 'credibility' was established through performative speech and conduct whose motives are consistently seen to be 'transparent' and 'accountable':

So the same thinking: is someone is in a responsible position, his conduct is clean, transparent, and if he says anything, people listen, people respect. But if a person is not that credible enough, then whatever he says will be undermined. It will not be taken wholeheartedly. So that's the challenge that public servants face: whether to live a transparent life, and then be credible enough to make a decision, or if his conduct is not that transparent, not accountable, then whatever he says, he will know that people will not listen to him.

Thus, Philip was indicating, such 'credibility' is grounded in public perceptions and evaluations of a person's total relational conduct and character over time, both inside and outside work hours. A public servant, he suggested – and particularly those in leadership positions - will not be able to gain the respect and cooperation of others both within and outside the workplace unless they have such personalised 'credibility' and 'respect'.

Crucially for Philip, such 'credibility', and the respect it afforded, was accrued irrespective of one's formal government position, or the formal authority it may confer. He summarised:

Credibility brings respect and standing within the community. So the position is important but if you don't have credibility no one will listen to you.

He reiterated:

So credibility is far more important than the positions. I mean, position, you now...you have the positional power to make any decision. The position gives you the power to make whatever decision....the formal authority. But if that formal authority does not go with ethics then that's nothing. People will not take wholeheartedly what you are telling them.

This in turn had practical ramifications. Personal credibility underpinned the resolution of community conflict when the legitimacy of claims and entitlements was in dispute:

If you have credibility, you can go out there and stop a fight. If two clans are fighting each other. Because you have credibility people will listen to you. ...You can go out there and solve a conflict. Land dispute....

Thus, in this example at least, the legitimate authority of formal law – i.e. the legal prohibition on public violence – was secondary to, and dependent on, the legitimating ‘force’ of the public servant’s personal ‘credibility’: the perceived personal ethical properties of character and judgment they are able to bring to bear to persuade the parties to a conflict to hear and to see that their recommended course of action for resolving the dispute – and the manner in which it is perceived to recognise and respect each party’s relative claims and entitlements – was ‘fair’.

The ‘practicalities’ of this ethic were further illustrated in two examples Philip gave me, both drawn from his experience as a District Administrator. While one of the cases was a clear example of ‘sticking to the rules’, the other described a situation involving discretion in decision-making. Each of the cases nevertheless illuminate key aspects of the relational ‘public service’ ethic of fairness, accountability and transparency that Philip had described.

Example 1 – discretionary judgment

Philip first example involved his relations as District Administrator with locally-operating Churches. Churches from a wide variety of denominations are key players in local PNG communities. Aside from their influential spiritual and social role, Churches frequently provide a range of basic health, education and other community services in cooperation with the PNG Government. While funding for such services comes directly from the Central or Provincial Governments or other donors, formal and informal ‘on the ground’ coordination between District officials and Churches is often vitally important.

At the same, time, however, Church-based identification and ties also constitute a basis for 'wantok' sociality. Indeed, at the start of the interview Philip himself had explicitly included Churches in his list of the other 'people around' who comprised the 'informal forces' acting on public servants. In a related manner, I myself had occasionally in Port Moresby heard people refer to others who attended their own Church as their '*wan-church* member'. Consistent with this, in his example Philip indicated that Churches, too, expected support and favours from their 'wantoks' just like everybody else.

Thus, according to Philip, an official

may be a church member, he may be a member of a Church, and then he's holding a senior position, and then the Church will come. "Oh, we want this and we want that".

He confirmed they he had himself been often placed in such a position:

I used to be the District Administrator. And I am member of a Church. So I would be asked to do this.

Philip then firmly stated how he handled the situation:

But to make myself clear, I would treat every Church the same. So I would go out and call all the Church leaders in. OK, you are operating in our District. These are our government policies. Wherever assistance come, if we have resources, we support you equally.

It is important to note here, however, that, in taking such a proactive and equitable approach, Philip was not establishing a basis for allocating significant resources. On the contrary: the discretionary resources available to a District Administrator in PNG are typically paltry; funds received from either Central or Provincial government sources are earmarked as grants for specific government sectoral priorities and programs, and often are almost entirely allocated for staff salaries and running costs. What Philip could offer was more likely to amount to the occasional use of Government office equipment or vehicles, of small amounts of grant funding for

specific purposes. In short, what was at stake for the Church organisations was unlikely to have a major impact from a broader public policy perspective.

Nevertheless, Philip clearly felt the need to proactively take such a 'transparent' stance. As he reiterated:

Whenever a request come from a Church, the other Churches, they don't request. If we treat one Church favourably all the time, the other churches will not be happy, so that's why I have to, when I was a DA, bring all the Churches in, say "OK, we will support you if ever we have extra resources. But this is our boundary, this is your boundary. You are an NGO, and within the *gavman* funding there very little for you guys, but we will support".

He continued:

So sometimes I would give them vehicle, to load up their stuff. Give them a vehicle to load their youth, to go to a youth camp...

Thus, he concluded:

So in that way I was seen as transparent, I was seen as fair. So I was not aligned to my own Church. So the others, if I said something, they would respect.

Commentary

In summary, in order to establish credible authority with the Churches – and gain their ongoing respect, support and cooperation - Philip first needed to actively establish a public but personalised relationship with them. This first involved transparently establishing the terms of that personalised relationship: indicating his respect for the 'boundaries' of government policy, and thus making explicit his commitment to the notionally legitimate equivalent claims and entitlements of the Churches with respect to himself as an agent of government.

Two things here are worthy of note. First, in calling attention to ‘boundaries’ Philip was careful to establish what were ‘officially’ legitimate expectations about the claims and entitlements of each of the players, both Government and Churches. Here he signalled his position as one who respected the ‘boundaries’ notionally established by Government policy: in doing so, however, his action in calling attention to them had the practical effect of publicly constituting mutual awareness of the existence of such boundaries among the Church stakeholders, particularly for his wantoks. Further, in making such a public declaration he was placing his reputation - his ‘credibility’ - on the line. That is, by making such boundaries ‘transparent’, he was also making ‘transparent’ his respect for such boundaries – and the equal respect this implied for his Church stakeholders. He thus established this as the basis of others’ respect for himself.

Secondly, establishing his personal ‘credibility’ also involved making an initial joint offer of material support. In offering discretionary support from ‘extra resources’ he was publicly indicating his willingness to engage and cooperate with the Churches – in effect, to establish reciprocal relationships of mutual respect with each, on an equal footing.

While the resources offered were miniscule, their signifying role was nevertheless vitally important: the offer also operated as a *tangible* sign of his non-alignment or ‘neutrality’, and through it Philip could establish the ‘transparency’ of his motives as someone who was ‘fair’ in his generosity. That is, this initial offer served to grant public recognition and respect to each Church’s notionally legitimate claim to entitlement to be considered on an equally favoured basis with the other Churches, including his own. However, this alone was not sufficient. Equally, he needed to be seen to consistently make good on his offer - by giving them all the occasional use of a vehicle - which served in turn to help legitimate his credible authority in the eyes of the other Churches, and underwrite their subsequent respect and cooperation.

I did not ask Philip about any difficult ‘practicalities’ involved in such a situation. Presumably – or at least, one would expect - by failing to ‘favour’ his own Church he

did not risk its 'rejection', or the loss of its support in times of need. At most, I suspect, he may have forgone a potential opportunity to win some standing and status with his '*wan-church* members'. However, Philip next example, which described a situation with his relatives, clearly included a greater potential for such risks.

Example 2: non-discretionary judgment

Philip next example described an instance involving rates of Government compensation for the uprooting of some coffee trees belonging to his relatives. He explained:

This was sometimes...when we want to build a road through...fix up a road. And then there's coffee gardens there, and they were my relatives. So they would expect me to pay them more.

Philip explained the dilemma for a public servant caught in such a position:

So, because we will go back to the community. And then if we don't be transparent, if we don't make decisions that favour them, they go back and say, "Oh, this person is not a good person."

Notably, here Philip was describing two distinct aspects of the situation that could lead to this problem. One, evidently, was in not making a decision that favoured one's relatives. The second, however, was in not being 'transparent' about such a decision. In explaining how he responded to such situations, and thus avoided any negative consequences to his reputation and standing within the community, Philip made clear what he meant by 'transparency' in this context:

What I used to do is stick to the rules, and I tell them, "This is the *gavman*, this is the policies, and I'm employed by the *gavman*, I will stick to the rules"...

I said "We can't pay you more. We got standard rates that the government has...every coffee tree that we uproot there's standard rates. Every square metre that we require for the government, the standard rate."

I asked Philip whether people would understand that a public servant must stand by the 'rules' in this way:

They will. "Oh, we are trying to overstep our boundary". If they explain to them...if the officer explains to the people well and clearly, then the people say "Oh, we are trying to overstep our boundary". So... and they will also think about their relative's job as well. And if their relative explains, "If I do not follow this I will be sacked, I've got a higher authority that's overseeing me as well, I have to follow the rule to safeguard me and safeguard my job".

I think that's the...in the that way, people will understand. The *gavman* official will be safeguarded.

Commentary

First, as with his previous example with the Churches, Philip emphasised the importance of first clearly and 'transparently' establishing the existence of official 'boundaries' or 'rules', along with his respect for them. In this context, I suggest, this amounted to implicitly signifying to his relatives his equal respect for the tangible interests of others who were also equally eligible for compensation, and that respecting those interests was 'fair'. Secondly, however, it is notable that his relatives were motivated to acknowledge limitations to their claims and entitlements – and thus implicitly recognise the equal standing of others' interests - not out of respect for 'the rules' per se, or even necessarily out of sense that others' interests were indeed legitimate and should be respected, but out of concern for the possible personal consequences for their wantok if he broke the rules.

In sum, Philip's interview emphasised how he perceived that the authority of the state's 'rules' – and peoples' obligation to cooperate with them - were legitimated by perceptions and evaluations of the conduct of individual public servants in relation to others. These perceptions and evaluations centred on the manner in which individual public servants were seen to treat their own and other's tangible material and psychic symbolic interests. For those who were not wantoks, this concern focused on whether

the public servant did so in a manner that was broadly seen to be in accordance with equal entitlements and expectations specified in government rules, policies and standards, and thus whether their motives and conduct were seen to be 'fair' and balanced, as well as 'transparent' and 'accountable', from a positional and relational point of view. A public servant who was seen to consistently judge and act in this manner could elicit the respect and trust of others who were not their wantoks, and gain their cooperation. From the perspective of their wantoks, however, Philip's account suggested that the focus of concern was as much on the personal interests of the public servant themselves, and the possible consequences for them if they were seen to 'break the rules' by favouring their wantoks. Importantly, however, these interests also had to be made 'transparent': the 'boundaries' of a public servant's discretionary action, and their obligation to comply with rules and policies, had to be explained 'well and clearly'.

Overall, Philip's account suggested that the legitimacy of the 'formal' system was not grounded in an abstract, *a priori* conception of the legitimacy of rules and the entitlements they conferred, but in more a tangibly concrete sense of positional-relational interests, and how these were seen to be treated by the public servant. The next study will take this insight further, and examine the way in which 'impartial procedures' are perceived to be legitimated.

Case Study 2 - Rules and Procedures: understanding 'impartiality'

Ruby is a senior officer in a policy research role in a central government department in Port Moresby. She is in her early thirties. Her parents come from two different Provinces, both on the northern coast. Following her graduation from the University of Papua New Guinea, Ruby joined the public service in the early 2010's via the (now defunct) Graduate Development Program, a selective intensive induction and training program managed by the PNG government which was designed to prepare high calibre graduate recruits for a public service career. A couple of years ago she had been selected to participate in post-graduate short-course training in public policy at an Australian university. When we spoke, she had recently returned from a Precinct

Executive Leadership and Management training course funded by the Australian government, where she had taken a public service ethics module focused on the LMCF.

Ruby's exposure to the discussion on public service ethics at the recent training course had prompted her to think about the challenges involved in reconciling Melanesian culture with the "bureaucratic system". She noted, however:

But it's really a complex... This is my own personal view. Our Melanesian culture has some of the very good values there, that we should get and sort of formal...not to abuse it, but to complement the formal system...

Thus, while our hour-long conversation ranged across a range of issues related to her work environment, the focus of our discussion repeatedly returned to Ruby's interest in this question.

Example 1 – Procurement procedures

Part way through the interview we had been discussing the adequacy of her Department's various procedures. Ruby took the opportunity to give an example where she saw wantok issues at play. Her example focused on a relatively common scenario: a public servant needing to hire transport when on work-related travel to their home locality:

So, like what some officers normally do, they pick out their wantoks who have hire cars somewhere in the village or when there's a duty travel up there, and they engage their wantoks to provide that hire car and so they pay them.

Ruby acknowledged that those who engaged in such practices knew that under Government purchasing guidelines they were supposed to get three quotes, and that they were breaking the rules in going directly to their wantok.

Yes, yes. They know....

But, she said, they often cited local circumstances as a reason for not following the procedures:

Some say, oh, in that area there was no other reputable hire car there so I got this person to provide hire car services for me. So some justify it like that.

Whether or not she felt such considerations were in fact valid, Ruby was clear what she thought people's primary motivation was:

But then like, if I engage you you're gonna give me some 10% or something.... It's all about the money.

Ruby's tone indicated that she disapproved of such a motive: in her eyes, it clearly did not reflect well on those who engaged in such practices.

However, in her further remarks, she provided a more positive redescription of the scenario - one that recast it in more favourable moral terms as a well-motivated and benevolent act of reciprocity, rather than a narrow and self-interested pursuit of money:

If you look at it, this wantok system or nepotism has both a disadvantage and an advantage. So, the advantage part of it is that, OK, my cousin just set up a small business, a hire car business, and he is looking for clients, so I'm trying to help him, help him out. So I engage him. And then by engaging him you know your safety and security is guaranteed, and all that. And like, it's sort of a two-way thing: you're supporting him, and now he may support you in another...so you don't really need to get your 10% now, it's just a token of appreciation that you showed him. So when you're in need, then he will remember that I've come and support. So these are some of the good part of this process.

In redescribing the situation in this way, Ruby was implying that she thought it should be seen as an ethically acceptable option for a travelling public servant in need of a hire car. Not only was the officer blameless in their motive – i.e. they were not acting out of a desire for personal monetary gain - the Government's work would be enabled to proceed with guarantees of the officer's safety.

That this accorded with Ruby's understanding of the issues became clearer in her next example of the advantages of engaging wantoks. Her example was in relation to the procurement of professional consulting services for a Government project:

Like, the other good thing about nepotism, for example, when it comes to projects...like if I want to do a scoping design or study and this consulting firm or company have given me a very high price, but if I know that I have a credible wantok who is also an architectural engineer or something, then you can negotiate with him...for a lower price. But he could give you the quality that you want, for a lower price. That's the good thing about the wantok system.

As with the hire car example, Ruby suggested that this scenario was not uncommon: "that happens", she told me. However, she also sought to place conditions on the ethical acceptability of such an arrangement:

As long as your wantok is credible, like has the qualification, but if it's not credible then, yeah...

Such a relative would evidently be acceptable because he would be capable of fulfilling the government's purpose; moreover, engaging a wantok who was not 'credible' would evidently indicate that your motives in doing so were inappropriate.

Commentary

Even with these caveats, however, it was clear that - as with Ruby's hire care example - such a process would be contrary to mandated Government procurement procedures. This bears further examination. Ruby's examples suggested that she did not appreciate the way the procedures operated to constitute and validate an epistemologically 'objective', 'impartial' and 'rationally optimal' evaluation of available options, and that they should be considered ethically binding because of this. Thus, not only was she overlooking the legitimate interests of other actual or potential 'competitors' in these processes - i.e. their entitlement to be formally evaluated on a 'level playing field' - she was unable to see how evaluating the comparative 'merits' of various 'competitors' under the formal conditions of equality as prescribed by the procedures

enabled an epistemologically 'valid' and 'impartial' comparative judgment to be made, and that this is what 'officially' legitimated the result.

Here, however, I draw attention to the fact that Ruby instead sought to legitimate the outcome purely on the basis of the perceived legitimacy of her own motivating intentions, and the fact that they were perceived to result in outcomes that appeared to serve the substantive material interests of both her wantoks and the organisation. This focus on motivating intention indicated the central importance of Ruby's own psychic-symbolic interest in perceiving herself to be acting in a manner that respected others interests, measured in terms of the visible, substantive effects of her actions for those interests. Her evaluation of her actions, I suggest, thus enabled her think of herself as a 'ethical' person 'in good relational standing' with others – a mode of thought that I have argued is characteristic of the Melanesian ethic of mutuality.

Ruby's orientation to an ethic of mutuality, and her concern with others perceptions of her, can be further illustrated by a second example she provided.

Example 2 – the evaluating gaze of others

Each year Ruby's Department is responsible for coordinating applications by members of the public for enrolment in educational opportunities offered by a range of education service providers. As a senior policy officer, Ruby has work relationships with senior staff at these providers, and is well known to them. Ruby told me that, some months prior to our interview, while the annual application process was taking place, she had been approached by people in her personal networks for her help in getting unqualified applicants positions in the educational program of their choice.

I got a phone call, and some email from some of my friends, and family members, saying, "Oh, please, you are there, can you call this institution and put my son in because of this and that..."

She told me that this was a common experience for people working in her Department. However, rather than complying with such requests, she had taken her own action:

I just got so frustrated that I went to Facebook said publicly that I won't entertain any friends or family members calling me to push their child into an institution because I'm working at this Department.

I asked Ruby what kind of reaction she had gotten to her Facebook post:

They stopped, like, calling me and asking me and...yeah. Like, some of my other friends said, like "Wow, it was very brave of you to come out publicly and say it" because we don't get this all the time from people...like who can really stand up and say, like, I won't tolerate this.

I confirmed this by later viewing Ruby's public Facebook profile. Notably, the many supportive comments beneath her post all praised her for her action, often by describing her as 'brave', or as a '*lida*' [leader], or humorously suggesting she should become the next head of her Department. Many also noted that the kind of public stance Ruby had taken was all too rare in Papua New Guinea.

I asked Ruby what had motivated her to refuse her wantoks' requests. She replied:

I don't want to put myself in a situation where the institutions will have a negative, like, thoughts about me, or just because you are meeting [with them] that you can push all your wantoks in. I don't want them to have that perception of me, or that idea.

She continued:

And then, like...I have to respect their selection criterias and rules. If my wantok like..if my family member is qualified, then yes, I can propose...

Commentary

Two things are notable here. Firstly, I suggest, that Ruby's motivating concern with how she would be perceived by her counterparts at the education service providers indicates that her ethical orientation was primarily relational. In effect, she was primarily concerned with being subject to 'evaluating gaze' of others with whom she

saw herself in personalised relations of mutuality. “Pushing” her “unqualified” wantoks would show her disrespect for “their” rules and standards, and thus their legitimate interests, in response to which they would be entitled to evaluate her as the kind of person who would seek to gain improper advantage from the relation, and she would risk losing their respect. In short, Ruby perceived that such action would be inappropriate to proper relations with the service provider personnel in the context of their respective formal organisational positions relative to her.

Secondly, I suggest, Ruby’s view that it would be acceptable to promote a ‘qualified’ wantok also reveals both her ethical-epistemological orientation to the service provider’s selection procedures, and her perception of how their legitimacy is grounded. As with her understanding of other procedures, Ruby evidently understood this legitimacy to be grounded in tangible substantive interests rather than formal epistemological conditions of validity. Thus, proposing a ‘qualified’ candidate was acceptable because it aligned with her perception of the interests and entitlements of the service provider in admitting candidates of a certain capability. The fact that this might nevertheless constitute a formal ‘conflict of interest’ did not seem to occur to Ruby. In the circumstances, from the point of view of ‘orthodox’ bureaucratic ethics, Ruby had an duty to ensure that she did not use her formal position - and could not be not *perceived* to use her formal position - to causally influence, or attempt to influence, the outcome of the service provider’s selection process, *irrespective of her actual motives or interests*. As a consequence, I suggest, she was unable to appreciate that even promoting a ‘qualified’ candidate could be considered ‘unethical’, and would violate the conditions necessary to ensure that the application of the selection procedures could be seen as ‘impartial’.

7.5 Conclusion

This chapter has sought to illuminate ways in which two ‘ethical’ public servants in Papua New Guinea interpret their obligations to the state when confronted with conflicting demands and expectations from their wantoks. It has endeavoured to show how they are able to personally and publicly legitimate their decisions and actions in

practice by drawing on understandings and modes of thought consistent with the Melanesian ethos of mutuality described in previous chapters. The case studies have illustrated how the 'notionally' legitimate 'formal' entitlements and obligations of both individual public servants and their interlocutors – i.e. those posited via the 'rules and policies' of the state - are in practice legitimated performatively by via the speech and action of the public servants. These processes of legitimation occur within a context in which evaluative attention is focused on the intentional recognition afforded by the public servants to their own and others' tangible, substantive personalised positional-relational interests, and the way in which their speech and action reveals to others their motivating intentions with respect to those interests. By seeking to publicly judge, speak and act clearly and consistently in accordance with the 'notionally' legitimate matrix of normative positional entitlements and obligations established by the 'formal' rules and policies of the state – and being seen to do so by others – a public servant is able to elicit from others evaluations of personal respect that serve to validate the legitimacy of those entitlements and obligations in practical terms, thus underwriting cooperative relations in accordance with the posited rules and policies. In so doing, an 'ethical' public servant is also able to serve their own psychic-symbolic interests in being evaluated by themselves and others as 'ethical', and entitled to respect.

Further, I suggest, the case studies also begin to show how these processes involve specific ways of interpreting and enacting core ethical notions of 'impartiality', 'accountability' and 'transparency' that reflect a personalised, relational ethic grounded in considerations of mutuality. In Case Study 1 it was noted that notions of 'accountability' and 'transparency' were used by Philip in a personalised, relational sense. 'Transparency' in particular was seen to be a relational property of persons, manifested via speech and conduct that makes 'visible' and thus helps to legitimate their motivating intentions with respect to the personalised positional interests of others. By implication, I suggest, the notion of accountability is similarly 'personalised'. In this sense, rather than holding themselves and others accountable for their actions in terms of an abstract conception of moral or ethical order as represented by formal policies and rules (and thus having and giving an impersonal

rational account for their decisions and actions), people were accountable to each other for the practical effects of their decisions and actions in terms of the putative normative expectations they associated with their positional-relational interests in a particular situation. Thus, I suggest, it fell to public servants to establish and legitimate the normative expectations of the state by consistently being personally 'accountable' to others for the effects of their decisions and actions on their own and others positional-relational interests.

Further, these notions of 'transparency' and 'accountability' were closely related to the notion of 'fairness'. Philip's account of 'fairness' emphasised the importance of being seen to be neutral, of not being unduly 'aligned' with the interests of particular parties - either one's wantoks or oneself - and of being perceived to strike the appropriate 'balance' in one's decisions. Such concern are evidently related to the notion of 'impartiality'. Notably, however, the term 'impartiality' also brings with it connotations of *cognitive adequacy*: that is, the notion that judgments may be considered legitimate based on the correct application of the abstract categories specified in a rule to the particular facts of each case that falls under the rule. In this sense, Philip's account suggests that the application of policies and rules in particular cases was not considered legitimate because of the formal validity of a judgment with respect to the specific requirements of the policy or rule, but because the outcome of applying the policy or rule by the public servant was perceived to serve the legitimate positional interests of relevant parties – including those of the public servant.

This interpretation is reinforced by Case Study 2. Here, Ruby sought to reconcile the desirability of acting in favour of her wantoks with the requirements of formal procedural methods of comparative evaluation. Her efforts were clearly characterised by a focus on the substantive interests at stake, and the manner in which those interests were intended to be regulated and served by the procedural rules. However, in considering how to apply the rules in particular circumstances – and how the rules should apply in those circumstances – she was chiefly concerned with the way in which intentions and actions with respect to those substantive interests could be perceived and evaluated. Notably, in thinking about the issues in this relational way,

she appeared to overlook the need to maintain epistemological 'valid' conditions of 'impartiality' that ostensibly legitimates the results of those procedural methods. In other words, in focusing on the substantive interests at stake, and her 'subjective' motivating intentions in relation to these, she did not perceive that 'valid' judgments are expected to be made - and should be seen to be made - under 'objective' epistemological conditions that are independent of any considerations 'personalised' interests.

Overall, the case studies have attempted to show that these two 'ethical' public servants in Papua New Guinea draw upon their own cultural resources to avoid the kind of 'particularism' that is often seen as motivating and legitimating 'corrupt' or improper conduct. Categories and modes of thought and practice predominant in social domain are applied in the context of public administration practices that relate to relationship with those outside the formal organisation. However, as Case Study 2 in particular highlights, this does not always lead to judgment and action that is fully in accord with the expectations of 'orthodox' bureaucratic ethics outlined in Chapter 4. This raises the broader question of how such culturally inflected ethical understandings might operate *within* a formal organisational context, and what effects they might have on the functioning of such organisations - not only in instances where the issues of 'corruption' might be at stake, but in terms of broader 'everyday' administrative practices.

The remainder of this thesis will be devoted to investigating this question.

Chapter 8 – Administering Infrastructure at the Department of Human Happiness

8.1 Introduction

Where the Chapter 7 sought to highlight the ways in which selected Papua New Guinean public servants interpreted of their obligations to the state in light of the need to manage their wantok relations, this chapter and the next will focus on highlighting various ways in which relational considerations of mutuality affect the interpretation and performance of their functional roles within the bureaucratic apparatus, and thus affect the functioning of the bureaucratic apparatus itself.

These chapters serve this aim by presenting an analytical and interpretative account of my experience working for three months as a volunteer in an advisory and capacity building role at a central Government line department in Port Moresby. Firstly, in this chapter, I present a descriptive account of the functioning of a specific program being implemented by the Department. This program was suffering from a range of significant problems and challenges that prevented it from meeting its objectives. In describing how the program functioned – or failed to function – I seek to identify and analyse the various proximate causes of these problems. Following this initial presentation and analysis of the data, however, I then offer in Chapter 9 further analysis, interpretation and commentary consistent with the methodological and theoretical considerations presented in Chapter 3. Specifically, I seek to account for the functioning of the program in terms of the underlying ethical orientations of the staff of the Department.

I begin my account with the story of my arrival at my fieldwork site, and how I came to be there. I follow this with a description of what came to learn about the functioning of the program during my 3-month stay.

8.2. Arriving at the Department

After nearly seven months living in Port Moresby, I had somewhat belatedly arrived at my primary fieldwork site: a modest office cubicle on the 3rd floor of a commercially rented building housing a central Government agency I shall call the Department of Human Happiness (or DHH). I unpacked my lap top and notebooks onto the bare desk and found myself reflecting on my journey to this seemingly quotidian place.

My placement had been facilitated by an Australian friend and former colleague who had started work earlier in the year as a Senior Strategic Adviser in the DHH. Despite being busy steering a major sector-wide reform program alongside a team of Advisers funded by the Australian Government, he had been able to persuade the Departmental Secretary that my skills could be put to good use in an area of the Department requiring urgent attention. Millions of Kina were at stake on a troubled program of modestly-sized but critical infrastructure projects administered by a small team lacking experience and know-how in project management. The DHH was under significant pressure to lift their game from a range of important and influential government stakeholders. The Department's reputation was on the line. He was able to persuade the Secretary that I might be of help.

An introductory meeting in late January with the Secretary in his spacious "paperless" office on the 4th floor of the DHH building loosely confirmed arrangements. The case was put by two of the DHH's Australian Government-funded foreign advisers (including my contact), who pitched for me in a volunteer role as a part of a broader training initiative that would aim to develop DHH's staff capacity in project management. As we sat on couches around the coffee table watching documents scroll up the flat-screen television mounted high on the office wall, the Secretary solicited opinions from the small number of his key senior national staff who were in attendance. After at last outlining his own views and expectations he gave his ex-cathedra blessing to the initiative. Work would commence designing and rolling out an on-line training project to be developed with the support of an interested multi-national organisation training partner. My role would be to provide on-the-job capacity building support in project

management to relevant 3rd floor personnel, and at the same time assist work in developing the training project. In return, I would be free to conduct my research, which he said he understood and personally supported. He assured me that formal advice of my placement would soon be given to staff. It was a promising enough start, I felt, but more work still needed to be done to clarify my role.

One thing troubled me, however. The Secretary was adamant that the relevant program staff already had all the necessary tools at their disposal to do their jobs properly. He had the previous year ordered the purchase on-line of a set of project management templates - 53 in all - and mandated their use by both the DHH team and the Department's partner organisations. They were "best practice". They were simply and clearly written, and, he insisted, quite self-explanatory. All the team needed to do was familiarise themselves with the templates, and their accompanying slim guidebook, and put them into practice. All his staff really lacked, he confidently pronounced, "is confidence". This, presumably, would be provided by the proposed training project. I remained privately skeptical that his assessment would prove adequate.

Over subsequent days I was called to more meetings by the Advisers. Inevitably, none of them started on time. Key invitees often failed to attend; rooms, times and locations were sometimes confused. But agendas were followed, talks were had, and requests and instructions issued. But still no official word advising staff of my placement had been issued from the Secretary's office. Amidst the apparent muddle and confusion, I decided to nevertheless press ahead with information gathering and initial diagnostics. Most important to my mind was a one-on-one meeting with the Executive Manager of the Infrastructure Implementation Division (IID), based on the 3rd floor, with whom I had not yet had a chance to speak to directly.

I met alone with Paula in her cluttered 3rd floor office on a hot Thursday morning in early February. She was in her mid-30's, dressed in business attire, courteous and focussed. She seemed shrewd and lively, but also careworn and a little cautious. I started by outlining how I had come to be there, providing background to my

volunteer status as a capacity building adviser, my PhD studies, my experience as a project manager, and my quid pro quo agreement with the Secretary to undertake my research whilst assisting the work of the Department. I began to ask her questions about the work of her Division, and the challenges it was facing. She responded cautiously but at length, filling in the details of a complicated story I had begun to piece together from earlier group meetings and previous conversations with the Advisers, and describing in broad strokes the background to the current situation. We chatted quietly for an hour, with the occasional interruption from members of her team coming in to briefly deliver a message, obtain advice on an urgent work matter or to deliver a document to her overflowing in-tray.

At the end of the meeting, though I still sensed an understandable degree of caution in Paula's attitude towards me, we parted on a positive note. She had impressed me as diligent, committed and capable – someone who was trying to do her best under difficult circumstances. She promised to allocate me a desk in her Division, and to assist in organising meetings with her key staff, as well as with other managers in the Partnerships Wing of DHH whose work intersected with that of the IID. She was as good as her word, and the following Monday I returned to the office for several meetings that enabled me to gain further useful context for the work ahead. By Tuesday, as Paula had promised, I was sitting at my own desk.

It seemed slightly unreal to me that I had arrived at my destination with nothing as yet formalised in writing. Within two days I would be given a security pass to the glass doors on the 3rd Floor and - just as important - a key to the men's bathroom. I had in effect gained almost unfettered access to a Papua New Guinean Government Department based on a few face-to-face meetings, some vouchsafing by former colleagues, and some verbal assurances. I couldn't help wondering what, if anything, that may signify.

8.3 My work environment and routine

Over the following days and weeks, as I returned daily to my desk, I had ample opportunity to reflect. Most of my time was spent working alone silently, reviewing documents, making arrangement for meetings, writing up notes, or preparing materials for the several brief training sessions I held with IID staff during my stay. The general office environment was conducive to such work – a quiet and unhurried atmosphere, with most others also sitting quietly at their desks, or standing grouped together in twos or threes engaged in hushed conversation among the cubicles scattered across the expanse of the office floor. Sometimes, from my cubicle vantage point, I could observe more urgent meetings taking place in manager's offices behind closed doors. Visitors to the 3rd floor were infrequent, those admitted waiting patiently at the front counter until attended to. General noise was minimal, the exceptions being the insistent, unsynchronised beeping of several UPS units that no-one seemed ever seemed bothered to reset, and the sound of the regular afternoon thunderstorms that lashed the office windows.

Periodically, though, I would leave my cubicle to conduct an interview with a staff member in the 3rd floor meeting room, or to go to a meeting on the 4th Floor. Occasionally, I would engage in informal conversations with my cubicle mates or other staff members, often about their work but sometimes about their personal lives and other matters. Apart from this, my only routine appointment away from my desk was on Monday mornings, when I would join the staff of the IID in the conference room for their weekly divisional meeting.

As I continued my investigations in the days and weeks that followed my arrival, Paula's initial account of the situation of the IID program proved accurate in outline. Unsurprisingly, though, I discovered there was a fair bit more to the story. I begin my account with a brief overview of the structure of the DHH, and functions and staffing profile of the infrastructure program.

8.4 The functional role of IID within DHH

Along with many other Government agencies, Department of Human Happiness was located in a commercially rented office building in the Waigani District of Port Moresby. Its 200-plus staff were spread across four floors, grouped into four major functional Wings of around 50 staff each. A smaller group served directly under the Office of the Secretary.

Each of the four Wings was led by a Deputy Secretary, and together with the Secretary they composed the DHH's Senior Executive Team. Under each of the Deputy Secretaries were several Executive Managers (EMs), such as Paula. Each EM was responsible for managing a Division, comprising a team of between 3 and 15 staff. Larger Divisions were typically divided into sub-teams, or Branches, comprising Branch Managers and more junior officers who were responsible for the day-to-day work of the organisation.

The Infrastructure Implementation Division (IID) was situated on the third floor within DHH's Partnerships Wing, along with three other Divisions. The general role of the Partnerships Wing, as its name implied, was to manage special funding relationships with DHH's various institutional partners, whether those that were responsible for local service delivery - as was the case with IID and its infrastructure program - or other government or donor agencies that were DHH's financial stakeholders in various initiatives. IID itself was notionally structured into two Branches, with corresponding functional duties. These were a four-person Projects Branch responsible for overseeing project implementation and thus dealing directly with institutions and contractors; and a three-person Procurement and Disbursement Branch responsible for administering program finances. The Project and Procurement Branches were each headed by a Manager - David and Samuel, respectively - who reported directly to Paula. Finally, there was an executive assistant who also worked directly to Paula.

Notably, Paula and her team had only recently been assigned to IID, as part of a broader Departmental restructure that had been finalised less than 6 months prior to

my arrival. She herself was on a steep learning curve, having only assumed her role following the restructure. And like her eight-person team - a number of whom she had worked with in her previous role as Executive Manager of the Corporate Services Division – she had little or no experience in project management. Nevertheless, she and her staff had been given the task of fixing the ongoing problems of the infrastructure program.

8.5. The core problem: under-expenditure

The fact of central concern, as Paula had highlighted to me in our initial conversation, was that the infrastructure investment program was badly underperforming, and had been for several years.

Along with most other government service delivery Departments, Paula had told me, DHH's annual development budget included an investment program that targeted infrastructure improvements at its local-level partner service delivery institutions – new buildings, renovations, fit outs, and the like: general fixed-capital improvements. Unlike other Departments, however, the DHH program had in previous years developed a reputation for being *well*-managed – so much so that, four years earlier, under the previous DHH Secretary, the Government had taken a decision to shift responsibility for managing a number of other agencies' failing infrastructure investment programs to DHH. That was when things had started to go wrong.

Until then, DHH had been fortunate to work with a small number of relatively large, well-established institutions located in major cities with reasonably strong project management capacity. The problems had emerged, according to Paula, when DHH was tasked with responsibility for similar programs previously managed by other Departments that targeted a raft of smaller, more remote institutions with much lower capacity.

The extent of the problems subsequently became evident to me when I looked at the key measure of the program's performance: budget expenditure. Despite an annual

budget of around 100 million Kina, the overall expenditure rate for the program hovered around 70%. However, this figure itself masked the true extent of the problem. The overall program had several budget lines, each for a different type of partner institution. Annual expenditure on the big, city-based institutions that were DHH's long standing partners was over 90% of budget. In contrast, despite having been under DHH administration for nearly 5 years, the budget lines for the different types of smaller, regional institutions suffered annual expenditure rates around 40% to 60%, and sometimes lower. Of course, this was to say nothing of the quality of the individual projects that were actually implemented, or the extent to which they actually responded to priority needs – issues which were both at times questionable.

Overall, then, it was clear DHH was failing to deliver on one of its core mandates: to ensure the provision of high quality, high priority infrastructure projects that were needed by local partner institutions to enable them to serve the basic human development needs of local communities. In basic terms, the broad objectives of the infrastructure program were clear to both staff and management. However, what became first things that became evident to me was that it was far less clear on what basis it was being determined that specific infrastructure projects - and institutions - should be prioritised for funding, or why. This was because DHH had no specific, formal policy framework to guide decision-making on budget allocations for IDD's projects. This in turn meant that there were few structured, formal administrative process established to facilitate and enable such decisions.

8.6. Program Policy and Budgeting

Notably, it was not the case that there was a lack of policy in DHH - on the contrary, a lot of recent policy work had been done, and was ongoing. However, this was focused on developing the overarching policy and regulatory framework for the suite of sector-wide governance reforms that were in progress, and was mostly being led and facilitated by the Australian Advisers.

In this respect, the Department had in recent years established a general policy that outlined Quality Assurance (QA) standards for its partner institutions, and it also had developed a policy that identified some as regional 'Centres of Excellence' for each type of institution that were expected to be prioritised for a range of support. In a discussion with the Secretary, I learned that he saw these policies as providing a basis for informing decision-making on funding allocations within the infrastructure program. Staff, he said, should be using these policies as a touchstone for evaluating proposals from institutions, and making recommendations on funding decisions.

Crucially, however, these broader policies had been developed by another Wing in Department, not the Wing where IID was located, primarily for purposes of establishing accreditation processes for DHH's partner institutions. While generally aware of the existence of these policies and the Secretary's strong commitment to them, however, staff in the Partnerships Wing, including those in IID, were in most cases not aware which particular institutions had been identified as Centres of Excellence. Nor were they generally aware of the QA standards that institutions were expected to meet. Reflecting this, neither previous nor current IID staff – nor anyone else in the Department, including the Secretary - had sought to formalise any clear or explicit guidance on how these policy priorities should be applied to the infrastructure program. The Secretary told me he expected that his staff should have read and understood the policies, and know how to apply them in assessing proposals. Similarly he also expected that institutions should be sufficiently familiar with the policy framework, and know how to apply it in preparing their proposals.

This had a range of consequences for the way the annual budget planning process was managed. The official budget year in PNG runs from January to December, with formal Government budget planning for the following year commencing around June. Each year, a list of projects to be funded was developed and formalised in the Department's annual budget submission. A few of these reflected 'top down' priorities that were identified via the Office of the Secretary, usually directed by the Minister, and often reflecting specific political or policy priorities of influential politicians in the National Executive Council (i.e. PNG's Ministerial Cabinet) or Parliament. A few others were

earmarked for DHH's longstanding 'core' institutional partners, who each year received an infrastructure project allocation. Some were ongoing projects that were not expected to be completed during the budget year, and required a renewed allocation the following year. The rest, however, were identified an ostensibly 'bottom up' process, in which DHH's newer partner institutions would be invited to submit proposals for DHH to consider for funding.

In line with this 'bottom up' process, some months prior to the mid-year start of the budget process the Secretary would issue an official circular to the CEOs of these partner institutions calling on them to submit proposals to be funded in the following year. Such a circular was issued early in my time at the Department, in late-February (though I only became aware of its existence some weeks later). It was written in clear and straightforward English on a single page under official Departmental letterhead. It first called attention to the Department's suite of high-level sector strategy documents and reiterated the importance of quality infrastructure to improved service delivery. It then called for institutions to submit their proposals in the Secretary's mandated generic project proposal template by the end of May; and noted that they would be assessed for possible inclusion in the 2020 budget by a Technical Evaluation Committee. No further guidance on the 2020 proposal submission process was provided: nothing about any possible additional conditions for eligibility or conformity; or the evaluation criteria that would be used; or how funding might be prioritised among the various types of institutions across different regions; or even of any basic funding parameters that might give them an indication of the size of the projects they might be able to propose.

What was notable, however, was a piece of further advice in the circular about proposals relating to the budget for the *current year* (2019). The circular reminded institutions that proposals for the current year were *due by the end of the first quarter* (i.e. 31 March, about 1 month from the date of the circular.) It turned out that this piece of advice had needed to be in circular for two particular reasons. The first was that the proposals that had been received from a number of institutions during the previous year's budget process needed to be revised and re-submitted. This was

either because: a) their proposals not been of sufficient quality or had proposed projects that did not align sufficiently with broad DHH policy priorities; or b) the budgets contained in their original proposals substantially exceeded the allocations they had been awarded. In short, these issues had arisen in part because the circular calling for proposals the previous year had also lacked specific information and guidance that would have helped to prevent them arising. Further, when the time came for the Department to finalise its formal budget submission, it had simply allocated budgets to its preferred institutions on the basis of what it thought was reasonable; if the amount requested by an institution fell within generally accepted parameters (i.e. between 500,000 and 1.5 million kina), the allocations matched the institution's proposed budgets; if they didn't, DHH simply had assigned an allocation instead.

However, there was also a second problem: a number of institutions had received funding allocations in the 2019 budget despite not having submitted any proposals at all. How had this occurred? The answer, once it was explained to me, was again relatively straightforward and unsurprising. Following the finalisation and submission of the Department's proposed budget to the Department of National Planning and Monitoring (DNPM), mysterious and unpredictable things would begin to happen. Lobbying would start with DNPM, mostly from politicians, seeking to have their favoured institution's project included in the budget. Sometimes DHH would be made aware of this, but more often not. In either event, the result was that, once the final Government budget appeared at the other end of the process and was sent to Parliament for ratification in December, the list of institutions it contained had often changed significantly from their initial submission. Often, institutions had been added to the list without any appropriately documented proposal, while others had been dropped.

However, ratification of the budget - which was usually rubberstamped in January by the Government's Parliamentary majority without further detailed scrutiny - was itself not the end of the process. The official budget rules allowed DHH some further room for manoeuvre. Under the budget format, the overall infrastructure program was

broken down into several consolidated budget lines, each corresponding to a type of institution. A list of approved institutions was included under each line, along with a total budget figure for the line. The budget rules allow the Departmental Secretary the discretion and flexibility to allocate the total budget figure for each line among the designated institutions. Following Parliamentary ratification, one of the Secretary's first tasks in January was thus to finalise the allocations, and thus figure out how to incorporate the new institutions within the budget alongside those that had survived from the Department's original budget submission, as well as any ongoing projects from the previous year that had been included in the budget and required an allocation to ensure they were able to be completed. The task was relatively urgent, as it provided the basis for annual cashflow forecasts and workplans that were due to be submitted to DNPM and Department of Treasury at the start of the fiscal year.

Normally, this task would be done by the Secretary in consultations with his managers, based on whatever information was on file or could quickly be obtained. The year I was there, however, the Secretary had been required to finalise it himself, as a number of his key staff happened at that time to be on leave. The result – a final list of the annual budget allocations for each institution – had been advised to relevant DHH staff by the Secretary in mid-January via an internal email. Attached to the email were a formal circular letter addressed to his senior managers and staff in IID and the Department's Finance Division, along with a spreadsheet detailing the allocations. The circular explained the reason for urgency, reminded staff of the overarching goals of the infrastructure program, and noted that to meet these goals it was necessary to “ensure that financial resources are *fairly and adequately distributed*” [emphasis added] among partner institutions. It further emphasised that it was “imperative that we coordinate distribution of allocated funding to [partner Institutions] as per the break-up”. No further information on the basis of the Secretary's final allocation decisions was given in the letter or the spreadsheet that might explain how it was ‘fair and adequate’. The Secretary's covering email, however, did contain a brief informal note that to staff that he had considered the views “which were expressed during our discussions” and that “based on the size of the ... institution and the needs I made the break-up”.

Thus, the Secretary had taken the opportunity in his February circular on next year's budget process to remind the CEOs of institutions to submit their proposals for the *current budget year*. Further, the fact that the timetable for this was the end of March was itself significant, for a couple of reasons. The first was that, following the passage of the Budget in January, and the submission of cashflow forecasts to Treasury, it took until late March for funds to begin to flow from the Department of Finance. This delay in the issuing of monthly warrants thus gave DHH a little breathing space, but it also meant that they needed to have agreements in place with the institutions so that the institutions could engage contractors and could begin to spend the money they had requested in their initial cashflow projections. Any delays in receiving 2019 proposals, or in having them evaluated, finalised and approved, meant further delays to the start of the projects. Given that the budget allocations for each year expired in December, delays beyond April in commencing a project increased the risk that it would not be completed by the end of the year, leaving unexpended annual budget. It also meant that the following year's budget would need to include requests for funds to be allocated complete these unfinished projects – a process that itself was not straightforward, and often left unfinished projects without funds for completion.

Now, however, with the first batch of monthly warrants about to be issued by DNPM and the Department of Finance, staff were under pressure to obtain and evaluate the 2019 proposals. The next step for IID staff was thus to follow up in writing with those institutions that had been included in the budget list, confirm with them what their official allocation now was, and if required, ask them to submit a proposal, or re-submit a revised proposal. However, the process of advising institutions was itself far from straightforward – communications with many remote institutions were often difficult, not only because they often lacked reliable internet or telephone access, but because often IID had no record of an appropriate contact person at the institution, or what their contact details were. This was particularly the case for those institutions that had not submitted proposals. Much effort was expended in tracking these down.

In the meantime, while the missing proposals were being tracked down, David – the Manager of IID’s Project’s Branch – directed his staff to commence evaluating those proposals that were already on file. Notably, the evaluation methodology that had been devised for this task was simply to review the institution’s proposals for its conformity with its allocated budget and the mandated DHH proposal template – a largely formal exercise that did not explicitly seek to evaluate the substantive merits of the proposals. In particular, it did not seek to explicitly address the question of whether a proposal demonstrated an institution’s capability to implement their proposed project, and specifically whether it provided sufficient detail to enable a procurement process to proceed. However, any shortcomings in the evaluation methodology proved in the end to be moot.

By the end of March, as the time for my scheduled departure neared, Paula was advised by David that the team had failed to obtain any of the 16 outstanding proposals, and only a few revised proposals. Of the proposals that were examined, most were in incorrect formats or so poorly written as to be virtually useless as a basis for evaluation, let alone providing a sound basis for procuring the services of a contractor. Many had proposed budgets far in excess of their final allocations. This meant that the process of finalising agreements with the Institutions would likely take a significant amount of time, which in turn meant that implementation would inevitably be delayed, perhaps for many months. I suspected that in reality this would mean that few of the projects would actually commence before the end of the Financial Year, and would probably need to be included in next year’s budget.

In the meantime, however, warrants for funds had started to be issued by DNPM, and the team had to increasingly deal with issues arising with the implementation of ongoing projects from the previous year. This posed its own set of challenges, which I describe in the following sections. I start my analysis of these challenges by describing the three types of administrative arrangements that IID was using to manage its various projects.

8.7 Issues with DHH administrative arrangements for overseeing implementation

In her initial briefing to me, Paula had outlined the basic administrative arrangements for the infrastructure program. Under these arrangements, the institutions were expected to directly engage contractors to undertake the required works, and DHH then simply entered into agreements with the institutions to pay the contractor's invoices upon verification of claims by the institutions' project managers. In effect, under these arrangements, DHH acted as a 'third party' funder of the projects. I subsequently learned that this was only one of three approaches that were used by DHH, but it was by far the most significant. It was this set of arrangements, however, that was being used to implement projects with the newer, regional institutions, and which were associated with IID's biggest expenditure problems. In understanding why this was the case is first useful to compare these arrangements with two others approaches that DHH was also using,

The first of these was the one which was used with DHH's older, more established city-based partners that came under the Department's direct line responsibility. This involved the transfer of funds directly to the institutions, who would then engage and pay their contractors. One of the key advantages of this 'traditional' approach – which helped explain why the projects under this model achieved much higher annual expenditure rates – was that any funds transferred to the institutions was recorded by DHH as being expended, irrespective of how much work was done during the year by the contractors engaged by the institutions, or how much they had been paid. In effect, these were annual or bi-annual grant payments, provided to the institutions in advance of works undertaken, with budget for the following year being determined based on evidence of funds they still on hand at the end of the year. Given this, meeting DHH expenditure targets against budget was relatively straightforward.

Another approach, in contrast, involved DHH itself directly engaging contractors to supply materials and works. These were colloquially known within the Department as "special projects", were a handful in number, and had their own budget line within the

overall infrastructure program. Typically, I was told, these were the projects that emerged as priorities from the Secretary's Office, often as a result of political imperatives, and usually targeted institutions that had been historically neglected, were just being established, or were facing major challenges. Given that DHH was responsible for directly managing these contracts, two architects had been engaged as specialist project managers to support and oversee their implementation. These "special projects" had their fair share of issues, which were often simply a general consequence of PNG's challenging operating environment: supply chain problems, underperforming or dishonest contractors, local land disputes that could lead to delays or even violence, adverse weather or unreliable communications. However, given the direct control and oversight that DHH had, resolving issues on these projects was generally easier. Nevertheless, the overall way in which they were administered also raised certain problematic issues, which I shall describe shortly.

The third approach – the one Paula had highlighted in her initial briefing, and which I came to refer to as the "third party payments" approach – was by far the most common. This approach had been decided upon by the previous Departmental Secretary when responsibility for the expanded infrastructure program had been transferred to DHH some years earlier. Problems with the approach had become increasingly apparent over time. Firstly, there was the challenge - endemic to PNG - of maintaining effective communications with organisations located in more remote parts of the country. More significantly, however, it had become apparent the newer partner institutions had little capacity or incentive to undertake transparent procurement and contracting processes, and even less to effectively monitor and manage their contractors. In some cases – no doubt under pressure to spend their annual budget - DHH managers had in the past approved payments to contractors without proper verification from Institutions that works had been undertaken, and in some cases without any evidence of proper contract documentation in place. In some cases, contractors had taken money and walked off the job. Others had walked into the DHH office, often on a daily basis, to demand payment needed for works to commence, but without the necessary documented authorisation from the institutions. Disputes had become commonplace. Work on many of the projects

stalled, or stopped completely. And many of the institutions' line Departments, who continued to be responsible for providing their recurrent operational funding, had started to complain.

It was this situation that had confronted the new Secretary soon after his appointment. Given the problems these administrative arrangements had led to, I was keenly interested to know why it had been chosen. Evidently, the "traditional" approach of transferring funds directly to institutions was not an option because the newer institutions, not being under DHH line management, could not receive direct funds transfers from the Department. But why hadn't the "special projects" approach been adopted? Perhaps, I thought, it may have appeared more costly and resource intensive to have DHH directly responsible for engaging and managing contractors. But then, why had DHH not insisted in verifying that adequate procurement processes were conducted by the Institutions? Notably, no one in IDD seemed to know the precise reason. Neither could they point me to a document that might help to explain the decision – if one existed.

The opportunity to find an answer came when I arranged to meet with the Department's former Secretary, who had been responsible for setting up the expanded infrastructure program. He told me, quite simply, that he had purposefully decided to put in place the "third-party" payments system to avoid having DHH staff directly engage with the selection and management of contractors. As he put it, he "wanted to make it the institution's problem, and keep [his] staff away". In short, not only would staff avoid becoming entangled in any issues associated with corrupt procurement processes, if payments to contractors could only be made on the say-so of the institutions, his staff could presumably not be held responsible if the payments to contractors were not 'above board'. Nor, in theory, would they be tempted by the offer of inducements by contractors, or be in a position to request such inducements. At the very least, it seemed, opportunities for such practices would be minimised.

That this was a potential problem was directly confirmed to me by Paula. In her first week on the job as the Executive Manager of IID, she told me, she had been

approached by a contractor with offer to pay her “lunch money” – a colloquial term in the public service for a small financial inducement – to arrange for the payment of an invoice. Similarly, David had stressed the widespread existence of such practices by telling me of a new term he had just learned from a taxi-driver: “Waigani language”, a joking reference to the ubiquitous use of inducement money to facilitate cooperation from government officials. Early in her tenure, Paula said, she had taken the trouble to specifically warn her team against such practices, telling them that she “would not protect them” if they were caught.

However, whether or not the former Secretary’s strategy – or Paula’s warning – had proved successful was impossible for me to verify with certainty. By and large, based on my day-to-day observations and interactions with the IID team, it appeared that they avoided such practices, and believed them to be ‘corrupt’ and improper. If this was genuine commitment – and I believe it was, at least among the current IID team – this was probably just as well, because it was less clear that the Department’s financial systems provided adequate oversight to enable the identification of such practices. In a report of a Departmental audit conducted for the financial year 2015²¹ – the first year of the expanded infrastructure program’s implementation – the Government’s own Auditor General had concluded that there were ‘significant and serious weaknesses’ in DHH’s financial control framework. It noted specifically that “control activities such as delegations, authorisations, reconciliations, segregation of duties, system access and management were not sufficiently robust to prevent, detect or correct errors or fraud”. Specific problems it highlighted within the infrastructure program - across dozens of cases – included to failure to provide relevant documentation to substantiate approved transactions, such as relevant payments forms, copies of contracts, acquittal or progress reports, correct invoices formats or evidence of more than one quotation being sought. It further noted cases where invoices had been processed for payment without certification from a relevant officer, had been paid twice, and even where there was no material evidence of goods and services having been supplied at all.

²¹ The report was not tabled publicly in Parliament until 2019.

Of course, the conclusions of the audit report said nothing about whether any of this reflected ‘corrupt’ intent, and it identified no specific instances of corruption. Indeed – the fact that it was unable to make any such conclusions was part of the very problem it had identified. Thus, the question of whether “lunch money” – or indeed, anything more serious – explained any these cases was left open. Notably, however, since that time the Department had evidently made some effort to improve the situation. As part of the Government’s general financial oversight regime established by the Department of Finance (DoF), DHH was required to participate in quarterly audit committee meetings with DoF personnel, designed to review DHH’s financial administration systems and its compliance with financial regulations. The DoF was evidently happy enough with the way DHH was attending to issues, citing them as “among the top 5” government agencies in relation to their active engagement with the audit committee program - a fact that the current DHH Secretary was pleased to advertise on the home page of DHH’s official website and in the Departmental Newsletter.

Nevertheless, despite such apparent improvements, it quickly became clear to me that the DHH infrastructure program had not been complying with certain specific requirements mandated by Government procurement and financial management regulations. This was freely admitted by staff themselves. These issues had significant implications for both “special projects” as well as the “third party” model, and in fact managed to get DHH into trouble with the Department of Finance during my stay in the Department. However, from the point of view of my analysis of the IID program, it was the wider consequences of their approach to the rules that were of primary concern.

8.8 Skirting the procurement rules

The first matter concerned a specific element of the finance regulations known as an “Authority to Pre-Commit”, or APC. In short, any government agency intending to enter into a contract to procure goods or services above a threshold of 500,000 kina was required to obtain an APC from the Department of Finance. The APC process was intended as a control mechanism on forward commitments: it not only notified the

DoF of an agency's intention to enter into such a major commitment, and thus enabled them to verify that the agency had sufficient remaining annual budget cover to meet the proposed expenditure, it also advised them whether the expenditure was expected to be extended beyond the in the current budget year, and thus acted as a forward budget planning tool. Further, and of equal importance, the APC rule also mandated that any agency procurement with a contract value above 500,000 kina should go to public tender, which required that the procurement process not be managed by the requesting agency, but by Government's Central Tenders and Supply Board (CTSB). Procurement below the 500,000 kina threshold, in contrast, could be managed by the agency concerned, using a 'three quotes' method, and did not require an APC.

What became apparent, however, was the DHH was not generally complying with this rule. About one third of their projects involved annual budget allocations that were significantly above 500,000 kina threshold, with several as high as 1.5 million. These included several "special projects", as well as a larger number of the "third party" projects. Most had not gone through the APC process, with accompany CTSB tender. The underlying reasons the APC rule was being avoided for the two types of project turned out to very different, though the practical strategies used avoid scrutiny were the same.

Firstly, the main objective in omitting the APC for "special projects" was simply to avoid the CTSB tender process. As David, the manager of the Projects team, somewhat blithely remarked about the APC: "we skip that bit because it requires public tender". Given the inefficiencies in the CTSB, I was told, it could sometimes take as much as 6 to 12 months to engage a contractor. If true – and I was not able to verify it, though it seemed plausible – it was not only problematic for DHH staff from the point of view spending their annual budget allocation, it also, I surmised, involved significant additional paperwork and planning. It was simply much quicker and easier to run a procurement process from within the DHH itself, based on a 'three quotes' method. Moreover, in one case where mandated CTSB processes had been followed, the selected contractor had not proved to be without problems, which itself provided a further reason to disparage the CTSB process. As Paula had lamented, "we go through

the proper process and get poor quality”. The other purpose of the APC - forward year commitment control - was deemed irrelevant by DHH staff because most of their projects were expected to be completed within the budget year (even though many of them didn’t). Nevertheless, as David acknowledged, in avoiding the mandated CTSB process, “we are taking the risk”.

The situation was slightly different for “third party” projects. In these circumstances, even if a project contract was expected to be valued at more than 500,000 kina, DHH technically didn’t need to obtain an APC because it wasn’t entering into a contract with a supplier. But the institution that engaged the contractor technically wasn’t required to do so either, either because it wasn’t a government-run institution and was not required to conform with the Government’s financial management and procurement guidelines, or because, even if it was a Government run institution, it was not spending its own budgeted funds. In effect, I was surprised to learn, the “third party” administrative model enabled DHH to take advantage of what appeared to be a loophole in the Government’s financial management and procurement rules

For both kinds of projects, however, avoiding the APC process created a specific problem. Correctly processing a payment through the Government’s Integrated Financial Management System (IFMS) required a copy of the contract showing not only the basis on which an individual payment was being made, but also total contract value. Avoiding this problem involved two main techniques. First technique was contract splitting: that is, splitting a project into several contracts with the same (or sometimes different) suppliers to deliver different aspects of the overall project. The second technique was to negotiate a payment regime with contractors to ensure any single payment was below 500,000, and to omit the total contract value from the IFMS finance submission. In describing these practices to me, Samuel, an experienced finance officer who had managed IID’s Procurement team for several years, remarked phlegmatically, though slightly self-consciously, “we use the rules to our advantage”.

However, the use of these techniques was eventually caught by the DoF. In reviewing payments claims from DHH for a special project during the latter part of 2018, they had noticed that a large number of claims - over 1.8 million kina’s worth - had been

made out to a single supplier, with no total contract value included in any of the claims. In response, DoF representatives called a meeting with DHH in late February, at which they reiterated the purpose of the APC rule and reminded DHH staff of their obligations with respect to it. In future, they stated, all payments claims would need to show the total contract value. Further, any procurements above the 500,000 kina threshold would need to apply to DoF for an APC, and would subsequently be required to go to public tender via a mandated CTSB process. Further, they emphasised, any procurement under this threshold – even where an institution was to be the contract holder, or was not a government-controlled institution – must obtain three quotes, which had to be evaluated by a Technical Evaluation Committee on which DHH was formally represented.

Notably, the DoF was not the first body to call DHH's attention to the procurement rules. The previous year, under increasing pressure from other government stakeholders to improve the performance of the infrastructure program the Secretary had established an inter-Departmental Program Steering Committee (PSC) to assist with program coordination and oversight. PSC membership comprised several line Departments whose infrastructure programs DHH had taken on, as well as key coordinating agencies including the DoF, DNPM and the CSTB. At a meeting of the PSC the meeting the previous October, following Paula's presentation of a report on "Projects with Issues", members of the Committee had noted that many of them had budgets of 500,000 kina and had not gone through the required CTSB process. Further, it was emphasised that contractors needed to be appropriately vetted for all projects, no matter their budget. To address this, the Committee had resolved that in future, DHH should ensure all projects above the threshold go through an appropriate public tendering process, and that a workshop with CTSB and institutions be arranged to familiarise the latter with relevant procurement processes. In response, Paula had tasked Samuel to follow up with the CTSB – however, arrangements for a workshop were being delayed by reforms to the CTSB being carried out under a donor-sponsored reform of the government procurement laws. The CTSB was in the process of being overhauled and re-established as the National Procurement Commission. By the time I arrived at the DHH, little had progressed.

Nevertheless, in emphasising these conditions, both the DoF and the PSC had put their finger on perhaps the central shortcoming of DHH's "third party" administrative arrangements: a lack of oversight of institution's procurement and contracting processes. Up until now, as Samuel had told me soon after I arrived, IID had at most simply advised institutions to get three quotes, but then did nothing further to verify that they had done so: "we trust the institutions to be using appropriate processes". Many of the problems IID was now struggling with could be traced back to this approach.

In some cases, trusting the institutions had proved adequate. A number of projects had been successfully implemented by institutions within anticipated timeframes by honest and competent contractors, with a minimum of issues. For most, however, the situation was the reverse. The contractors engaged by many of the institutions had proved to be dodgy and underperforming. Further, it had become apparent that a number either had connections to the management at the institution, or with a powerful politician. When issues arose with their performance, DHH had little leverage. As one IID staff member put it: "Some contractors, we can't push them out. They have connections with the Minister, or someone important". In a number of cases, staff also informed me, the initial proposals submitted by Institutions - and accepted by DHH - had in fact been written, and in some cases submitted, by the contractors themselves. This was in part understandable: many institutions lacked the capacity to prepare a properly scoped-out and fully costed infrastructure proposal, or the financial resources to engage someone qualified to do it on their behalf. Canny contractors, aware of the opportunity to access government funds, had simply approached institutions where they had contacts and successfully pitched the opportunity to obtain some new infrastructure by offering to prepare proposals for them. In some cases these proposals had even been submitted to DHH directly by the contractor.

The overall situation had been compounded by a lack of adequate contracts. In several cases, "contracts" between the institutions and the contractor had been single page letters confirming that the contractor had been selected, a brief description of the proposed project, with a total project value indicated. In other cases, inadequate

specifications had led to disputes about the scope of works, with little in the way of legal remedy for work poorly undertaken, out-of-scope or incomplete. These issues were exacerbated by communications issues between DHH and the Institutions, which were often exploited by contractors. At a contractor's instigation, work would be sometimes be authorised by an institution that was clearly out of scope; DHH would not be made aware until a claim for payment was submitted. In other cases, the institutions themselves – possibly in collusion with the contractor - would submit bogus reports, advising of the completion of work that had not been done, and authorising payments claims by the contractors. In several cases while I was there, cheques to contractors had to be cancelled after it was discovered that the claimed work had not been completed.

Later, during a group conversation with members of the IID team that was discussing the sources of some of the current problems, Samuel provided some historical context for the overall situation. When the money for the expanded program had come to DHH a few years previously, he remarked, “we didn’t have the processes in place to deal with it. We just asked institutions what they would like to spend money on. We were reactive to the money coming to us suddenly. We were told we had to spend that money that year”. However, while this might have helped to explain how the problems had initially emerged, it did little to explain why so little had been done in the subsequent four years to address the emerging problems. Just as importantly, while more attention was now being paid by the current IID team to ensuring that more robust contracts were in place between institutions and contractors, and verifying that works were subsequently being done within scope and could legitimately be paid, it was far from clear that this would be sufficient to achieve improved rates of expenditure. Indeed, in many respects, the immediate effect of their efforts was to result in a slower rate of spending.

8.9 Expenditure forecasting and cashflow challenges

This slowdown in turn was both complicating, and being complicated by, another set of issues that was affecting almost all of the projects: expenditure forecasting and cashflow. At the beginning of the year, as noted above, the Department was required

to submit to DNPM a set of expenditure forecasts for the year, broken down by month. Each month, these were expected to be updated on a rolling basis, with the next month's forecast providing the basis for the warrant of funds authorised by DNPM and issued by the Department of Finance. The initial annual cashflow forecast, of course, had no basis in reality, since many of the projects that had been approved in the budget had not yet been properly scoped and budgeted, let alone contracted, so no implementation schedules could be known. Subsequently, even after contracts were in place, few institutions were able to provide implementation schedules that could provide a reliable basis for expenditure forecasting. Each month therefore, a new expenditure forecast was submitted, with the next month's request for warrants usually based on whatever payments the IID team expected - or hoped - would be made in the following month.²²

Often, however, these payments would not occur as forecast – delays would occur due to weather or supply chain problems, institutions would not submit the relevant reports or authorisations, disputes would arise that delayed the authorisation of payments, or it would be found that payments had been made for work that had not been undertaken or were out of scope, so cheques that had already been issued would have to be cancelled. Given the unreliability of DHH's monthly forecasts, and the limited availability of government funds, DNPM had therefore adopted a routine policy of only warranting a fraction of the monthly funds requested by DHH – often, as low as 40%. But this just often meant that DHH was frequently short of funds, and could neither pay contractors for works completed, or provide them with advance payments or cashflow that were usually needed to enable them to start or continue work. The result was a steady stream of communications from irate institutions and contractors that soaked up the time of IID staff and further disrupted the implementation of projects.

²² In at least one instance, I was told by Paula, the relevant officer in Finance had simply made up the monthly cashflow figures without consulting IID. When Paula challenged her on this, she replied that it didn't matter because DNPM was not going to give them the funds they asked for, anyway. Subsequently, Paula had been contacted by her counterpart in DNPM who asked about the basis of the figures. She had replied honestly that they had been prepared by Finance. When the Secretary was told of Paula's comments to DNPM by the Finance Officer who had prepared the figures, he admonished Paula, telling her that she was expected to protect the Department from criticism by other agencies.

8.10 The problem of “Abandoned Projects”

However, while cashflow and expenditure posed consistent challenges for Paula and her team, the single biggest ongoing headache was caused by what the IID team had come to refer to as “abandoned projects”. These were projects that had been commenced the previous year, but for one reason or another hadn’t been completed by December. The basic problem was they had not been included in this year’s budget allocation. This had happened for a couple of reasons. The first was that, when the budget submission had been drawn up the previous June it had been expected that they would be completed, but either unforeseen delays had occurred that prevented this from happening, or contractors had somehow been paid for works that had not in fact been done. The other reason was that projects had simply dropped off the budget list once it had gone to DNPM. In both cases, without budget allocation this year, there was no currently available source of funds to finance their completion. In a number of instances, the contractors – either having been paid, or tired of waiting for funds to arrive and unable to afford to keep their teams and equipment on the job – had walked off. Some of them were now uncontactable.

In early March, at Paula’s instruction, David had prepared a briefing memo for the Secretary advising him of this situation, and seeking guidance on how to approach it. Notably, as with a number of other such documents I encountered during my time at the DHH, the memo contained an outline presentation of facts and issues, and some suggested possible courses of action, but no analysis of policy options or specific recommendations. It simply asked that the Secretary provide guidance. In response the Secretary called a meeting with Paula, David and their Deputy Secretary, Lawrence, to discuss it. The discussions, however, were not documented, and no clear agreed course of action had seemed to emerge. The practical result was that the problem was pushed back to Paula’s team to find solutions.

With DNPM pushing DHH to find strategies to finish the projects, the matter became a major focus of attention at IID’s Monday Divisional meetings, where Paula brainstormed with her team.

8.11 Information management and record keeping

Notably, all of the potential solutions that Paula offered to the problem of abandoned projects relied on one crucial ingredient: access to reliable and relevant information. That such information was generally in short supply was one of the most fundamental, ongoing challenges faced by the program. From the most fundamental practical point of view, this was in part due to constraints on resources available for the team to travel to visit the institutions, where they could meet and discuss issues directly with the institutions and contractors, as well as physically verify project progress. Funds for project-related travel came from DHH's administrative budget, and could not be drawn from program funds. Moreover, these had to be shared with staff from the Monitoring and Evaluation Division who also were required to visit projects for reporting purposes. Often, the M+E team would coordinate with IID to follow up issues on their behalf. Nevertheless, the lack of budget generally meant that the more remote institutions - typically the most problematic ones - could be visited at most once per year by a DHH staff member. Some were never visited.

The need to travel more to visit the institutions was frequently raised by staff. At one Monday meeting, David asked whether unspent trust fund money could be used for such a purpose. In response, Samuel said he would check with someone in the Finance Division to see whether there were funds left in the administrative components in these funds, as he was unsure if they were still available. But he indicated that, in response to a similar inquiry the previous year, he had been told that the funds couldn't be used for such a purpose. Paula then asked about another account involving Air Niugini: "Are we in charge of that account?" No-one knew. Thus, it seemed, not only did the team lack reliable, first-hand information on the projects, they lacked information-to-hand on the available means that would enable them to obtain such first-hand information. Nor, for that matter, did they have reliable information on what their actual needs were: as far as I was aware, no-one had ever developed a coordinated travel plan that would tell them what budget they would require, and how they might use available resources to best advantage.

However, the most serious obstacle to accessing necessary information was the lack of proper records management system. In this, DHH was not unusual. Accounts I had been given by advisers in other Government Departments suggested this was a near universal problem; one adviser informant, whose job took him to many different agencies, stated that it was commonplace to see large containers parked at the rear of Government Departments, filled to overflowing with weathered and rotting boxes of files. Others had talked about the perpetual struggle for staff to locate key files and documents within their agencies, up to and including copies of relevant pieces of legislation that governed their agency's mandate and operations.

In her previous role as EM of the Corporate Governance Division, Paula told me, she had attempted to address this problem within DHH by developing a Departmental document control policy. The situation she described as prevailing in DHH was similar to reports I'd heard of other agencies – key documents and files were distributed among staff, with no record of who they were given to, or where they subsequently went. When approaching someone to find a file, a common response would be: "I gave it to so-and so". Often, when individuals were transferred to another Division, or left the Department entirely, they left no instructions as to where to find files. Paula's draft policy had aimed to put in place some controls and guidelines to address the problem.

Unfortunately, with the restructure, her draft policy had languished. Instead, the Secretary had attempted to address the problem by instituting a "Paperless Office" policy. Henceforth, all key intra-Department documents and correspondence were to be electronic, and transmitted via email. Similarly, all external correspondence was also to be electronic where possible, and any incoming paper documents were to be scanned and stored electronically. This seemed to help, but only to a point. The first issue was a lack of necessary equipment. There was only once scanner on each floor of the Department. This discouraged people from scanning any documents unless absolutely necessary – particularly bulky ones like project reports and proposals, which were often bound, and could not easily be put back together. Similarly, aside from the one in the Secretary's Office, and another in the 4th Floor conference room, there were no screens installed in other rooms in the Department, and only one shared

projector on each floor. This meant that people still often needed to print out and photocopy documents in order to facilitate group access. However, the second issue was even more critical: there was limited available shared space on the Department's server. What had been made available to IID was already full; as a result, people were generally storing documents on their laptops, or on the personal server space. Moreover, the shared server as yet had no mandated file structure - and no file access protocols - which were yet to be developed. I was told that this task had been assigned to a particular staff member on the 4th Floor, but as yet nothing had progressed. Thus, unless people sent or received a document via email – and were later able to locate it – they had no access to each other's files, and probably couldn't locate them easily even if they did. So, if people moved jobs or left the Department, the same underlying problems were likely to occur.

Conscious of the problems inherent in this situation, Paula had tried a couple of solutions. Late the previous year she had approached the Department's ICT Manager to allocate more server space to IDD. He had promised to look into it, but then had gone on leave, and she had heard nothing since. Subsequently, as an interim measure, she had arranged for the purchase of several external hard drives, and had instructed her team to ensure that documents were saved on these. Her main solution, however, had been straightforward: soon after taking her job, she had sought special permission from Secretary to convert a large storage cupboard located next to her Office into a filing room. During the restructure, she had told me, people had suggested that boxes of files be thrown out. Instead, she had gathered copies of every physical IID file and document that could be located, placed them under lock and key, and imposed a strict access and sign-out policy on staff.

However, while providing a degree of control over key documents and records, the solution had its limitations. Firstly, the materials lodged in the filing room were only loosely organised: shelves full of ring-binders and documents grouped together under broad classifications – such as year, or project name - with their labels giving only general clues as to the specific contents they held. Second, the physical documents themselves represented only a fraction of the relevant materials, much of which was still held only in electronic form and had never been printed out. This lack of

organisation posed a continuing challenge for staff, who often came in to the office on weekends, or stayed late after business hours, to search for files to put together an urgent brief requested by the Secretary.

8.12 Documenting work

Above and beyond the question of accessing records, however, an even more fundamental issue was what staff chose to record, and why. Overall, this seemed to depend on the staff member, and their individual appreciation of the value and importance of documenting particular decisions, directives or actions in writing. This is an issue that I shall explore in greater detail in the next chapter. For present purposes, however, I will firstly note that more experienced officers seemed generally more conscious of the importance of documenting their work, and the basis for it. However, what was even more notable here is that that even this practice tended to focus on recording the specific decisions and directives that provided an authorising basis for their action, and who made or gave them, rather than the justifying basis for the decisions, directives and actions themselves. This was least problematic in relation to formal approvals that required specific delegated authority, and thus often required a specific form to be used – such as formal financial approvals, or decisions in relation to recruitment processes. Even here, however – as the previously mentioned Auditor General’s report on the operation of DHH’s financial systems attested – the substantiating basis for such decisions (such as relevant supporting documentation) was quite often omitted.²³

More problematic were situations where no prescribed format existed that required the recording of a decision or authorisation, or its substantiating basis. Thus, decisions might be taken simply based on verbal discussion – as with the Secretary’s budget allocation decisions. Alternately, memos might be drafted seeking a management decision, but – as mentioned above - these often commonly lacked substantive analysis that provided a basis for any specific recommendations. Moreover - unlike the case of the Secretary’s budget allocations – the subsequent decision itself was often

²³ According to my informants, this was also evidently the case with HR practices relating to such things as recruitment and promotion processes.

relayed verbally. Further, if the decision was taken by the Secretary, this was often relayed via feedback from an intermediate manager. As a consequence, if the decision or subsequent directive was to be documented, this needed to be done retrospectively. The easiest way to do this was via a confirmatory email to the relevant manager from the staff member concerned. However, such practices – even when used – only served to record the specific directive or decision, and the person who authorised it. The justifying basis for the decision or directive was usually left out.

The same sort of issues arose with respect to management decisions and directives that were unilateral, and not based on a request by staff. These, too, were often given verbally. Thus, for example, at a Monday Divisional meeting that was discussing the proposed agenda for a forthcoming Program Steering Committee (PSC) meeting, Paula noted that the Secretary had two or three times mentioned to her manager, Lawrence – the Deputy Secretary of the Partnerships Wing – that all infrastructure proposals that came in should go to the PSC for their approval. She took the opportunity to remind her team: “If you get verbal directions once, twice...You need to write that down on paper!”.

8.13 Formalising accountabilities

Notably, the specific example used by Paula to illustrate her point – the expected role of the PSC – raised another set of issues in relation to documentation: the question of formally documenting functional roles, responsibilities and accountabilities. Quite clearly, the Secretary’s directive had implications for the Terms of Reference (ToR) that had been established for the PSC. As part of my work, I had reviewed this existing ToR, and it had become evident to me that they were inappropriate for the program oversight role that the PSC members were expected to perform. Specifically, the existing ToR had been modelled on a set of ToR that were contained among the Secretary’s mandated project management templates. As such, they reflected the role of a Steering Committee for a specific project, rather than one charged with oversight of an entire program of such projects. Given this, the ToR left it unclear what the PSC’s broader program oversight role was supposed to be, not only in relation to the proposal approval process, but in other respects as well. Whether he was specifically

aware of this or not – and I doubted he was - the Secretary’s directive only reinforced my sense that the ToR needed to be updated, so that the functions of the PSC could be properly and accurately documented.

When I later broached this with Paula, she matter-of-factly acknowledged that she was aware that the ToR were inadequate, and needed updating. However, her response surprised me by continuing in a growing tone of exasperation and wry despair. Wasn’t this an issue that her manager Lawrence, as the PSC Chair, or the PSC’s designated Executive Officer – who worked in the Office of the Secretary - should follow up on? “Like, do I have to continue to do everything?”, she asked rhetorically. “Like, I can continue to do it and they’ll take it for granted, or I can leave it to them and they’ll somehow have to sort this.” Given her workload, I could certainly sympathise with Paula. However, it nevertheless struck me as somewhat ironic that the issue she pointed to - the respective roles and responsibilities of the PSC’s Executive Officer and Chair, vis a vis each other and herself - also seemed to also reflect an instance where accountabilities had not been clearly been defined, agreed and appropriately documented.

The absence of formalisation of roles and responsibilities notably created issues in two other cases that I became aware of. Both were also related to the distribution and management of workloads. The first was within IID itself. Soon after the restructure, when her new team had been assembled, Paula had reorganised responsibilities within her team. Rather than David’s three-person Project Management Branch being collectively responsible for oversight of all projects - as had been envisaged in their formal job descriptions - Paula had instead allocated responsibilities for oversight of projects under each of the four different institutional types to a separate officer. This meant that David and his team members each had responsibility for projects belonging to one of the different types of institutions, while the fourth type had become the responsibility of one of the officers in Samuel’s team. In addition, Paula had allocated to herself carriage of the special projects, which crossed the four institutional types. This undocumented change subsequently created a number of issues within and across the two teams, the implications of which I shall discuss on more detail in the next Chapter.

However, it also created issues for Paula, who found that the workload associated with the special projects became increasingly untenable. In response, towards the end of my stay at DHH, after discussing the issue with her Deputy Secretary, Lawrence, they approached the Secretary and obtained his approval to transfer responsibility for three of the special projects to the other Executive Managers within the Wing, on the proviso that adequate 'information sharing' would occur. This was discussed and verbally agreed at a meeting between Lawrence, Paula and the other Executive Managers, but again, was not formally documented in detail other than through a brief confirmatory email copied to relevant staff. In effect, the other EM's were to report to Paula with respect to these projects - an unusual situation that attracted comment from staff. I shall also discuss this in the next Chapter.

8.14 Approaching the challenge of reform

Coming as it did towards the end of my three-month work placement at DHH, however I was not able to observe the longer-term effects of this latter change in reporting lines. Nor, unfortunately, was I able to observe the impact of my own work on behalf of DHH. In addition to a several informal training sessions on proposal assessment – which, unfortunately had not achieved much in the way of concrete results - I had built on my analysis of IID's work practices to develop a range of tools that I hoped might be of use to Paula and her team. These included a draft set of policy and administrative guidelines for the proposal assessment process, a new draft assessment template and proposal evaluation guide, and a process map and timeline linking the proposal assessment and project implementation phases to the annual budget cycle, showing where I thought the PSC – and each of the 53 Templates - fitted into the process. I had also prepared some notes on what additional resources – human and financial – I judged might be needed to support the administration of the process, and some notes on further development of the tools.

Over the weeks I had had many conversations with Paula, and I knew that she was supportive of several of the changes I would be suggesting, though I was yet to clarify many of their practical administrative implications. Further, I was aware that she was already broadly moving in a number of directions consistent with my proposals.

However, a few weeks prior to my expected Departure, as I was in the process of finalising my work products, I learned to my surprise that she had already attempted to gain the Secretary's endorsement for a number of specific directives that anticipated several of my suggestions. She told me that earlier that year she had drafted a Circular for the Secretary to go out to all of the Institutions. The Circular had been sent in late February, around the same time the Circular on the 2020 budget process had been issued.

While this may have seemed to be good news, Paula was downcast. On being emailed a copy of the final Circular she had been dismayed and frustrated to find that it bore little resemblance to the version she had drafted. Much of the specific content had been removed, and the overall tone radically altered. The extent and significance of the Secretary's changes became readily apparent when I compared the two documents.

Paula's version of the Circular

Paula's version had been largely based on the key recommendations that had emerged from the PSC meeting the previous December. It commenced by stating that its objectives were to inform CEOs of the range of issues that were being experienced in the infrastructure program, and also to inform them of new approaches that were being taken by DHH to address these issues. In the first part the circular, Paula had then presented a detailed list of issues that Institutions needed to address, which had become familiar to me over the preceding weeks. These were grouped under five headings: Governance Issues, Capacity Issues, Land Issues, and Communications Issues. Among the specific items on the extensive list were: internal governance issues at the Institutions; political interference; lack of adherence to legal requirements in tendering and contract award, untimely and poor-quality reporting; lack of effective contract administration resulting in breaches; and a lack of communication and information sharing with DHH.

Following this list, the draft circular then set out 5 "reminders and refinements" in relation project processes that were aimed at helping to address the issues that had been identified. In introducing these, the draft stated:

It is imperative for respective heads of institutions to take stock and to comply with the refinements in the Project Implementation process put forward by [DHH].

The first of these ‘refinements’ was headed “Awarding of Contracts”. The related points clearly and succinctly set out the PSC’s recommendation: that established government procurement processes will henceforth be used, both for projects below and above the 500,000 kina threshold. Further, in text that was underlined, it stated that:

Any new contracts entered into by institutions and contractors outside of [DHH] knowledge and administration will not be honored.

Of the remaining four ‘refinements’, I was familiar with the background to three²⁴.

The first of these related to a recommendation by the PSC that, where Institutions had more than one project running at a time, they should set aside 10% of their budget to engage a professional project manager. This was consistent with established Government investment project funding guidelines, and was an initiative that would start the process of addressing the poor quality of project management by the Institutions. The second dealt with procedures for cost variations. In clear and direct language, it set out strict and mandatory conditions for the approval of such variations by DHH and the PSC:

Any deviations from the signed contract such as change of design, alterations to structures, change of type of construction material and methods, and other non-sanctioned construction work outside of the project scope will not be accepted.

All potential variations must be presented to [DHH] through writing. Any extra work executed without prior and formal notification to the [DHH] or to the Project Manager or Supervisor acting on behalf of the department will not be honored by [DHH].

The final ‘refinement’ dealt with the problem of unauthorised changes to a contract’s Scope of Works. Again the language was clear and direct:

²⁴ The fourth dealt with a question relating to ‘double dipping’ on reimbursements where external donor funds had been received for a project

Strictly there shall be no instructions, or any decisions for that matter made in any way or at any place to recourse or re-scope the initial Scope of Works.

Any changes both contractual and construction undertaken outside the consent of the [DHH] or persons authorized by [DHH] will be deemed as non-compliant and payments will not be honored by [DHH].

Overall, it appeared, Paula's draft had made a conscientious attempt to highlight in a frank and straightforward manner the many problematic issues that were plaguing the program, and also to clearly and firmly establish some basic remedies that institutions would be expected to comply with. This, I thought, was commendable. Later, however, when I reflected on the contents of Paula's draft, I noticed a couple of things that struck me as interesting and important. These related not so much to what was contained in the draft, but what was absent.

Firstly, with respect to what I thought was perhaps the most important element in the circular – the section of "Awarding of Contracts" – Paula's text simply asserted that, henceforth, procurement and contracting processes were expected to comply with Government regulations. However, no indication was given as to how DHH was expecting to verify that this had occurred, or what institutions would be required to do to enable this verification. Earlier in the year, the DoF had recommended that a DHH representative should sit on the Technical Evaluation Committee for any procurement process related to the infrastructure program. This was certainly one option, but it wasn't necessarily the only – or best – one. In the absence of such a verification process being spelled out, I wondered, how was this 'refinement' going to be implemented, and how would the institutions know what to do in order to ensure their compliance? It wasn't yet clear.

Second, on a similar level, the introduction of the requirement to now conform to government mandated procurement and contracting guidelines introduced a range of practical issues. In short, properly conducting such processes took time and planning – how was this going to be managed in a way that best aligned with the annual budget cycle, and did not create additional delays that could have a detrimental impact on DHH's ability to spend its annual budget allocation? What should the institutions be

advised in this respect? Further, given that institutions had often shown that they lacked the capacity and resources to properly design their projects in the first place, what support might they require or obtain from DHH in the planning phase to prepare a project for tender? I was aware that there had been some discussion in the PSC, and within IDD itself, to encourage institutions to use 'standard drawings' developed by various government agencies for different types of infrastructure, but these discussions were not yet very advanced. In sum, none of things were clear, either.

What was lacking in Paula's draft circular, therefore, were any guidance to institutions on how these aspects of the circular was to be operationalised, which reflected the fact that there were yet no firm supporting plans for putting in place the revised arrangements. This was where I hoped my work products might help to provide some further, albeit limited, guidance. However, aside from these practical concerns, what I found most notable about Paula's draft was the overall way in which it had been presented. No clear and explicit reasons had been advanced to justify and explain the proposed changes, either in the Draft circular itself, or in an accompanying memo to the Secretary. Indeed, many of the 'issues' that Paula had highlighted in the Circular had little to direct connection with the proposed 'refinements'. The circular had simply jumped from a long list of the issues that were creating problems for the program, to a description of the proposed 'refinements' – without explaining why the 'refinements' were specifically necessary and appropriate. These kinds of reasons were implicit in the document, but Paula had evidently not seen it as necessary to make them explicit. Moreover, there were no references to overarching principles such as 'accountability', 'transparency' or 'the need to ensure effective use of public money' that might have been used to frame a legitimating justification for the changes. The changes were presented as legitimate simply on the basis that they 'self-evidently' accorded with the government's rules and purposes.

The Secretary's version of the Circular

In the event, however, the Secretary's revised version of the circular made these concerns largely moot. The document was virtually unrecognisable from Paula's draft. Almost all that remained from the draft was the statement of objectives. Firstly, the

detailed list of issues Paula had painstakingly included had been taken out. What was left, towards the end of the document, was a list of the five headings she had used to group them together. Even more significantly, all five of her recommended ‘refinements’ or policy changes had also been completely removed. But what was perhaps most striking was the changed tone of the document: where Paula’s draft had expressed a tone that clearly set expectations of mandatory compliance from the institutions, the Secretary’s version instead sought to inspire a common vision and offer support and assistance.

Firstly, immediately following the list of the circular’s objectives, the Secretary had included an inspirational quote from an academic paper that extolled the potential contribution of the sector to human and economic development. It then noted, in a general sense, the existence of various challenges, and acknowledged – as did Paula’s draft – that “in most cases” these were “embedded within the [Institutions]”. Here, however, in place of Paula’s 5 ‘refinements’ the revised circular instead offered the Secretary’s 53 templates, and their accompany guidebook, as the solution to these challenges.:

Please find attached the Project Guidebook. If your Institution wants to deliver a projects [sic] on time and within budget, then this short guidebook will give you the knowledge you are looking for. By reading it, you will learn how to initiate, plan, execute and close projects properly.

The circular concluded:

Therefore as of this year for all projects, we will use [DHH’s] Project Guidebook and templates. Projects or reports submitted in a different form will not be accepted. However, if your Institution would need in-house training, please advise, as the [DHH’s] staff will be happy to conduct such training.

In short, the Secretary had reframed the circular as a generous and helpful offer of support. Instead of outlining a set of rules and emphasising their expected compliance, he had sought to engage and motivate the institutions with the gracious offer of a useful and valuable gift.

Paula and I subsequently speculated on the possible implications of the Secretary’s decision to abjure the recommendations of the PSC. Paula’s main concern was the

message that this might send to key PSC stakeholders, including the representatives from the influential coordinating agencies such as DNPM and the DoF. The draft circular, she emphasised, had been forwarded to the Secretary via the PSC Executive Officer, which underlined the fact that they were the source of its main recommendations. She was unsure how the powerful PSC stakeholders might react. I privately wondered whether the Secretary's main motivation was to cultivate favourable relationships with the Institutions, and build their support in the face of continuing criticisms from their line agencies on the PSC. Whatever the case, it was impossible for us to tell. More than a month had passed, and the Secretary had given no account of his reasons to Paula. If he had explained them to Paula's manager, Lawrence – who was, after all, the PSC Chair – they had not been passed on.

Chapter 9 - Culture at Work

In this chapter I offer further analysis, interpretation and commentary of my account of the DHH infrastructure program consistent with the methodological and theoretical considerations presented in Chapter 3. Specifically, I seek to account for the functioning of the program in terms of the underlying ethical orientations of the staff of the Department.

9.1 Summary analysis of the functioning of the DHH Infrastructure Program

In getting to the bottom of DHH's challenges in administering the infrastructure program, evidence for phenomena that I suspected might be an important part of the story proved largely absent. As noted in Chapter 2, the general reputation of many Government agencies in Port Moresby was that they were havens of wantokism, ethnicization and corruption, and this was felt to account in no small part for their poor performance. However, while each of these phenomena were acknowledged by staff to exist to varying degrees within DHH – and I saw and heard of examples of each – their influence was by no means pervasive, and did not seem to cause over-riding problems that systematically interfered with the general functioning of the organisation, or that of the infrastructure program in particular. As was often the case, it was David who most clearly articulated the general situation that I perceived to be operative in the Department. Commenting on his own changed perceptions of corruption and the influence of the 'wantok system' both before and after entering the public service, he noted:

And I've noticed that, OK what I've been told, that if you end up in public service this is the situation, this is the system you will be part of. But when I come in, and now being part of public service, it just dribbles down to the individual...you can choose to do what is right, and then...or choose not to. Particularly under this Department.

By and large it was my impression that, like David, the bulk of the officers I interacted with at DHH considered themselves 'ethical', sought to serve the interests of all Papua New Guineans, and generally chose to do what they thought was 'right'.

However, neither was it a case that the Department in general, or IID in particular, were critically under-resourced or lacking in staff. Aside from the perennial problem with travel budgets, a lack of human and financial resources did not seem to interfere dramatically with the ability of DHH staff to do their work. Overall, day-to-day work in the Department seemed to progress, though in many respects far from optimally. In general issues were addressed, people cooperated, and things got done - though often in a way that did not afford a clear resolution of issues.

Why, then, did the infrastructure program seem to pose such notable challenges for DHH? What were the underlying causes of its failures? One theory that I had quickly discounted was that these challenges could be simply or even mainly accounted for by a lack of 'project management capacity' among IID staff. As I learned, many staff across the Department admittedly often lacked specialist 'technical' skills, knowledge and experience required to understand and perform their roles fully effectively. Some in fact told me that they felt that they were better qualified to undertake other jobs in the organisation than the ones they had been assigned in the recent restructure. Most, including staff in IID, made at least some effort to learn on the job, undertaking research as best they could to find out what was needed to enable them to do any given task, or seeking advice and guidance from others. Moreover, much of the work involved in 'managing' IID projects was fairly routine administrative work, performed more or less capably by staff under broad direction from their managers: making calls, holding meetings, writing letters or memos, reviewing reports, filling out and processing payments forms, managing consultants. Further, they obviously understood the basic point of this work: to ensure that contractors did indeed build the approved infrastructure needed by DHH's partner institutions.

Thus, rather than the IID staff lacking 'project management capacity', as was widely suggested, the more immediate issue for the IID team was that they simply didn't understand how the project management templates mandated by the Secretary should be applied in the context of their work, or how they could get their institutional partners to use them. In part this was because the templates were overly

complicated, and used a range of unfamiliar jargon that was not fully explained in their slim 'guidance manual'. Further, they were not well suited to key aspects of the 'third party' administrative arrangements for most of the projects. Their unfamiliar reporting formats were not aligned with existing government formats, requiring extraneous information, and demanded far more practical work from low capacity stakeholder institutions than they did from DHH staff themselves.

However, the fact that the templates were not exactly 'fit for purpose', and that IID staff did not know how to apply them, did not in itself account for the existing situation. Rather, as the previous chapter endeavoured to show, the program was beset by a number of underlying issues, most of which had been relatively longstanding, and none of which would be readily solved by simply adopting the templates. Importantly, these issues were interacting in a way that meant that no one issue could be solved without considering its causal relationship to others.

Firstly, it was clear that many institutions were not able to prepare sufficiently robust, well-defined proposals that could serve as an adequate basis for guiding project implementation. Secondly, it was equally evident many institutions were not engaging reliable contractors using valid procurement processes, or managing them effectively with the aid of robust, 'standardised' works contracts that were the intended end point of such processes. Significantly, the first problem was a contributing cause to the second problem. Thus, on the one hand, the institutions proposals were often not detailed and robust to serve as a basis for a formal procurement and contracting process; while the resulting absence of robust contracts meant that they were ill-equipped - and sometimes unmotivated - to manage the often unreliable contractors they engaged with any degree of control or means of holding them accountable.

Third, however, a further issue was exacerbating DHH's ability to deal with the first two problems. This centred on the uncertainties in the budget process, in which outside interventions resulted in a final list of institutions and their allocations being ratified only in January. This effectively meant that the post-budget commencement

of project implementation was delayed by at best by several months while time was taken to obtain revised proposals and subject them to evaluation, 'improvement' and final DHH approval – after which, in theory, institutions would then have to go through a procurement process to engage a contractor, which would in turn lead to further delays.

In previous years, DHH had dealt with this set of problems largely by ignoring them. Firstly, rather than subjecting proposals to rigorous evaluation, either pre-or post-budget, in most cases they had pretty much approved whatever project idea the institutions had proposed, as long as the project's aims broadly fell within their overall policy and budget parameters and the amount of money they requested seemed proportional to their needs and those of others. Subsequently, to avoid contracting delays they had effectively allowed institutions to skirt the procurement rules. This had then not only led to the need to subsequently breach financial regulations in order to make payments, it had led to the program becoming mired in a range of implementation issues. On all counts, DHH had eventually been caught out by external stakeholders. Now, however, with a more rigorous post-budget proposal evaluation and 'improvement' process at least being attempted, another problem had been revealed: the standard of proposals was in many cases so weak that proposal finalisation and contracting could not be done in a realistic timeframe that would enable implementation of projects to commence in time for their completion by the end of the year.

Two sets of broad solutions to the program's underlying problems had been identified. Firstly, the previous year the Secretary had introduced his templates. By mandating the use of the templates, institutions (he believed) would be motivated and incentivised follow their guidance (with the support of DHH staff), and thus develop the knowhow to not only write a proposal, but also to implement proper procurement processes - as well as successfully execute all the other aspects of project management. This, I concluded, was an unrealistic expectation – but it was apparent that insufficient time had elapsed since the introduction of the templates to provide evidence that would demonstrate this to the satisfaction of the Secretary.

The second set of solutions that had been proposed had been outlined in Paula's ill-fated draft circular, largely in response to pressure from other stakeholders (i.e. the DoF and the PSC). Under this proposal, DHH would ensure that institutions followed mandated government procurement and contracting processes. Notably, however, while this was no doubt seen by both Paula and the external stakeholders as a means to improve implementation outcomes – by ensuring the engagement of more reliable contractors via more robust contracts, and insistence on the allocations of fund to engage specialised project managers – neither Paula nor the other stakeholders had considered the practical context of this insistence that the mandated rules be followed. That is, neither the practical *pre-conditions* that needed to be in place (i.e. that institutions had adequately specified project proposals that could be used as a robust basis for a public tender or recruitment of a project manager, or that DHH had specified the necessary administration arrangements that would enable them to validate the institutions' use of proper procurement processes), nor the practical *consequences* of implementing the rules in the absence of those preconditions (i.e. the likely further lengthy delays to the start of project implementation) had been explicitly considered. In short, the obligation to follow the rules was being asserted without considering the wider causal context in which they would be operating.

Notably, this manner of thinking about administrative action and its effects seemed to be characteristics of DHH's overall approach to the program. Rather than considering specific actions in the context of the program's overall means-ends causality, each stage in the overall process (i.e. proposal development and submission, initial proposal assessment, budget formulation, final budget allocation, proposal finalisation, procurement and contracting, implementation, monitoring) seemed to be considered in isolation, with perceptions of what needed to be done at each stage largely driven by DHH's obligations to meet the formal requirements of that stage in the overall process. Thus, while actors were oriented to the overall ends of the process – building infrastructure – no one was conscious of the way the specific elements in the process needed to fit together as a 'seamless whole' in order for the program to operate effectively. In this sense, the overall means-ends causality of the program had not

been subject ‘formal rationalisation’ in a Weberian sense, based on methodical and systematic analysis of that causality.

For example, the purpose of initially inviting institutions to submit proposals was viewed by DHH solely in the context of the formal requirements of the budget formulation process. The call for proposals enabled DHH to identify and propose for funding projects that were perceived to be aligned with its policy aims, such that it could make a budget submission to obtain approval for those projects. The purpose of the initial ‘pre-budget’ proposal evaluation process was thus not seen as connected to ensuring the establishment of conditions required for the timely tendering and effective implementation of the projects by institutions, which was much later in the process. As a result, no work was done at this stage to evaluate the capacity of the institutions, or to ‘refine’ or ‘improve’ the proposals. Indeed, given the fact that the list of projects that was submitted by DHH was likely to be significantly altered during the budget process, and that their initial notional allocations would have to be revised, *there was no real point in doing this* at the budget formulation stage: it would likely be wasted effort, both for DHH and the institutions. In this sense, the initial proposal assessments were thus mainly seen as a means to formulating a budget proposal that would be perceived to meet the formal requirements of the government’s budget process.

Following the finalisation of the budget - and the critical intervention by DNPM which resulted in a list of institutions different to those proposed by DHH - the subsequent ‘allocation’ process was driven by an immediate need to distribute available funds among the approved institutions to enable cashflow forecasts to be submitted, and in such a way that would be perceived as allocating an appropriate share of funds to each. Because of the lack of available information at that point (i.e. detailed, relevantly costed proposals), the limited time available, as well as the fact that the list of institutions had already been confirmed, the allocation itself had to be based on ‘formal’ considerations – that is, it could only be made on a ‘notional’ basis that reflected overall perceptions of ‘adequacy’ and ‘fairness’, rather than on a substantive assessment of the relative merits of the proposals, and an evaluation of the likelihood

that they would constitute a reliable investment of public funds. Subsequently, the call for re-submission of the proposals was instead seen by staff as a necessary means to align the proposals with their actual allocations, and improve the 'quality' of the proposals (defined as being in the Secretary's mandated format) - so that the project could be formally approved by DHH and payments to institutions could then proceed.

It was only at this stage, however, that the question of procurement and contracting arrangements arose as a practical consideration. It was here that differences in opinion had evidently emerged. Paula's view, responding to the expectations of external stakeholders and her own desire both to follow and be seen to follow the rules, was that DHH needed to insist upon the use of mandated procurement processes. For the Secretary, this appeared unnecessary: it could evidently be equally assured if the institutions properly applied his templates. In this sense, however, the procurement stage was simply seen by both in light of the *formal requirement* to engage adequately vetted contractors under appropriate contracts through relevant processes.

In practice, however, this way of thinking about the program meant that nowhere in the process were proposals evaluated for the purposes of ensuring that institutions were adequately evaluated and vetted for their capacity to implement their projects. In this sense, the way the entire process worked actually *prevented* DHH from being able to assess proposals and allocated funding on the basis of a comprehensive assessment of their substantive merit; that is, on the basis that that chosen institutions and their proposals would together constitute (or could, with adequate support and oversight, be made to constitute) *reliable means to optimally achieving the policy ends of the government*. Given the way the budget cycle and the project cycle interacted, there was simply no place where this task could effectively be undertaken in a way that was consistent with the existing processes and timetables. Remarkably, despite four years of implementation experience, it seemed that no-one had explicitly identified this as a problem, or had sought to identify either its causes or a possible solution.

The key issue, in this respect, was the DNPM intervention in the budget. It effectively meant that decisions on public investment in infrastructure were ultimately not being made - and indeed *could not be made* - on the basis of the 'rationally optimal' allocation and use of resources. From the perspective of an 'orthodox' ethic of bureaucracy, this situation could potentially have been addressed in a number of ways. Firstly, the absence of any endorsed formal funding guidelines for the program left wide scope for out-of-left-field 'political' interventions during the budget formulation process – a situation that created administrative headaches for the staff of IID. Developing some robust formal policy guidelines linked to broader existing Government policy priorities - and having them endorsed by the Minister and DNPM – may not have totally prevented such interventions, but at the least it would have provided some basis for the Department and its public service allies in DNPM to 'push back' against such requests. At very least it may have given them a stronger basis for requiring that such requests be submitted with accompanying relevant proposal documentation. Second, such guidelines would also have provided a clearer and more robust basis for DHH staff to both evaluate proposals and make allocations on the basis of 'merit' – one that could be grounded in a more formal, systematic and 'impartial' proposal evaluation method that could have also potentially provided a legitimating basis to 'push back' against political interventions, by 'de-legitimising' such interventions. Third, as part of such arrangements, an agreement could potentially have been reached with relevant government stakeholders that a portion of the program's funds be formally allocated to 'priority political initiatives', perhaps with their own set of implementation arrangements, leaving the remainder of the program to be 'rationally' administered. Fourth, with greater certainty that their initial budget proposals would survive the budget process, DHH would have been in a better position to invest time and effort to work with institutions to improve their proposals and bring them to a 'tender ready' state, both before and immediately after final budget was confirmed. And fifth, documented policy guidelines and related administrative arrangements would of course have also provided a basis for more comprehensive and specific guidance to institutions on the required form and content of their proposals, likely reducing the time consuming need to seek revisions.

In sum, solutions to the problems of the program could have been potentially been effected by 'orthodox' means of 'rational formalisation'. Notably, however, my observations of the way in which DHH staff and management generally went about their work suggested, at best, an ambivalent attitude to formalisation. While there was a general acknowledgment of the legitimacy of *existing* formal policies and rules – at least notionally – the practice of developing *new* and *additional* policies and rules of different kinds to precisely govern and legitimate cooperative administrative action was not something that was taken particularly seriously, or even seen as a necessary part of effective bureaucratic practice.

Thus, for example, the Secretary had not considered it necessary to develop a specific policy framework for the Infrastructure program, either to guide his staff in the proposal assessment process or to guide institutions in the preparation of proposals. Indeed, he did not see it as necessary to formalise any kind of additional guidance to institutions with regard to the proposal submission and evaluation process beyond the bare bones instructions contained in his budget circular. In the same fashion, the terms of reference that had been developed for the Program Steering Committee were inadequate, such that the PSC's precise role in program coordination and oversight – including the allocation process – was left somewhat vague and undetermined. In the same vein, I observed several instances where role allocations among staff, along with their specific accountabilities, had not been formally documented. Finally, neither were there formalised administrative processes or systems – such as a detailed filing and records management system, or even a basic system for tracking IID's payments – that could adequately support reliable and timely access to information. Often, where some degree of formalisation was attempted, this was because it minimally met a perceived formal requirement or expectation. In these cases, people often used 'what was to hand' as a resource, but without thinking through and abstracting was precisely required from a substantive 'means-ends' point of view. This was the case with both the PSC ToR and David's proposal assessment methodology – both of which borrowed heavily from the Secretary's templates.

In all these ways, the way the program operated did not demonstrate a high degree of ‘formal rationality’ in a Weberian sense. Correspondingly, neither did it operate in a manner that exemplified the ‘orthodox’ principles of ‘impartiality’, ‘accountability’ and ‘transparency’ outlined in Chapter 4. In the first instance, even under the restricted circumstances in which it was undertaken, the process by which allocations were made did not reflect an ‘impartial’ process i.e. one undertaken in accordance with a formally constituted method that precisely specified clear evaluation criteria and ensured their consistent application to each of the proposals. Nor did the allocation process reflect orthodox principles of ‘transparency’ and ‘accountability’, in terms of the Secretary making publicly available evidence of the specific means-ends ‘rationale’ that was the justifying basis of allocation decisions, and which would enable independent evaluation and validation of the decision-making process and its results against relevant policy objectives. Rather, he simply asserted that the results of the allocation process were ‘fair and adequate’ – an assertion that was evidently expected to be evaluated and validated simply by observing the results themselves.

In a similar fashion, many of the Department’s practices were inconsistent with the requirements of ‘orthodox’ interpretations of principles of ‘accountability’ and ‘transparency’. Thus, for example, it did not appear to be general practice for any justifying basis or rationale for ‘non-routine’ decisions and directives to be explicitly formulated and documented. Rather, it was more usual for staff to simply document the decision or directive, and the identity of the person responsible for it. It even appeared that many ‘routine’ decisions that required such documentation – such as finance approvals involving payments to contractors – were often made on the basis of inadequate justifying evidence, and thus absent an appropriate legitimating ‘rationale’. However, these issues were further exacerbated the general lack of management attention to providing adequately formalised filing and record management systems. This meant that the enabling conditions for practices of ‘accountability’ and ‘transparency’ were decidedly problematic, not only leading to significant inefficiencies, but often making it difficult if not impossible for anyone – whether DHH staff or their stakeholders and clients – to be ‘impartially held to account’ even on the basis of what *had* been documented.

More generally, the absence of precise formalisation meant that ‘accountabilities’ were often inadequately specified, and that as a consequence it was also unclear on what basis various actors in various situations were being ‘held to account’, or to whom they were accountable - or indeed even if they were being held to account at all. This was not only the case with PSC ToR, or the allocation of roles and responsibilities within IID itself, but with such things as the timing and methods of the post-allocation proposal evaluation process or even the measures that Paula put in place to organise IID’s filing.

In sum, endeavouring to clarify specific accountabilities would have involved a recognition that both the abstract and practical formalisation of relevant and sufficiently precise policies, rules, roles and plans was a ‘rationally desirable’ - and thus a legitimate and necessary - means for causally effecting reliable organised concerted action in optimal pursuit of the program’s desired ends. Such process of formalisation, of course, would have initially involved any proposed policies, rules, roles and plans being actively informed, examined and contested by relevant actors; but this too, would ideally have been done ‘rationally’, based on relevant principles and evidence. Perhaps most critically, however, once accepted and formally endorsed by relevant authorities on such a legitimating basis, the success of such a process of formalisation would have required a recognition by relevant actors that its products - the authorised policies, rules, roles and plans - effectively constituted both practically required and ethically binding obligations for them to cooperate as fully as possible in compliance with their encoded intentions. Any subsequent decisions and action made in relation to the program - along with their resulting effects - would thus only be recognisable as legitimate to the extent they were subject to, and informed by, the precise evaluative considerations specified in the relevant formalisations. To fail to recognise and act on such mandatory obligations to act in compliance with their optimising intentions would thus mean becoming legitimately subject to correction, censure or sanction.

As argued in Chapter 4, ‘rational’ organisational formalisation involves a certain ethical orientation. Specifically, it demands the willingness and capability of actors to

impartially and autonomously subject themselves – and others - to a precisely formulated regime of abstract deontological obligations constituted under a formally guided, optimising means-ends rationality. This serves to constitute a certain kind of relationship: a type that forms the basis for legitimate cooperative action in a bureaucratic organisation. As the discussion thus far has endeavoured to show, in general terms, staff at DHH did not generally evaluate, contest, justify and legitimate cooperative action and its resulting effects on the basis of ‘formally rationalised’ intentions and obligations. In the absence of such ‘formally rationalised’ approaches to evaluating and accounting for their intentions and actions, what therefore ultimately legitimated, motivated and regulated their efforts at cooperation?

I turn to investigating this question in the remainder of this chapter. I begin by examining the way in which IID staff interpreted the notions of ‘accountability’ and ‘transparency’.

9.2 Representations of accountability and transparency (but not impartiality)

The adjectives ‘accountable’ and ‘transparent’ (and associated nouns ‘accountability’ and ‘transparency’) were sometimes used by my informants in the course of their everyday work, most often with reference to the conduct of contractors or institutions, or less usually in reference to their own practices. In my interviews with staff working on the infrastructure program I asked them to tell me what they thought ‘accountability’ and ‘transparency’ meant, and what they involved.

Firstly, with respect to accountability, Paula told me:

Answerability.... The reporting structure. I mean, what you are given, the work you are given, and... I guess in respect to the business, the processes that are there, and taking ownership and responding according to the set processes...

Paula’s response revealed several dimensions of her understanding. Firstly, the notion of “taking ownership” suggests her core focus was on the obligation to take personal responsibility, or accept personal liability, for completing work one has been “given”,

that is, to make the task 'one's own'. Second, such work was "given" by someone in a formal position to direct or assign such work, and to whom one was "answerable" for one's actions. Third, but equally importantly, for Paula "taking ownership" also involved a sense of obligation to ensure that the work is performed in accordance with the relevant rules.

This language of 'accountability' as "taking ownership" of one's work was echoed by others. Lawrence, Paula's manager, in contrast emphasised that this involved the need to take 'ownership' of the *results* of one's work, including publicly acknowledging work that failed to meet expectations:

Well... accountability is maybe taking ownership, taking ownership of what we do. So, if you have an activity, for instance, projects...If you are accountable to implementing our activities...if it goes well, we're happy; if it goes wrong we still must take ownership, say we made a mistake here, we didn't do what...as we... and being accountable. Owning up, and acknowledging that, "Oh, yeah, that was my work", instead of shying away.

This sense of having an obligation to "own up" to one's actions, and to acknowledge responsibility or liability for the results of those actions, was also stressed by David, the Manager of IID's Projects branch. David's overall definition of accountability, however, also included the element of 'rule following' that had been emphasised by Paula:

Accountability generally means that I have to be honest, and own up at certain point if something is wrong. And I know that this is my responsibility, I haven't implement what is...according to set procedures that I come to a final result. If I get a result it is not to what is required, or to that requirement, I have to own up...

Notably, despite their differences in emphasis, the way in which 'accountability' was understood by Paula, Lonnie and David emphasised a 'personalised' sense of accountability: that is, rather than being centred on the notion of an actor being required to have and give an 'impersonal' *rationale* for their actions, it was one in which evaluations of the appropriateness of an actor's judgment and action centred on the personal ethical qualities or properties of the actor, and whether their ethical

agency was both actively oriented to recognising - and capable of meeting - legitimate expectations and obligations. In this sense, for Paula, Lonnie and David, “taking ownership” of one’s work, and “owning up” if those expectations and obligations were not met, signified to oneself and others that one possesses the appropriate ethical qualities and agential properties.

A somewhat different approach to defining ‘accountability’ was taken by Ernest, a member of David’s team. Unlike the others, Ernest did not employ metaphors of ‘ownership’ in his description; rather, he emphasised considerations of ‘fairness’ with respect to meeting one’s work obligations:

Accountable is you must be fair in the everyday dealings, everyday involvement, not only financially but what you are doing. You must be accountable for what has been given to you....Like, somebody gives me a task to do, I must complete it. That means I am accountable. ... I can factually get the job done, on a time given. ...Accountable must do, where it’s due.

He further explained, by way of example:

Accountability, meaning there is a workplan. Workplan is in place already. So, if you getting the job done, be fair, and say “For this one, this one, I’ve done this one”. If you haven’t done it, be fair. “I haven’t done this one”

Notably, however, in emphasising that meeting one’s work obligations was ‘fair’, Ernest was also implicitly emphasising an aspect of ‘ownership’: one was responsible for doing the tasks that were ‘given’ and were legitimately *one’s own*, in manner that accorded with legitimate expectations of what was ‘due’. ‘Accounting’ for one’s actions meant being ‘factually’ honest about whether one’s work had been completed in accordance with such expectations and obligations.

The personalised sense of Ernest’s understanding came out even more strongly when I asked him about the meaning of ‘transparency’:

You must be transparent, in your dealings, in way you approach people, people must see you as being a transparent [person]...]... So, in my dealing, in

whatever I say, whatever I do, I must be accountable. They must see me as who I am.

Here, Ernest's reference to 'being seen' to be transparent seemed to echo the language of Philip, (the local government adviser whose account was presented in the case study in Chapter 7), for whom 'transparency' reflected a relational property of the person. I asked Eric to clarify further what he meant by 'being transparent':

Meaning truthfulness. Be fair. Then accountable comes in. You must be accountable. Then you are transparent. If you are not truth in what you are saying, if you are not truth, faithfulness to your job, faithfulness, truthfulness, and then your commitments to what you are doing, then you are not transparent. Transparent doesn't mean someone will see you from the inside, see your internal organs functioning. No. Transparent in what you are engaged to do. Like, if I'm telling you another thing, and I'm telling somebody another thing out there, then I'm not transparent.

Here the personalised and relational sense of Ernest's understanding seems evident. Once again, this did not involve an obligation to make public the evidentiary basis of one's judgments and actions (i.e. one's rationale or "reasons"), but an obligation associated with qualities of one's motivating intentions with respect to the other. This involves a focus on the personal ethical properties or qualities of the agent: their "truthfulness" and "faithfulness".

A more idiosyncratic but equally revealing description of 'transparency' was given to me by David:

Transparency...it's just sometimes when you start doing something you have already done it up in your mind, and in that process that's different thinking, thoughts that come through, OK, you can do this, you can do that way, and either way there's consequences and benefits. So being transparent, regardless of those thoughts that come through, I have to do something that is according to set rules, though I have thoughts. For instance, I might be tasked to do a certain report, about a project back in [my Province], but because I'm from there, there might be thoughts in my head that if I give a very negative report, and you know... it might [affect] ... development in that Province. So these are the thoughts that comes in my mind before I actually do the work. So If I'm being transparent, I'm putting those thoughts aside and doing the right thing.

Again, like Ernest, David's understanding of transparency did not relate to the practice of making publicly available the substantiating evidentiary basis of one's judgment and actions. Rather, transparency involves the practice of ensuring that one's motivating intentions correspond to legitimate obligations (i.e. those encoded in the "set rules") - specifically in circumstances where one's actions will have consequences for one's own and others interests. Transparency, in David's sense, thus again primarily described an ethical quality or property of the agent.

Notably, David's interpretation of 'transparency' can in some ways be seen as more akin to the notion of 'impartiality', insofar as it suggests a sense in which one's judgments and actions in relevant cases should be guided by rules so as avoid undue 'bias' or favour'. From an 'orthodox' perspective, however, the notion of impartiality also includes a dimension of cognitive adequacy. In this sense, in terms of the account of presented in Chapter 4, an 'impartial' report would be one that strove to be epistemologically 'objective' by ensuring that all relevant facts were explicitly evaluated on the basis of relevant formal considerations, such that the results of these evaluations supplied valid 'impersonal reasons' for one's conclusions and recommendations. David's definition of 'transparency', in contrast, did not include this dimension of 'cognitive adequacy' – it only involved 'putting aside' thoughts that might motivationally bias one's intentions in an undue manner in favour of certain particular interests.

Significantly, when I asked David what he thought 'impartiality' meant, he replied with a common colloquial definition: "No fear, no favour". In itself, such a definition was consistent with the character of the definitions of 'accountability' and 'transparency' that he and others had provided, in that it, too, focuses on the motivating intentions of the agent. However, unlike the terms 'accountability', 'transparency' and 'fairness', the term 'impartiality' was not in active use within the DHH – at least, in my time at the Department I never heard or saw it used. I asked one Executive Manager if she thought this was a valid observation, and if so, why it might be the case. She agreed that it was true, but was unsure of the reason:

Maybe...just because in this environment the word accountability and transparency are used over and over again, so people just sort of stick to that.

In short, the term 'impartiality' was simply not a part of the Department's discourse.

These interpretations of the core ethical concepts associated with bureaucracy, I suggest, are consistent with the general DHH staff practice of not documenting the specific 'rationales' for decisions, directives and related actions. It also helps to explain why requests for decisions or directives were not themselves usually formulated in terms of a clear written argument or 'rationale', based on methodical or logically structured analysis of means-ends causality. Quite simply, staff were not oriented to a notion of 'accountability' that established such practices as an ethical obligation.

In practice, therefore, rather than 'thinking through' the means-end causality of a problem in advance, and making it explicit in writing to enable their manager to evaluate and validate it as part of their decision-making process, staff tended to identify issues for consideration and possible courses of action. Usually, though not always, their manager would call them in for discussion – often along with others possessing relevant knowledge of the situation - and further problem analysis then took place verbally, issuing in a decision and verbal instruction. This outcome was legitimated in practice by a combination of consensus and positional authority. With respect to documenting the outcome, however, the general practice was to ensure only that the identity of the decision maker, and the specific substance of the decision or directive for action, was documented. Further, this was usually done after the fact, and at the initiative of the officer who had sought the decision or directive from the manager.

This is consistent with an interpretation of accountability as "taking ownership". In effect, by making sure that "ownership" of a decision is properly ascribed to the formal decision-maker, if something later goes wrong – or is subsequently revealed to have been improper – the staff member responsible for executing the decision is free from blame. This suggests that the practice of *documenting* decisions and directives was not

motivated by a broader sense of accountability centred on the need to independently evaluate and validate the optimal use of public resources, and thus to evaluate and validate the intended means-end causality behind the decision or action. Rather, it reflects a primary motivating concern with potential personal consequences of being perceived to have been 'responsible' for an improper or ill-judged decision or action, including being subject to negative evaluations of one's capabilities and motivating intentions.

Given these 'personalised' definitions of core ethical concepts, and their implications for the explicit formulation and recording of justifying means-ends 'rationales', I now wish to examine the attendant sense of motivating obligation that appeared to characterise everyday interactions between staff where issues of 'accountability' were at stake. I approach this through the presentation of a vignette.

9.3 Oscar's story

Oscar had a habit of disappearing from his desk. As a Coordinator in the Projects Branch of IID, he was responsible for oversight of a number of key projects, and was expected to be around when contractors came to visit, or when meetings were called with key Departmental stakeholders to discuss project-related matters. His frequent absences were a source of some frustration for Paula as his Division Manager. Paula told me that when she went out to the floor of the office, "like, half the time I'm going there and I'm seeing he's not there." Sometimes, she said, he simply didn't turn up to meetings, both internally and externally, leaving his colleagues to shoulder the responsibility. She had a high regard for the young man's abilities: "He's smart". The problem was with his attitude: "He's too laid back, and it's just the immaturity, it's just showing, like...he can't sit still and work."

However, Oscar's behaviour was only part of Paula's concern. Indeed, a number of supervisory and collegial relationships within the Division were under strain. Paula also told me that Oscar's behaviour was not being adequately checked by his immediate

formal supervisor, David. David had only joined the public service relatively recently and, Paula acknowledged, was lacking confidence. And Ernest, who occupied the most junior position in David's small unit but was older than both David and Oscar – and who had unsuccessfully applied for a promotion to the two more senior positions during the Departmental restructure - had little regard for either of his more formally senior colleagues. He claimed to be working directly to Paula, rather than to Oscar and David. Paula acknowledged that her pragmatic decision late the previous year to alter work responsibilities across the team in a way that cut across the team's documented formal functions and position descriptions had complicated the situation. She summarised her challenge: "I'm just trying to establish the reporting lines, as well as the respect."

As if to confirm Paula's account of Oscar's behaviour, a week or so later I ran into him one morning as I entered the office elevator. He was with a young woman, who I guessed was also in her early twenties; they had come up from the ground floor where the car park was located. In response to my friendly query he said they had been out in the Departmental vehicle organising a "gathering" for the forthcoming weekend. I asked if it was work-related. He responded ambiguously that it "kind of was", but that it was also family-related. I asked if he was related to the young woman. He said yes. At that, the conversation was cut short as the doors opened onto the 3rd floor where our desks in the Infrastructure Implementation Division were located, and I departed the scene, leaving Oscar and his companion to travel on mysteriously to the 4th floor above.

A couple of weeks later, in another conversation with Paula, I gleaned some further information that shed light on young Oscar's unaccountable comings and goings. His step-father, she revealed to me, was the manager of the Department's vehicle fleet. It seemed that Oscar was often out in a Department vehicle running errands. Whether these errands were related to personal or Departmental business was left unstated. But Paula said she had remonstrated with his step-dad, telling him that if he wanted a driver she would be happy to release Oscar, because she needed a program manager. She also indicated she'd sent an email to Oscar with some stern words about his

attendance issues and lack of time discipline. She indicated that the forthcoming round of formal individual staff Performance Appraisal sessions would enable her to clarify her expectations and “put her foot down”.

A couple of weeks later I was interviewing Paula for the last time before my scheduled departure from the Department. The subject of Oscar came up again. She talked about one-on-one chat she had had with him. She showed me the polite but firmly worded follow-up email she had sent to him. It read, in part, “I expect more proactiveness and response from Coordinators...Please start taking your responsibilities seriously...I think I have given you enough time to settle down and appreciate the activities within the Division.” I asked her if she had received a response. She said she hadn’t, but she felt she had seen some change in his behaviour. But it was also clear she felt that there was more needed.

Paula expressed some sympathy for Oscar, even though his behaviour was not new. Officers from the Department’s Division where he had previously worked had in fact asked Paula how she was finding him. Paula provided the context for their inquiry: she explained that she had something of reputation in the Department, and the other Officers were curious about how the situation with Oscar was going. When I jokingly asked Paula if she was seen as a bit of a “hard ass”; she laughed, but didn’t disagree. Her approach to Oscar, she said with a grin, was a case of “me being nice. This is me being *very* nice!”

She continued to relate her conversation with Oscar’s former colleagues: “ ‘He’s a good worker’, I told them. ‘He just needs to sit his butt down and work’ ”. She said she had also told them he “very much reminded me of myself”. She explained: “I just need sometimes...to move around a bit and then come back and concentrate.” But she also thought that his behaviour was in part due to the fact that his previous supervisors had not managed to get him to settle into better habits. Paula felt that it was representative of a more general problem among some junior staff that reflected a failure of proper supervision:

“And I guess because, you know, when they came in and what not, and they’re just left, and they think that it’s OK, they can just go out, or, you know...’OK, now I’m in the position I can just ...’ You know, they’re secure. They feel secure in the position... they’ve been appointed. ‘I’m definitely going to be paid, it doesn’t matter if I’m sitting there or not...’”

Paula told me that she prior to sending the email to Oscar she had also remonstrated with his line-manager, David, about his approach to managing Oscar: “Don’t let me be sending emails to officers, put a foot down...!” But then, she said, she had sent the email anyway. She said she had copied David in, but had toned down the language from her original draft, worried that David might “read too much into it”. David, she said, “is a sensitive fellow, too!”

As I reflected on this, I thought about Oscar’s relationship to his step-father. I suggested to Paula that the family and kinship relationships between many officers in the Department must make management of others a challenge. Her response took me by surprise:

“Like, for me, I’d be seen as Oscar’s big sister.”

She proceeded to explain. The tie was not one of blood, but the two families were very close. They had lived in the same village in Paula’s home Province. Paula’s father had been a Forestry officer, and had been away on work when her mother was due to give birth to Paula. She had been delivered in Oscar’s step-father’s house. She now called him Uncle. With her father away a lot, she grew up in her adoptive Uncle’s home. The relationship was so close, Paula said, that “I grew up knowing them as mum and dad. I never addressed [him] as uncle, they were like mum and dad.” After a while he had moved away to Port Moresby and remarried, and when she came to the city to attend university, he came to check on her and make sure she was OK. She had not known that her adoptive Uncle had adopted another son – Oscar - until she joined the Department. Now Oscar was working in her Division.

I had learned that such *wantok* connections were not uncommon in the Department – as with the PNG public service generally - but I was mildly surprised that it had taken me so long to learn of Paula’s connection with Oscar and his step-father. I asked Paula if her relationship to her Uncle made it easier or harder to ask him to stop giving Oscar access to the Departmental vehicles. “Easier”, she replied. But she insisted that she would say the same thing to anyone in the same position. Based on my interactions with Paula over the previous three months, I believed her. Did her relationship to Oscar give her any advantages in dealing with him? She smiled. According to Paula, the staff in Oscar’s previous section had said:

“ ‘He’s with the Big Sister now... she’ll deal with him.’ Like, that’s how they’re saying...”

In the event, Paula’s immediate problem took care of itself. The next day - my final day in the Department - I was told by Ernest that Oscar had just his license suspended for reckless driving.

9.4 Interests, obligations and personal standing: managing one’s relationships and reputation

For the staff of DHH, managing cooperative relationships was a central part of their day-to-day work. For Paula, this meant not only managing her own relationships - both with her staff as well as others in the Department - but managing the relationships between and among her staff as well. In what follows I wish to examine what the preceding vignette reveals about character of those workplace relationships, and the terms and conditions under which they were constituted and managed.

Firstly, the vignette centres on various direct and indirect accountability relationships, including a number in which Paula sought to gain the cooperation of others in a manner consistent with their formal work obligations. What is notable about Paula’s interactions with others, I suggest, is the language she used to assert her claims to be entitled to others’ cooperative action. These claims were consistently articulated in the first person, rather than in neutral ‘third person’ terms. That is, rather than

reminding others of their formal obligations to the rules or the interests of the organisation, her appeals for cooperation were cast in *personalised* terms:

- “*I expect more proactiveness and response from Coordinators... I think I have given you enough time to settled down...*” [more neutrally: “More proactiveness and response is expected from Coordinators and you have had enough time to settle down...”]
- “*Don’t let me be sending emails to officers...*” [alternately: “It is not appropriate that I should be sending emails to officers...”]
- “*I need a program officer...*” [alternately: “Oscar is employed as a program officer, not a driver...”]

In effect, Paula was asserting claims to entitlement to others cooperation on the basis of the perceived legitimacy of her *personalised positional interests* – interests that arose by virtue of her formal position in the organisation, and which were being affected by the way in which others were conducting themselves with respect to their own positions. In this sense, other’s failure to act in a manner consistent with their own formal role obligations, and “take ownership” of their work - whether to attend meetings, manage their staff, or properly manage the use of Departmental vehicles - were impacting upon her ability to fulfil her responsibility to her own job. As such, she was pointing out that her legitimate personal interest in meeting and being seen to meet her formal obligations was conditional on others’ meeting theirs, and that they thus either directly or indirectly had an obligation *to her* to do their jobs properly. In this sense, the underlying sense of ‘duty’ to that Paula was invoking in ‘holding others to account’ was grounded in a generalised sense of *mutual obligation*: one in which she was asserting other’s obligation to recognise and respect *her* legitimate role interests, and her specific claims to entitlement to their cooperation, by meeting *their own* obligations to properly perform their own roles, in accordance with the general rules, policies and standards of the DHH and the public service generally.

Given the personalised character of her claims, Paula thus needed to be in a position to credibly make such claims in a way that could influence others’ action. Notably, despite being in a management role, there was little she could directly do to threaten

or impose sanctions or penalties on others for their failures to comply. In this respect, she lacked significant overt positional power. However, what limited overt power she had, she notably did not seek to use (I shall return this below). Her ability to legitimate her personalised claims was therefore reliant on two other dimensions of the situation: firstly, the existence of a normative framework that was shared with other actors, and second, her personal credibility as an actor within that normative framework.

In relation to the second of these, Paula *was* a credible actor – she had a general reputation for consistently judging and acting in accordance with relevant rules and standards, and for meeting role expectations. She was also known for equally expecting others to do the same. In this sense, in her own eyes and the eyes of others she possessed the requisite general ‘standing’ to give her personalised positional claims credibility. Importantly, however, the ‘moral authority’ that came with this reputational standing was not something she could simply assert. In particular, her standing with her team members also depended on her success in establishing and maintaining respectful inter-personal relations.

Thus she was careful to cultivate such relations through polite but firm language that sought to elicit or exhort others’ voluntary cooperation in a manner that indicated her recognition of, and respect for, others’ personalised interests and ethical agency. In the case of Oscar, this included a reminder to him that she had given him “enough time” to recognise his responsibilities; for David, a willingness to tone down the wording of her email, as well as an exhortation to not “let” her be sending emails. Similarly, she signified her recognition of Uncle’s interests and agency by expressing her willingness, albeit rhetorically, to release Oscar if he “needed a driver”. This general approach to cultivating cooperative relations was a marked feature of her approach to her staff, exemplified by her manner of conducting IID’s Monday morning Divisional meetings: she addressed her senior managers, Samuel and David, as “Mr X” and “Mr Y”; always respectfully sought their views and those of other staff, and consistently issued directives to her team - including *frequent* ‘important’ reminders about attendance, timeliness and deadlines - as polite requests or exhortations for

cooperation that acknowledged the challenges they were all facing, rather than as straightforward imperatives or commands, or even as reminders to staff of their simple obligations to comply with rules.

Indeed, it was a breakdown in such relations of mutual respect between her staff that she was now having to repair. David, uncertain in his role and not communicating effectively or authoritatively with the members of his team, had failed to earn standing and credibility with Ernest and Oscar. Taking advantage of the ambiguities created by Paula's informal and undocumented reorganisation of role responsibilities, Ernest had unilaterally decided that he was no longer required to formally report to David, but was reporting directly to Paula instead. Oscar, meanwhile, was taking advantage of David's inexperience to simply ignore his work obligations and disappear in the Department vehicle.

Here, however, the success of Paula's personalised strategy in each case depended on the orientation of the other party to the formal rules. David and Ernest both considered the rules legitimate and were both sensitive to their own obligations to comply with formal norms and performance standards. They also respected Paula's claims to positional-relational standing within that normative framework and wished to maintain her respect. As such, her strategy in making personalised claims was relatively unproblematic: given their respect for her standing, she could reasonably expect that they would seek to comply, and would be motivated to 'live up' to her legitimate personal expectations. However, for actors such as Oscar and his step-father – for whom wantok interests evidently outweighed the notional legitimacy of the formal rules – the legitimacy of Paula's claims to their cooperation would not have been as secure. It was thus fortunate for Paula that she was able to leverage her relation as a wantok to gain their cooperation. In effect, as she acknowledged, in this situation being a wantok made it "easier": knowing that Paula was a credible actor who took the rules seriously, and that she knew *that they knew* they were also supposed to respect the rules, they presumably understood that refusing to cooperate with her 'formally' legitimate claims would risk losing her respect and would likely damage valued personal relations.

What is also notable, however, is that Paula did not seek to point out to either Oscar or her Uncle that their use of the vehicles was illegitimate. Nor did she or anyone else in the Division seek to report the situation to relevant authorities within the organisation, or make a formal record or complaint about Oscar's frequent absences – despite the fact that his behaviour had been going on for months and his use of the Departmental vehicles and his relationship to the vehicle manager was well known to other Divisional staff. In this sense, though Paula knew that her Uncle and Oscar were breaking the rules, she did not seek to hold them to account for this – or to use her positional power to get others to hold them to account. This, I suggest, was consistent with her personalised approach to accountability. In short, these aspects of the situation were not her personal concern – it was not their rule breaking *per se* that was of primary importance, but only the consequences of that rule breaking for her own legitimate positional interests. Her focus was on getting Oscar to “take ownership” of his responsibilities, and to get David to “take ownership” of his management responsibilities with respect to Oscar; it was someone's else's job to “take ownership” of the task of holding her Uncle to account for breaking the rules and providing Oscar access to the vehicles.

In this sense, the significance of other actors' deontological obligation ('duty') to perform their roles (i.e. exercise their positional entitlements) in appropriate ways was not evaluated by Paula from a 'disinterested' third-person causal perspective. Paula was being 'fair', but not by being 'impartial'. From such a perspective, the significance of judgment and action is evaluated with respect to its conformity to an abstract, 'person-independent' deontological duty formally encoded in the rules, and which is 'justified' as binding by virtue of its contribution to the constitution of a desired 'impersonal' means ends causality. From this 'impersonal' perspective, Paula herself - as well as others in her team - would as “good bureaucrats” have had to recognise an individually constituted ethical obligation to report her relatives' breach of duty (i.e. report the fact that they were using public resources as a means to illegitimate ends, and thus acting against the interests of the state). I suggest, however, that Paula's and others' evaluations were primarily cast in terms of how her relatives' judgement and

action with respect to that duty were perceived to affect the substantive legitimate personalised positional-relational interests that were seen to be at stake in the concrete situation. This, I suggest, is consistent with an interpretation of 'duty' as involving a form of 'mutual obligation' between relationally constituted agents, rather than being independently constituted for each autonomous agent in light of an abstractly conceived and 'depersonalised' normative-causal order.

This focus on the consequences of judgment and action for legitimate personal-positional interests was a general feature of discourse in the Department. For example, it typically featured in justifications aimed at motivating 'legitimate' action, as when Paula had warned her staff against accepting "lunch money" payments from contractors. Rather than simply pointing to the illegality of such action, and reminding staff of the impropriety of such practices or potential consequences of breaking the law, Paula had told them: "I will not protect you". Similarly, when staff in a particular instance were tasked to prepare contract documentation for the Secretary's signature, she reminded them of the importance of ensuring that the paperwork was correct by stressing that "the Secretary's office can get in trouble if we don't do it properly". In a similar vein, Paula's boss Lawrence highlighted to me the need to improve the departments' filing and records management systems not because it was in the legitimate public interest and mandated by the requirements of the Archives Act, but because it was important to be able to respond to the Secretary's personal expectations for prompt action.

Such concerns with legitimate personal-positional interests also often focused on questions of 'status' associated with relative positional standing. One notable example involved a situation in which David had been required to come in on the weekend to search through the files to respond to a project-related query. The query had originated with the Deputy Secretary of the Corporate Services Wing. David had responded to the query with an email directly to the Deputy Secretary, copying his response to Paula, his own Deputy Secretary Lawrence and a couple of other managers with an interest in the issue. This, it turned out, was a breach of 'protocol'. On Monday morning, David's action was the subject of private conversation between

Paula and another manager, and David was informally cautioned by Paula that his response should not have been directed directly to the Deputy Secretary concerned, but via his own Deputy Secretary, Lawrence. A similar concern with relative positional 'standing' manifested in the circumstances mentioned in the last Chapter, where the Secretary had agreed to a re-allocation of Paula's responsibilities for oversight of "special projects". Under this arrangement, each of the three other Executive Managers in the Partnership Wing were given responsibility for one or two of these projects, but were now expected to report to Paula. This had generated joking comments from staff who highlighted that the other managers were now working for Paula, and had put Paula in something of an awkward position in relation to her peers.

For her own part, Paula herself disclaimed an interest in such status issues. She got frustrated when her staff address her as "boss", or insisted that she sit in the front seat of the car, and told them not to do it. Nevertheless, she was highly sensitive to the fact that *others* considered such issues as important, and took care to speak and act in a manner that ensured others would not have legitimate cause for offence or disfavour. In this sense, as with DHH staff in general, she was highly sensitive to questions of *reputation*, or managing other's perceptions of oneself – being careful about what one said to whom, and how one said it; or taking care to act in a way that was seen to be mindful of one's own and others relative positions, responsibilities and perceived personalised interests.

There were consequences for being seen to speak or act in ways that were perceived to be inappropriate or disrespectful. Across the Department, other's behaviour was the frequent subject of talk and gossip. Managers in particular were subject to people 'talking behind their back'. Paula herself was not a gossip, and discouraged her staff from engaging in such practices. She acknowledged that this meant she didn't get to hear a lot of what was being said around the Office, but she was clearly aware of what it was about:

Mostly it's to do with jealousy and work, or someone not knowing their stuff, and you know, looking stupid in front of someone else...

When her team did repeat to her things they had heard, she sometimes told them to just to stop: “Don’t go around spreading it.”

However, the need to be mindful about what one said and did in relations to others, and to protect one’s reputation and standing, also had a more serious dimension. There was always the question of knowing whom one could trust. This was something that several managers raised with me as an issue. As Paula put it:

Yeah, I mean, PNG’s a small place, you don’t know who’s talking to who. You have to know who’s linked to who. It could be by personal relations, by marriage, or from the village, or through going to school, education...previous work...so, who’s talking to who...

By and large, those managers who like Paula were serious about their work and ethical obligations, told me they strove to be ‘diplomatic’ or ‘neutral’ in their public comments on others’ conduct, particularly where such conduct was evidently infringing the rules. One could never be sure at whose behest - or in whose interests - others were acting, and who they might report back to. Conversely, among those who were less committed to the rules, the question of reputation was presumably less of an issue: they evidently did not care about how they were perceived and evaluated by committed rule-followers such as Paula, whose values and ethical orientation they did not share. Put another way, their psychic-symbolic interests were simply not at stake in such relations. As long as they perceived no risk of personal consequences for rule breaking - particularly if it could remain hidden or unnoticed - breaking the rules could thus be justified if it was seen to accord with what one felt was in one’s interests. Such interests did not have to involve ‘illegitimate’ material gain, as in the case of Paula’s *wantoks*. They could simply include an interest in being seen by relevant others (i.e. those perceived as consequential for one’s material and psychic-symbolic interests, such as the Secretary) to ‘get the job done’.

9.5 Attitudes to formalisation

There is one further aspect of the vignette that I wish to examine. This relates to the fact that the problems that Paula was attempting to manage arose in part because the adjusted role allocations and accountabilities in her team had not been formally documented. Individuals did have job descriptions, but these had been rendered out of date by Paula's changes, which she had only discussed verbally with the team and which had not been worked through in detail. Paula's attitude to formalisation was not unusual – as previously highlighted, many aspects of the IID program were not subject to formalised arrangements. What I wish to argue here is that, along with people's divergent orientation to the rules as described above, the general lack of concern among DHH to constitute precisely regulated organised cooperative action on the basis of 'rational formalisation' can also be accounted for by their general ethical orientation to concrete, personal positional-relational interests, and the significance they granted to these interests. To show this firstly requires a brief re-cap of what has been argued to constitute the 'orthodox' ethic of bureaucracy.

As previously argued, the 'orthodox' ethic of bureaucracy requires a willingness and capability of bureaucratic actors to impartially and autonomously subject themselves – and others - to a precisely formulated and adequately documented regime of abstract 'impersonal' and 'anonymous' deontological obligations. The practice of formalisation thus involves a mental process of abstraction formally guided by key foundational concepts or 'principles', including those of 'impartiality', 'accountability', and 'transparency', each of which reflect an aspect of the 'orthodox' person-independent ethical obligation for bureaucratic actors to 'have', 'give' (and 'demand' from others) 'person-independent' or 'objectively valid' reasons for judgment and action. 'Adequate' formalisation rests on the application of these guiding 'principles' to the interpretation and analysis of relevant 'facts' in a given situation. That is, their application focuses an agent's attention on relevant features of reality that must be abstracted and represented in the formalisation as relevant to an agent's practical judgment in order to constitute the desired causality. These include both factors that

are necessary and sufficient for supplying valid 'reasons' for judgment and action so as to reliably constitute a desired optimal primary causality, as well as factors necessary and sufficient to supply reasons that will reliably constitute the desired secondary causality involved in any accountability relationship that serves to 'guarantee' that primary causality.

As the discussion in the preceding sections has endeavoured to show, my Papua New Guinean public service informants did not conceive of the notions of 'impartiality', 'accountability' and 'transparency' or 'duty' in 'orthodox' terms. Rather, the meaning of these terms focused instead on the properties or qualities of the agent, and how these were revealed by the agent's motivating capabilities and intentions. In turn, this focused attention on how the agent's motivating capabilities and intentions were revealed in their speech and actions, and the intended and actual effects of their speech and action on interests seen as relevant in specific situations. Here, however, the crucial issue was how the relevance of interests was perceived to be constituted and validated, or what was considered most salient with respect to interests. Rather than treating such interests in abstract and 'depersonalised' terms in manner consistent with an abstract, 'depersonalised' conception of social causality, the focus of peoples' attention was on the perceived *concrete* positional-relational dimensions of those interests, and how those concrete interests were tangibly affected by speech and action. In effect, what was ethically most salient for people in given situations were the conditions that actors in that situation *perceived to be governing their own and relevant other's concrete personal positional-relational interests*, and which were thus perceived as providing the parameters governing social action in that situation.

Within DHH – and the public service more generally – these conditions and parameters were recognised as being constituted or bounded by the terms of existing policies, rules and roles, which were considered 'notionally' legitimate in that they constituted a shared normative framework expected to be followed by all relevant actors as a means to regulate interests, and the pursuit of those interests, in a manner that 'fairly' secured both the individual and common good. An actor's 'duty' to do their work in accordance with the rules and policies was thus grounded on a notion of 'mutual

obligation', rather than being seen as independently constituted for each actor. This meant that 'doing one's duty' involved the requirement to recognise and respect 'legitimate' concrete personal positional-relation interests relevant to any given situation – interests that involved one's own and others obligations and entitlements with respect to judging and acting in accordance with existing laws, policies, rules and role entitlements. Hence, as noted, what was ethically salient for both observers and actors were the properties or qualities of a person's ethical agency, and how these were revealed in an agent's motivating capabilities and intentions with respect to situationally relevant, positionally constituted entitlements and obligations.

Crucially, I suggest, it was agents' motivating capabilities and intentions with respect to recognising notionally legitimate concrete positional-relational interests that were thus seen as the *necessary basis for constituting desired social causality*. Individuals were expected to exercise their agency to "take ownership" of their own positional entitlements and obligations ("duties") in a manner that responded appropriately to personalised interests that were perceived to be legitimate in a given situation, and judge and act accordingly. Correspondingly, "holding others to account" referred to situations where an actor was seen to have infringed relevant positional interests and their related claims to entitlement, and involved pointing to the manner in which an actor had failed to 'live up' to legitimate expectations and obligations.

As such, I suggest, abstract formalisation – or the requirement to document in advance the precise mandatory parameters for judgment and action necessary and sufficient to constitute a desired causality – was thus often considered unnecessary. It was just seen as 'extra work'. Instead, broad parameters for judgment action were established by the generally perceived practical requirements established by the framework of existing high level or general laws, policies, rules and roles. Actors were generally expected to possess or be motivated to obtain knowledge of relevant facts and parameters for judgment (i.e. the relevant laws, policies, rules and roles), and be capable of applying that knowledge to determining an appropriate course of action in a given situation. In situations of uncertainty, they would be expected to consult with others who possessed relevant or superior knowledge: their manager, their staff, or

other relevant stakeholders with a legitimate positional interest in the outcome. The outcome of the decision-making process would then be legitimated by a combination of consensus and positional entitlement. Often, however, the outcome was left vague, imprecise and subject to interpretation, and would require follow up clarification - which was not always sought.

In this way, within the broad normative framework constituted by existing policies, rules and roles, 'organised' cooperative action was largely constituted *processually and situationally*, in a 'negotiated' manner that was understood to be dependent on agents' willingness and capability to engage with each other on terms that were seen to 'respect' relevant persons' 'legitimate' positional-relational entitlements, obligations and their associated interests. In this sense, *'personalised' relationships mattered*: that is, a desired social causality was seen to be constituted on the basis of agents' proper orientation to (i.e. recognition and respect for) formally prescribed relational obligations and entitlements. This meant, however, that in general actors had to be constantly mindful of how they were perceived by others, and specifically how their speech and action was evaluated by others with respect to its effects on their own and others' perceived interests. Put another way, ethical agency was constituted under the 'evaluating gaze of others'. It was only those with significant positional power – such as the Secretary and his senior managers – who could afford to ignore the potential consequences of 'creating offense', as long as they were comfortable with staff 'talking behind their backs', and were confident that their positions would not as a result be undermined.

As a corollary, however, given this focus on the motivating capabilities and intentions of agents and the perceived requirement for them to possess or gain the relevant 'knowledge' needed to capably judge and act in given situations, failures of 'organised' cooperative action were often responded to not by efforts at formalisation but with calls for 'training'. In this sense, my presence and role in the Department was such a case: staff, it was said, simply needed training in 'project management'.

Further, I suggest, this general ethical orientation also helps to explain why the overall program was not ‘formally rationalised’, and why its overall causal ‘logic’ remained obscured. Such an ethical orientation, I suggest, involves no perceived binding ethical imperative to evaluate the optimality of a given action (either past or future) in light of a ‘depersonalised’ means-ends causality - a causality that is socially constituted via precisely formulated abstract and person independent deontologically binding obligations to judge and act in light the ‘impersonal’ considerations relevant to constituting that causality. In short, action was not evaluated from this perspective because it was not generally conceived or represented in these terms. Instead, action was generally conceived and represented in terms of how it was motivated by and affected concrete, situationally relevant personalised positional-relational interests.

As a consequence, therefore, rather than subjecting the entire IID infrastructure program to ‘rational causal analysis’ to determine how it ‘ought’ to be administered, DHH staff tended to treat each element of the program in isolation, considering what ‘ought’ to be done in light of the specific existing formal obligations and entitlements that each stage entailed, and the consequences for associated positional-relational interests that were perceived to be at stake in that situation. This focus was evident in Paula’s ill-fated circular, for example, which did not seek to situate her proposed ‘refinements’ in the context of their role in legitimately constituting a desired overall means-end program causality. Rather, it simply asserted a range of formal obligations that institutions were expected to comply with, along with the legitimate entitlement of DHH staff to make decisions that would affect the interests of institutions of the basis of verification of their compliance.

Finally, I suggest, this ethical orientation helps to explain why no one sought to develop and apply a set of ‘rationally formalised’ arrangements that would address the central problem of DNPM’s intervention in the budget. Several dimensions of the situation are relevant. Firstly, I suggest, it was significant that DNPM – and the politicians who were pushing their projects for inclusion in the budget – were legally entitled to intervene in the budget process and determine which institutions were selected for funding. The budget laws did not formally prohibit such interventions; on

the contrary, they formally established this as a positional entitlement that belonged to politicians. At the same time, however, the process for soliciting and evaluating proposals that DHH administered was not based on the application of an 'impartial' formal method involving the consistent application of formal criteria abstracted from an overarching set of formal policy guidelines for the program. In this sense, it was not seen as *ethically necessary* – either by DHH or other stakeholders - to ground the legitimacy of allocation decisions on the basis of 'impartial' judgments derived from the application of a 'valid' formal method. As such, none of the stakeholders considered the possibility that the actions of DNPM and the politicians whose interests were at stake could or should be regulated and legitimated by such means. The problems were simply seen to be caused by the fact that politicians were motivated by narrow, particularistic interests rather than ran counter to DHH's interests in administering the program in accordance with its formal policy objectives. However, given that no-one had systematically analysed the means-ends causality of the program, no-one was in a position to highlight the practical administrative implications of the budget intervention and its systemic consequences for the reliability of public investment. Nor were they able to identify suitable 'reforms' that might constitute an adequate administrative solution to the problem.

Chapter 10 - Conclusion: searching for the “Melanesian Way”

The preceding argument has sought to explain why, despite the best intentions of the public servants who were managing it, a government administered public investment program in Papua New Guinea persistently failed to meet its intended policy objectives. It has sought to do so by focusing attention on the way in which those public servants were oriented to, thought about and enacted their workplace ethical obligations and entitlements, and the manner in which this served to constitute, legitimate, motivate and regulate cooperative action in a bureaucratic organisational context.

The argument has sought to highlight specific ways in which this distinctive ethical orientation differed in crucial respects from an ‘orthodox’ bureaucratic ethic - one that I have argued emerges from the functional requirements of the bureaucratic organisational form itself, and which is implicit in the legal, administrative and academic discourse and related practices that are intended to constitute well-functioning, reliable state bureaucracies in modern liberal democratic polities. In contrast to this ‘orthodox’ ethic, the ethical orientation at work in DHH, exhibited in the specific representations and signifying practices that constituted it, was seen to operate in a manner that tended to work against or inhibit the methodical identification of clear causal explanations for administrative problems, as well as the identification and implementation of precise and ‘rationally formal’ administrative solutions to those problems.

In contrast to the ‘orthodox’ bureaucratic ethic grounded in abstract ‘impersonal’ obligations and reasons for action, this distinctive ethical orientation or ‘practical ethos’ was seen to be oriented to concrete considerations of personalised, positional interests, which in turn were grounded in underlying notions of ‘mutual obligation’. In this respect, the bureaucratic ethos at work in DHH shows clear affinity with the Melanesian ‘ethos of mutuality’ formally described in Chapters 5 and 6 of this thesis. In effect, I suggest, the way that DHH was constituted and operated as an organisation

reflected an adaptive transformation or recontextualization of the underlying principles of this 'traditional' ethos of mutuality in its encounter with the 'modern' bureaucratic institutional context

In this sense, I suggest, what I observed in DHH - and more broadly what I gleaned from my conversations with Papua New Guinean public servants - can be seen to exemplify the process of cultural change at work in Melanesia that anthropologist Edward LiPuma has characterised as "dialectical". As with other institutional domains - such as those of religion, politics and the market - state bureaucracy in Papua New Guinea has come to exhibit what LiPuma has called "an unmistakable Melanesian imprint". (LiPuma 1996: p6) This 'imprint', however, involves both the adaptive transformation of the underlying operative principles of the 'traditional' Melanesian ethos to accommodate perceived requirements of the new institutional domain, while at the same time shaping the way that actors interpret and enact the ethical requirements characteristic of that domain.

Thus, as Chapter 7 in particular sought to show, aspects of the Melanesian ethos of mutuality that are evidently inconsistent with the 'universalist' and putatively 'impartial' ethos of the modern state have been rendered notionally 'illegitimate' - notably, those associated with particularistic 'in-group' relations constituted by direct personalised reciprocal exchanges of material and psychic-symbolic capital. In this sense, 'ethical' public servants in Papua New Guinea tend to identify themselves as first and foremost 'Papua New Guineans', rather than as members of their particular ethic or kinship group. Correspondingly, they generally acknowledge the 'rule of law' as applying equally to all Papua New Guineans, including themselves. However, the manner in which the 'ethically universalist' requirements of the state are interpreted and legitimated in practice by these ostensibly 'ethical' public servants nevertheless reflect and draw upon existing cultural understandings and practices. In effect, 'ethical' public servants are able to performatively legitimate the normative order of the state in their interactions with non-state actors by 'generalising' the ethos of mutuality, and the tangible, concrete relational practices associated with it. This strategy relies for its effect, however, on the *personalised* relations that are perceived to be credibly constituted by such practices.

In a like manner, Chapters 8 and 9 have sought to show similar processes at work within the bureaucracy itself, and thus between and among bureaucratic agents of the state themselves. In effect, these chapters have sought show that the particular manner in which peoples' ethical agency was constituted in their roles as state bureaucrats reflected this underlying personalised, relational ethos. This was exhibited in the manner in which they interpreted the principles and practices of 'impersonal' bureaucratic 'formality', and specifically those associated with principles and practices of 'impartiality', 'accountability', 'transparency' and 'duty'.

Thus, while the practical ethos of the Department generally meant that it was generally able to avoid systemic problems of 'wantokism' and associated particularistic forms of 'corruption', it nevertheless also meant that it was unable to constitute itself as an organisation in a way that approached the 'Weberian' ideal of being able to reliably guarantee the optimal use of state resources in a manner that was consistent with the objective of achieving mandated state policy purposes. In short, the staff of DHH simply did not consistently think and act in terms necessary to constitute the kind of organisation that possessed these kinds of capabilities.

Here I wish to return to the remarks on my informant, David, whose observations I quoted at the beginning of this thesis. David, it may be recalled, expressed his view that Papua New Guineans' "sort of cultural and traditional ways of doing things" were very different to those appropriate to the workplace, and were in general acting as a "barrier" that prevented the effective operation of his country's formal systems of governance. The preceding analysis suggest that David's insight holds true, but in a very specific sense. Rather than exhibiting the direct influence of any specific norms of 'traditional culture' on workplace practices, the modes of thought and practice I have sought to document instead exhibit "distinctive meanings and implications" (Knauff 1999: p 14) characteristic of what Knauff has termed a "tradition of cultural distinction" (p13).

However, it also indicates that that the influence this distinctive cultural inheritance on the operation Papua New Guinea's formal systems of governance operates in ways and at levels that David and his colleagues were evidently not fully aware. Equally

importantly, however, it also suggests that such influences occur in ways and at levels that international development actors who seek to address problems of governance reform in Papua New Guinea are also not necessarily fully cognisant of. To the extent that such actors work within an international discourse that characterises ‘formality’ in terms consistent with the ‘orthodox’ interpretation of the bureaucratic ethos outlined in this thesis, their approaches to understanding problems of bureaucratic capacity and effectiveness will likely involve different sets of ethical assumptions to those of their Papua New Guinean interlocutors – assumptions that lie hidden beneath a putatively common language of ‘duty’, ‘accountability’, ‘transparency’, ‘impartiality’ and even ‘formality’ itself.

This serves to highlight a more general point, concerning the way in which failures of donor-supported attempts at governance reform in Papua New Guinea have come to be accounted for, and the lessons that have been drawn from these failures.

Consistent with international trends in development research and practice, reform failure in Papua New Guinea is now routinely attributed to the workings of ‘politics’. Equally, solutions to problems of reform are increasingly sought in the domain of the ‘political’, driven by methods of ‘thinking and working politically’. As a consequence, as noted in Chapter 2, the value of state ‘capacity building’ has to some extent come to be viewed with a degree of scepticism among the donor community. While no doubt based on important and valid insights, I suggest that this general approach nevertheless risks downplaying two vitally important factors: firstly, that political processes in Papua New Guinea are themselves generally constituted and legitimated on the basis of the same underlying social ethos that characterises the workings of the state bureaucracy; and secondly, that the long-term effectiveness and sustainability of governance reform – necessary if it is to reliably guarantee desired development outcomes – requires the existence of effectively functioning state bureaucracies. Both dimensions of the problem require, I suggest, a further turn in development practice beyond ‘thinking and working politically’ towards a focus on ‘thinking and working *ethically*’.

This, I think, has further potential implications. Firstly, the relational “ethos of mutuality” that I argue is characteristic of contemporary Melanesian forms of sociality,

along with its persisting strength and vitality, finds its correlates in many countries. As such, the methods and arguments advanced in this thesis might fruitfully be applied to the study of bureaucratic practices in other country contexts. Such an approach would not necessarily seek to supplant existing approaches to the study of ‘everyday bureaucratic practices’ – such as those of Gupta, Mathur, Anders and Olivier De Sardan examined in Chapter 3 – but to complement and extend them. It would do so by more self-consciously and systematically attending to the ethical dimensions of ‘everyday’ bureaucratic practices, and the distinctive culturally inflected “meanings and implications” that may serve to shape their practical effectiveness.

Secondly, at a deeper and more fundamental level, such considerations serve to draw attention to the very aims and methods of ‘development’ itself. A central argument of this thesis is that the constitution of ‘effective’ state bureaucratic organisations requires that state bureaucrats constitute themselves and others as subject to the binding requirements of an ‘impersonal’ ethical and causal necessity. This point serves as a reminder, should it be needed, that the constitutive condition of ‘modernity’ is in many ways the ‘depersonalisation’ of human relations, whether via the commodification of those relations in the market, or their ‘bureaucratisation’ via the organisational imperatives of the state. In broad terms, this appears to be a necessary price paid to reliably obtain the material benefits of modernity.

The framers of the PNG Constitution, I suggest, were instinctively sensitive to this. They thus warned against the consequence of too readily adopting foreign ways and techniques, and sought to constitute the Papua New Guinean state on the basis of a distinctively Melanesian ethos and sense of personhood. However, it is perhaps also the case that their appreciation of the constitutive conditions of modernity were also coloured by their particular experience of colonialism, and their exposure to the often heavy-handed and paternalistic attitudes and methods of the colonisers themselves. Sure in their outlook, and no doubt convinced of the practical superiority of their civilisation and its methods, colonial authorities doubtlessly operated on the basis of assumptions that neither they nor their Melanesian colonial subjects were fully cognisant of. If the overall argument of this thesis is valid, despite profound changes in attitudes, approaches and relationships over the past 50 years, for many of those

engaged in the contemporary project of 'development' this fact still holds true. Many of the ethical assumptions at the heart of 'governance reform' remain largely implicit and unexamined.

This suggests that for both contemporary Papua New Guineans and international development practitioners alike, the project of state-building requires a more self-conscious dialogue on the aims and methods of governance reform: one that is shaped by a greater sensitivity to the underlying ethical assumptions of both bureaucratic forms of organisation as well as Melanesian forms of sociality. Such a dialogue would involve a more 'honest account' of what is at stake in the project of building a modern state. Under such conditions, Papua New Guineans would be in a better position to exercise their entitlement to shape their encounter with 'Western' modernity, and in a characteristically Melanesian way, find a 'balance' between the values and imperatives of their traditional culture and their legitimate desire to share equally in the fruits of modernity.

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