

Introduction

Remaking the Public Good: A New Anthropology of Bureaucracy

Laura Bear, London School of Economics

Nayanika Mathur, University of Cambridge

In this introductory article, we call for a new anthropology of bureaucracy focused on 'the public good'. We aim to recapture this concept from its classic setting within the discipline of economics. We argue that such a move is particularly important now because new public goods – of transparency, fiscal discipline and decentralization – are being pressed into the service of states and transnational organizations: it has therefore become critical to focus on their techniques, effects and affects through fine-grained ethnography that challenges the economization of the political. We demonstrate our approach through some ethnographic findings from different parts of India. These show how fiscal austerity leads to new limited social contracts and precarious intimacies with the post-liberalization Indian state. This relationship between new public goods and forms of precarious citizenship is then further illuminated by the six articles that follow in this special issue.

Keywords: bureaucracy, citizenship, precarity, the public good, state

This special issue explores an undeveloped theme in the anthropology of bureaucracy – the public good. Prominent theories have long emphasized that institutions involve an order of life and techniques of management oriented towards specific utopian goals (Weber 1994; Foucault 2010). These in turn generate what Weber called *Lebensführungen* or conducts of ethical life (du Gay 2008). We aim to direct this stream of analysis into new fertile paths by explicitly naming these utopian goals 'the public good'. It is our claim that through an enunciation of the concept of the public good, important and hitherto ignored aspects of bureaucracies come into view. We have rarely examined how bureaucracies are an expression of a social contract between citizens and officials that aim to generate a utopian order (Osella and Osella 2000; Ferguson 2013). Yet this is precisely what characterizes bureaucracies as opposed to other institutions of modernity. Their legitimacy rests on claims that they manifest a constitutional agreement and exist for the public good. In their techniques of management they attempt to materialize this contract between citizens and institutions. They are made up of public 'things' such as



offices, documents, technocratic procedures and infrastructures that seek to provide the foundation for social relationships with the state (Hull 2012; Chalfin 2014). They are also accountable to a public in ways that fit their utopian goals. Just as the forum provided the place of potential for (male) Athenian citizens, bureaucratic spaces are a central site for the forging of the personhood, affective life and sometimes the radical potential of contemporary citizens (Arendt 1958; Hetherington 2011). As the articles in this special issue show, by bringing into explicit discussion the question of the public good we can explore these neglected aspects of bureaucracy.

We argue that it is particularly important to examine the public good now because its practices are radically changing from those critiqued by previous generations of scholars. The most central principles that have become visible as global forms (Ong and Collier 2005) in a wide range of institutional and political settings are those of: fiscal austerity, marketization, consensus, transparency and decentralization. Importantly these principles enter the social life of institutions and become the ground for debate within bureaucracies and between officials and citizens about the legitimacy of the state. One aim of this special issue is to provide an ethnography of this unexplored, contested terrain. Each case presented here follows current configurations of the public good as they are enacted within organizations and traces their wider social, political and economic effects. Taken together, these cases offer not only an innovative theoretical direction, but also a new map of contemporary bureaucracy.

Our intervention departs from the absolutist moral critique or dismissal of bureaucracy that often appears in anthropology and sociology (and is rarely based on long-term participant observation). The workshop that underpinned this collection of articles had a specific mandate of presenting ethnographic accounts of bureaucracies. One of our objectives was to overcome anthropology's continuing neglect of such institutions. In a misreading of Weber, they have implicitly been associated with disenchanting iron cages of modernity and thus have not been considered generative of the ethical and affective politics presented by the material collected here. Other works, while highlighting the centrality of bureaucratic formations, have characterized them as sites for the enactment of structural violence (Gupta 2012) or as 'areas of violent simplifications' (Graeber 2012); or as straightforward agents of the market (Harvey 2005). Instead of following any of these prominent conceptualizations, we seek to build on more nuanced ethnographies that have revealed the subtle negotiations of power characteristic of bureaucratic encounters between officials and clients (Silver 2010; Reeves 2011; Best 2012; Caple-James 2012; Navaro-Yashin 2012).

Why the Public Good Now?

If ethics have long been included in theories of bureaucracy then how can we extend their analytical power through a focus on the public good? Through its referencing of a collective, this term brings into view more than the projects of bureaucrats and their individualized ethos, personas, goals and techniques. It also allows an exploration of how citizens and officials negotiate, in often tense exchanges, their divergent utopian desires and pragmatic concerns. This enables us to trace how such encounters and the institutional artefacts deployed in them contain an unresolvable tension between

desires for the collective good and the reality of inequality. It is important to go beyond questions of bureaucratic self-fashioning and technocratic procedures. Instead, by focusing on the *public* good, we can reveal the complex collective reality that is generated from intersections between different, often contradictory, projects. As the articles in this collection show, the unequal effects of bureaucratic action emerge from such collisions between artefacts, divergent utopias and pragmatic decision making.

It seems particularly urgent to develop the theme of the public good at the present moment. Our motivation comes from more than simply a wish to advance an epistemological agenda. We want to push back against a contemporary powerful economistic definition of the public good that has brought about a transformation in international and state institutions. In this economic conceptualization, the ethics of institutions are made invisible through a sleight of hand in which market ethics are turned into a 'neutral' technocratic measure of the public good. This conceals the continuing existence of utopian social contracts inside these measures and within bureaucracies. In these economic arguments, the public good is defined by its twin properties of 'nonrivalrous consumption' and 'nonexcludability' (Stiglitz 2006: 149); it is something from which nobody can be excluded and its consumption by one does not prevent or detract from its consumption by another. This debate can be traced back to Samuelson's influential paper, 'The Pure Theory of Public Expenditure', published in 1954, where he referred to 'collective consumption goods'. Typical discussions of this concept occupy themselves with the public good's capacity to improve the efficiency of resource allocation by overcoming the problem of free riders or of whether, and to what extent, states should provide public goods and whether, more recently, resources such as clean drinking water are 'better' provisioned by private agencies. These principles then inform the policy-oriented forms of New Public Management associated with the often externally imposed reform of bureaucracies across the world, including those discussed in the articles here. However we argue that such measures, widely charted in the literature on audit and structural adjustment (Power 1997; Shore and Wright 2000; Strathern 2000), do not simply result in the economization of the political (Harvey 2005). To suggest that this is what they do is to mistake economists' models for reality. As the articles here show, what in fact occurs is the creation of lines of conflict and diverse attempts to realise the public good within and beyond institutions (Miller 2002; Mitchell 2002, 2007). Economistic models of governance and technical audit mechanisms conceal the fact that, when bureaucrats and citizens encounter each other, they pursue their aims as part of a broader conduct of life (Weber 1994; du Gay 2008; Appadurai 2011). We aim to restore the complexity of these engagements in which people pursue various pragmatic and utopian goals (Robbins 2013). In particular, the articles follow the emergence of new orienting values of fiscal discipline, marketization, consensus, transparency and decentralization. These values are associated with the market ethics of the economists' public good and are linked to new technical mechanisms of accountability. But their resonances as an ethos, a lived persona, a contested referent or a frustratingly impossible goal cannot be captured in their social reality by economists' models or the analysis of audit techniques alone.

For these reasons, our project aims to build upon but also move beyond the anthropology of audit or governmentality that studies the ethical practices of bureaucracies as either mere ideals or techniques of neoliberal governance (Power

1999; Strathern 2000). We demonstrate, through detailed ethnography, that there is an urgent need to rethink this framing. Thus our argument is not just that accountability measures can be coercive (Shore and Wright 2000) or participation tyrannical (Cooke and Kothari 2001), though of course they can be and often are so. We are also asking about the effects of a yearning for, and imposition of, new public goods within and beyond specific bureaucracies. In doing this, we draw as much on the anthropology of ethics and affect as on the existing anthropology of bureaucracy (Stoler 2004; Navarro-Yashin 2012; Laidlaw 2013).

The ethnographic examination in this special issue is also an attempt to unsettle conventional accounts of a global shift from state-provisioning to neoliberal disenfranchisement and privatization of public goods. In a recent intervention, Elyachar (2012) has taken up the question of historical changes in public goods. She argues that under colonialism they were explicitly planned and constructed to serve the extractive and repressive practices of colonial powers. She suggests that it was only with decolonization, the creation of new states and the hegemonic rise of development as a centrally organizing practice that public goods began to be perceived as serving the collective improvement of all (2012: 116). In Elyachar's periodization, the free market was an organizing framework of economic life and public goods were provided by the state through their developmental mandate within this framework up until 2010, after which there was a switch in dominant policy approaches under crises of austerity (*ibid.*: 117). This change has led to a cutting back of public goods and a drive to privatize infrastructure, public goods and even aspects of governance. While Elyachar opens up significant questions about the historical emergence of particular forms of the public good, we think that the periodization of these transformations should be further investigated. Certainly the railways in India, for example, were introduced under colonial rule as part of a moral and material mission of social transformation (Bear 2007). In addition, the economization of the public good began in India much earlier than Elyachar's typology, with austerity measures in the 1980s (Bear 2013, 2015). As a converse to austerity measures, recent policies of the Indian government, such as the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) of 2005, expand the state's rural development provisioning, albeit with a new-found political rationality (Mathur 2012, 2015b). So India alone raises many questions about conventional periodizations of changes in the public good. Each of the articles presented here offers a vista onto how we might historically track such alterations, from the diverse settings of the UK (John), South Africa (Zenker), Italy (Tuckett), Peru (Pinker) and Pakistan (Qureshi). We also extend the study of the public good to what are referred to as 'global public goods' (e.g., Stiglitz 2006), through an ethnographic analysis of the marshalling of consensus by a transnational regulatory body (Telesca). Most importantly, our exploration of historical shifts and the contemporary reality of public goods does not accept the conventional definition of them. We reconceptualize the public good such that it does not refer just to resources such as clean air or roads or free public education. Rather, we understand it to be those desirable ideals that are considered universally beneficial for everyone and are the rationale for radical changes to bureaucratic organizations. In other words, we aim to lay the foundations for a focus on the ethical underpinnings and lines of social struggle that are hidden by the technical analysis of public goods in

economics and development studies. Each of the cases that follow achieves this through an ethnographic focus on sites of bureaucratic action – following policies into their complex social entanglements (Shore, Wright and Pero 2011).

In the next section of the introduction, our own work in post-liberalization India serves as an example of the broader moves proposed by this collection of essays as a whole. Each of our own projects follows how the public good of fiscal austerity generates new kinds of intimate relations with the state founded on delimited contracts. We reveal new forms of precarious labour and citizen relationships with bureaucracies that have significant unintended consequences for the effects of their policies and their legitimacy. Precarity has been widely discussed in relation to contemporary labour relations (Berlant 2007; Allison 2012; Weston 2012); but in our case studies here – and the articles that follow – we show why we need to expand this concept to include changing relations with the state. We also see how an approach that only focuses on audit and technical devices in its accounts of fiscal austerity cannot get to grips with contemporary realities.

The Public Good and Precarious Citizenship: Two Examples from India

(i) Sarkari Naukar (Servants of the State): The Utopias and Dystopias of Precarious State Labour in the Indian Himalayas

Mathur spent over eighteen months with state bureaucrats implementing India's ambitious anti-poverty legislation, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act of 2005 (henceforth NREGA) in the north-Indian Himalayan state of Uttarakhand. NREGA guarantees a hundred days of employment in a year to every rural household willing to work as unskilled labour for minimum wages on public works such as the construction of tanks or roads. NREGA is considered radical legislation due to the stringent transparency and accountability clauses built into it and because it aims to radically overhaul the traditional system of welfare provisioning in India. The latter aspect emerges from a critique of India's so-called 'bloated bureaucracy' which has come from many quarters but especially from the World Bank with its 'good governance' agenda. NREGA does not encourage the recruiting of new personnel to execute its colossal mandate. Given the wide coverage of the law – 740 million people – and the highly sophisticated paperwork it requires for its execution, it is imperative that new personnel are inducted into the state machinery. The result of the contradictory aims of the law, a greater provision of welfare at less cost, is the recruitment of highly skilled individuals without the creation of the tight, permanent bonds that have hitherto characterized state employment. In the past, state welfare measures were executed by the permanent development bureaucracy or via NGOs. More recently there are growing numbers of new hybrid organizations known as GONGOs or government-owned NGOs that are called upon to do traditional state development work (see Sharma 2008). Now a younger generation of 'servants of the state' is tied by a range of diverse, delimited contracts to bureaucracies.

In Uttarakhand these contracts have led to the employment of what were termed 'young professionals', echoing the terminology adopted by international development

organizations. These young professionals consisted of MBA, computer programming and engineering diploma holders. The MBAs work as assistants to the 11 Programme Officers in the district; the software developers run all the computer work; and the engineers are Junior Engineers (JEs) who design infrastructure plans. The district Mathur worked in employed fifty such 'professionals.' The conditions of their employment were markedly different from those held by their colleagues and superiors. They did not hold *sarkari naukari* (government jobs) and were not permanent state employees like the others. The professionals were, instead, hired through private contracting agencies on fixed-term contracts. Most of them had been issued a three-year contract with a six-month probation period at the start. The entire process of their recruitment did not go through a state-sponsored examination or central government recruitment. Rather, an NGO had been recruited by Uttarakhand's development department to advertise, interview and appoint the professionals. While the salaries were comparable with what permanent government employees with corresponding designations were earning, there were none of the other benefits of housing or health insurance that came with these positions. Job security did not extend beyond the specified three years, giving a sense of precarity.

While precarity of contract was an aspect of the young professionals' ethos and experience of life and work in the district, it was not the only or even the defining aspect. There was a sense of relief at having procured a job, albeit for a limited period, and there was the hope of it becoming permanent, despite the fact that senior government officials as well as the contracting NGO repeatedly said this was impossible. What was significant among the new recruits was a desire to escape from their 'backward' and 'remote' location in the Himalaya to larger, urban spaces in the plains of India (Mathur 2015a). They were bored by their mountain-top location that offered little by way of entertainment and leisure and actually held out many hardships of daily living with its high peaks and almost non-existent basic infrastructure. The point of gaining 'professional' degrees such as MBAs and Computer Programming was precisely to escape this 'backwardness' and join the ranks of the newly aspirational middle classes in urban India.

The disconnect young contractual bureaucrats felt with their environment was visible in their presentation as well as in their work ethic, leading to the transformation of the district's many government offices. The men (and all barring two of the Junior Engineers were men) dressed in tight jeans and T-shirts and wore fake branded sneakers such as Nikes. In the summer they wore Aviators and other sunglasses, all with fake brand names such as Ray Bans. They listened to their MP3 players, went back often to big cities in the plains for leisure purposes such as watching films in the cinema. They exhibited a marked lack of deference for both their superiors and for the customs of office life. They were, as disapproving older permanent office-mates said, lacking a basic knowledge of *sarkari* (state) culture. The permanent state employees were all middle-aged men who dressed soberly in muted coloured trousers and shirts and wore sensible old shoes. They were extremely deferential towards their superiors as well as to *sarkari* procedure and custom. Thus they believed in following each rule through its correct instantiation – as action on official documents – and behaved in an appropriate manner in meetings or inspections. The young professionals, on the other

hand, were careless with things like recording everything on the ordained documents or getting signatures and stamps that were required. They were often amused and bored by the long meetings and the sycophantic manner in which superiors were treated and official hierarchy maintained.

These differing aspirations and personas had serious repercussions for the implementation of the NREGA. In inspections, meetings and informal conversations it was widely reported that no work was possible because there was no meeting ground between the two sets of workers. Letters of complaints were levelled by one party against the other. District officials spent many hours reprimanding and attempting to reconcile both sides. The complaints ranged from the innocuous to the more serious. Thus we once got a long letter from an elderly official in a distant block office explaining how the 'jean-jacket boys' were lowering the standing of the state in this remote region of India. More problematically, for over six weeks there was no work done on the NREGA in one local office because the conflict between the professionals and the government officials had escalated. The young professionals had shut down the computer that held the monitoring and information system (MIS) and as a result the permanent officials were refusing to show them any files. This block needed a sharp intervention by a senior district official and several trips involving reconciliation methods to begin work again.

These conflicts were clearly related to different contractual and affective attachments to the state (*sarkar*). An intimate relationship with the state was professed by its permanent employees. They used metaphors involving the exchange of substances like salt (*namak*) and a relationship drawing on kin terms (*mai-baap*, mother-father) as well as dutiful servitude (*naukar*). This intimate mooring within the warm embrace of *sarkar* was entirely absent among young professionals. For them not only was their location in a remote district not the most desirable of circumstances but they also considered their own linkage to the state tenuous. For them the person that mattered was the head of the NGO that had contracted them. Over time, this fragmentation of work for the state along various contractual fault lines had a marked effect on the execution of the programme in the district. The perpetual conflict was adding to cries about the 'unimplementability' of the NREGA that pervaded the district (see Mathur 2012).

The point to be stressed here is that this conflict, with its repercussions for the implementation of the developmental legislation, emanates from a desire to revamp the 'older' system of bureaucratic functioning along the lines of the new public goods of fiscal austerity, transparency and professionalized efficiency. By bringing in young men holding 'professional' degrees from private institutions in big cities in the plains, the belief was that the much needed efficiency would be introduced without adding to the 'fiscal burden' of the state. Yet this move produced unplanned-for results. These cannot be explained away by recourse to empty gestures of 'neoliberalism', or poor state capacity or dysfunctionality, or any of the other familiar explanations that are often pressed into service in analyses of malfunctioning bureaucracies in India and elsewhere. An ethnographic approach to bureaucracy of the kind we propose allows us to move away from these interpretations. Instead, we can trace how new public goods generate fragmented governance, creating new sites of conflict. Different actors tied to the state through distinct kinds of legal and affectual contracts encounter one another and argue over what the labour of the state is and how it should be executed (Mathur

2015b). While this first ethnographic example points to the inefficiency produced by the public good of fiscal austerity, the next brief example presents a fragmentation that contains hope and a radical political potential.

(ii) Sarkari Kaj (*State Work*): *The Utopias and Dystopias of Precarious State Labour on the Hooghly River*

Bear carried out research for fourteen months during 2008–2010 on the Hooghly River, tracing the impact of the Kolkata Port Trusts' fiscal austerity policies driven by a new financialized form of public debt. Among other effects, these have created a new and tighter relationship with informalized sector precarious labour. As we will see, the distant closeness of such workers to the state leads to their desire for fuller incorporation into its social contract. What is at risk otherwise is a total delegitimation of state institutions. Ironically, therefore, the practice of fiscal austerity as it unfolds in specific situations of exploitation may have a radical political potential. How then did such workers experience and represent their changing relationship to the state? What dystopias and utopias of the public good did they enunciate? The following brief account focuses, first, on the experiences of boatmen or *majhis* in the sand trade and, secondly, on informalized sector shipyard workers.

An uncertainty of rights and income is central to the experience of *majhis* on the Hooghly. Working from a particular jetty and extracting sand from the river entirely depends on your relationship to the specific boat-owner who owns your vessel and the middlemen who control stretches of the waterfront. In this environment of negotiated rights to livelihood recent drives to enforce licence regimes by the Kolkata Port Trust to raise state revenues have had a paradoxical effect. Four years ago low-level bureaucrats seeking to meet fiscal targets imposed by higher officials started to assert the state's claims over the boatmen's trade. This move was met with enthusiasm from *majhis*. They responded to the moves to tax their labour through formal licences as a significant inclusion in the state that would guarantee their individual rights. For example, a thirty-year-old *majhi* described how they could feel proud to show their licences. He added, 'We too are part of the *sarkar* (state) now'.

Majhis gave very similar accounts of the dystopian decline of an industrial waterscape and utopian enthusiasm for individual rights gained through acts of labour. Typical of these were those of the two brothers Kapil Dev (aged 55) and Jitendra Sahni (aged 48) who lived and worked from Cossipore ghat, but had village homes in rural Bihar. They suggested that their livelihood was threatened by intimidation from gangs seeking to steal their loads, and by middlemen and the river police. They hoped that their recent regaining of individual rights from the Kolkata Port Trust might counteract these sources of insecurity. They now had a strong sense of themselves as *nagorik* or citizens. For example, both brothers responded to an initial question about where they were from by insisting that the only important aspect of their identity was that they were citizens of the nation-state of 'Hindustan' and that this was now proved by their *majhi* licences.

Kapil Dev and Jitendra's enthusiasm for the new licence regime was also based on the fact that it recognized their intimate, inalienable dependence on the river. Both of them described in detail the hard work necessary to raise sand from the river and their dedication to this labour. It was this, they argued, that entitled them to their licences.

Kapil Dev and Jitendra had a plan to revive the old boatman union that used to exist along the river in their father's times. They had set about trying to persuade their fellow sand-diggers to remake it, especially since the local Kolkata Port Trust bureaucrat had promised that if they formed an organization they could create a micro-insurance association under new central government regulations.

In absolute terms, majhis now contribute through the licensing system part of the value of their labour directly to the revenue streams of a state driven by fiscal stringency. Yet an amplified ethics and politics of equality, inclusion and individual rights of labour is also emerging. This was the unpredictable result of the implementation of fiscal austerity in a situation of exploitation that generated new affects and utopian possibilities. This was only one of several ethical engagements with the public good of fiscal austerity on the Hooghly.

A new kind of informalized sector shipyard work has developed over the past ten years from the outsourcing of the port. Since the 1950s, state shipyards along the river had had impressive infrastructure. These yards were unionized, were manned by 80 per cent permanent staff and production was driven by the time that it took to produce a vessel. Since 2000 the Kolkata port, and now also these state shipyards, have outsourced work to informalized family firms employing day labour supplied by brokers, which have minimal, rented and dangerous infrastructure. Wages are much lower here than in the state shipyards and men are laid off without any notice. Typical of these shipyards is Venture Ltd, which is owned by two brothers and employs 1500 men in Howrah. Not only is this yard non-unionized, the workers in it are supplied by brokers that include union officials. Minor accidents occur daily and major ones every three months or so. These cluster around the outsource contract inspection and delivery dates. Production speed is driven by these contracts rather than by the realities of the difficult work conditions (Bear 2013). The experience of exploitation by state agencies that workers have experienced has delegitimized these institutions.

An awareness of their close-distant exploitation by the state clustered for shipyard workers around two elements of their work environment: 'the nationalist crane' and the launching of Navy vessels. Workers often caustically joked about the contrast between the hopeful slogan painted on the rented gleaming yellow crane that moves between the yards and their situation. This reads '*Jai Jawan. Jai Bigyan. Jai Kisan*'. This is a well-known nationalist phrase from a previous era of state socialism, 'Victory to the Soldier. Victory to Science. Victory to the Peasant'. It belongs to obsolete hopes of work within the protected ranks of permanent employees in the state shipyards. The better pay, safer conditions and infrastructure of those yards can only be accessed through union influence and even then solely as temporary employees. The painful ironies of this situation are plain to workers, especially since the state yards outsource work to them. As the crane passed, men spoke of how the permanent yards could only regularly publish in the press news of exceeding their production times and targets due to their undervalued *hater kaj* (work of the hands). This would lead to further commentaries on the inefficiency of *sarkari kaj* and then of the *sarkar* itself that ignored their situation entirely.

These bitter commentaries would come to the fore also around the launching of state vessels in the yard. During these events Port officials or Navy commanders

would give congratulatory speeches from raised, decorated platforms covered in only enough sweets to feed the managers. These promised more work to the yard and its growing prosperity if the men kept their standard of work up to the mark. The men assembled around the hull of the ship listened intently to see whether employment for them would be likely here over the coming months. They often commented on the odd mixture of visibility and invisibility of these events. For example men would point out the photographer called by the owner of the yard, and talk about how the Navy or Port would not want this publicity to get out – that really their ships were made here. They also talked about the extreme danger and limited provisions for their safety. They pointed out the ‘safety shoes’ issued to them, which were just regular leather boots: ‘there is no safety here’. This was contrasted with provisions in the state yards. This sense of abandonment was particularly acute for men who had worked for some time in the state and navy yards on temporary contracts before joining Venture Ltd. Their despair would lead them into reflections on the connections between the corruption of the state and its politics and their precarious condition. They asserted that the worst kind of people were politicians, state and union officials, because they ignored workers. Such people were described as driven by the ‘burning of the stomach’ or individualistic desires. Workers would contrast the transactional short-term and individualistic logic of this burning of the stomach with the long-term reciprocal ties of kinship and ritual (Bear 2013, 2015).

It was in fact through a scaling up of an ethics of kinship and ritual that workers understood the public good. The civic world of the city was framed through concepts of ever widening circles of kinship connection upwards from the home. Each household was seen as a segment of a more or less complete group of brothers related by birth, sharing a *bonghso* (paternal lineage) linked by *rokto* (blood). They were linked to the wider social world of the neighbourhood and city through an idiom of *kutum*, or in-law relationships. Close friends too were considered *kutum*. Neighbourhoods and the city were represented as ever-widening ties of *kutum* – of actual and potential allies. These ‘allies’ must be involved in long-term connections manifested in a constant flow of sustaining food, information and affection between households. Collective eating and sociality, especially during Hindu rituals, provide the source and expression of these life-sustaining, long-term relationships in the city. Shipyard workers delegitimize the current forms of the state and the market entirely, suggesting that they are dominated by an individualistic asociality. They assert an alternative form of the public good scaled up from the collective ethics of the household and ritual.

This brief ethnography among boatmen and shipyard workers on the Hooghly is relevant for our wider comprehension of new forms of the public good. The fragmented, precarious citizenship mapped here is characteristic of our times. It is generated from the intersection of a new, fiscally stringent rationale of rule with the inequalities of limited state licensing and outsourcing relationships with informal labour. Such a situation is not confined to India, as other ethnographies of capitalism and austerity in Europe, America and the Global South show (Anders 2010; Dalakoglou and Kallianos 2014; Knight 2015; Roitman 2004).

Precarious Citizenship as a Global Form

Taken together, these two brief case studies from India demonstrate the emergence of a different kind of precarious citizenship from that associated with older bureaucracies (e.g., Qureshi, this issue), a finding that runs through the articles gathered in this special issue. All the pieces show that this precarious citizenship is not characterized by the dynamics of absolute inclusion and exclusion associated with the colonial and welfare/developmental state. Instead, it is shaped by forms of contractually delimited partial inclusion (e.g., Zenker, Tuckett and Pinker). This partial inclusion enfolds market institutions, social agencies and individual citizens into relations with the state that are framed by explicit limiting contracts. States seek to circumscribe their financial, political and ethical obligations to citizens and each other through these procedures (e.g., Jones, Telesca). As the articles here show – welfare provision, international negotiations, rights to information, access to justice, public–private partnerships and access to citizenship have all been transformed through the creation of new contractual forms. It is these restricted contracts that are generated by the new public goods of fiscal austerity, marketization, consensus, transparency and decentralization. As both our examples from India and the following articles demonstrate, often these do not deliver justice, and they create contradictions within institutions, generate inequality and frequently cause divergences between the expectations of officials and citizens (e.g., Zenker, Tuckett, Jones). The documentary regimes that arise also often have a different character. They stimulate speculation and productive ties between the state and market (Pinker). None of these realities would have been captured if we had stopped our analyses at the level of fiscal policy and technical devices. In particular, we would not have been able to understand the unpredictable potential of neoliberal policies to both support and undermine the legitimacy of state institutions. Nor would we have been able to comprehend the affective charge and ethical resonances of such policies.

The six articles in this special issue can be read together as commentaries on different forms of precarious citizenship and the public good, but they are also grouped in dialogic pairs. The first two address processes of marketization and the inequalities these generate in a welfare bureaucracy in Pakistan and an international environmental treaty agency. The second pair explores transparency and the limits of justice in processes of information disclosure in the NHS in Scotland and in Land Restitution Courts in South Africa. The final pair examines decentralization and the emergence of precarious citizenship in the provisioning of public infrastructure in Peru and immigration services in Italy.

Marketization and Unequal Public Goods

In the first article in this special issue, Qureshi explores the effects of the marketization of bureaucracy in Pakistan. His article presents an ethnography of a World Bank-financed vertical health programme for HIV/AIDS within the National AIDS Control Programme (NACP). He explores the uneasy assembling in this initiative of civil servants seconded from the Ministry of Health alongside professionals contracted from the NGO and management consultancy sector. In a scenario similar to that of our first Indian case study above, there was a clash between the personal ethos of the

Ministry officials who are habituated to working within a system with its roots going back to the colonial British state. As a result of its audit contracts with the World Bank, the NACP was obliged to call upon a management consultancy firm to educate them on subcontracting to NGOs with maximal efficiency. This management consultancy not surprisingly found the new assemblage inefficient given its hastily assembled character and conflictual personnel. As a result, it took over the management of the contracts rather than build the capacity of existing bureaucrats. Qureshi argues that the marketization of the bureaucracy driven by the World Bank through various forms of contractual outsourcing ended up becoming an instrument of accumulation by dispossession. Public resources were diverted from the provisioning of healthcare towards the profits of a management consultancy. His article extends the concept of accumulation by dispossession beyond the traditional Marxist utilization by exploring forms of precarity not just in labour but also in citizenship and the fate of public resources.

Telesca's article explores how states gather in a transnational institution to form a global market in marine life in the Atlantic. She demonstrates the marketization of marine resources as well as the pursuit of a new public good – consensus – that together enable unequal outcomes to negotiations. Focusing on the fate of bluefin tuna she explains that this has been one of many species on the high seas that 47 nation-states plus members of the European Union have agreed to manage according to the treaty and the policies adopted by the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT). What, she asks, are the nation-states that are party to ICCAT doing, if not their advertised purpose to conserve bluefin tuna and other sea creatures? Based on participant observation in ICCAT meetings, Telesca critically engages with consensus as a technique, ideal, practice and affective tie of solidarity upon which the rational claims, force and legitimacy of ICCAT rest. She explores the extent to which certain member states labour intensely at – and heavily invest in – a space and an event in order to control access to the tightening supply of fish bound for the global market. By tracing the inequalities hidden behind consensus, Telesca helps us to understand the international bureaucratic forums that shape global markets today. Rights to productivity are fought over, and usually retained by the most powerful nations.

Transparency and the Limits of Justice

In recent times, there has been significant anthropological attention paid to the issue of transparency (Ballesterio 2012). The second pair of articles presented here take these investigations in a different direction by focusing on limits to the responsiveness of bureaucracies engaged in creating transparency and justice. John studies the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002 (or FOI), which came into force in 2005, in the context of the Scottish National Health Service. This legislation is aimed at providing people with access to information held by public institutions in Scotland such as universities, hospitals, police forces and central and local government. Like many recent similar new contracts between citizens and state agencies across the globe, it was designed to change a public sector culture of 'secrecy' into one of 'openness'. John's work shows that transparency is not the same as openness by following disputes among

bureaucrats over what should be disclosed to the public. Contrasting the efforts of public servants to disclose information with the effort of members of the public to come into *knowledge*, her article explores the difference between the aim of the public servant and the aims of the public. Ultimately it reveals the incompatibility of the goals of the public good held by bureaucrats and their clients. Bureaucrats are restricted by their contractually necessitated professional conduct and cannot deliver justice even though they wish to. This generates disappointment and protest from their clients and a continuing, unequal access to social redress.

Staying with the demands for bureaucracies to become transparent, Zenker's article explores the outsourcing of justice from law courts to bureaucrats in the South African land restitution process during the 1990s. Calls for increased efficiency driven by quantitative measures of case resolution and global trends towards responsible, transparent bureaucracies produced de-judicialization. Before the 1990s, each and every land claim had to be referred eventually to the Land Claims Court for ultimate settlement. Given the painfully slow progress that ensued and the global push for transparent, efficient bureaucracy, a ministerial review led to a shift from this judicial to an administrative approach. Now ministerial bureaucrats have the power to settle claims by agreement, and only contested cases end up in court. The result of the application of the public good of transparency has led to a reduction in the accountability of institutions. Now that the administrative bureaucracy is liberated from systematic judicial review, the Department of Land Affairs, it seems, can operate all too flexibly. Zenker's article illustrates very clearly the democratic deficit and injustice created by the uncritical adoption of public goods that emphasize quantitative measures of efficiency, and push for transparency in order to be 'responsive' to citizens.

Decentralization and Precarious Citizenship

The final two articles in this special issue pivot around the theme of decentralization and precarious citizenship with a focus on the new kinds of documentary regimes these create. Pinker's article follows the political life of documents as part of a decentralized bureaucracy seeking to provide infrastructure in the Peruvian Andes. These artefacts were produced by groups of bureaucrats and their business partners in relation to a World Bank-funded road engineering study in the Peruvian Andes. Unlike Weber's emphasis on documents as instruments of rationalization and the more recent focus on documents as artefacts of institutional form, she reveals the ambiguous political processes and social contracts of cooperation enacted through document flows. Pinker argues that the dual promise of clarity and ambivalence within documents was key to the opening up of spaces of possibility in the project. Documents manifested the provisional, potentially shifting relations between people characteristic of decentralized bureaucracies engaged in public-private partnerships. They were as precarious in their authority and longevity as the new structural relationships between state and society in Peru. Pinker's article points towards a global present and future of bureaucratic documents in which they do not guarantee transparency, knowledge or rights for officials and citizens. Instead, they exist to provoke unstable productive relations as

flexible as the bureaucracies they are part of. They are therefore speculative, partial, fluid contracts that often generate uncertainty and inequality.

The final article, by Tuckett, explores the strategies adopted by migrants in the face of recently decentralized immigration bureaucracy run by third sector agencies and increasingly flexible laws of amnesty in Italy. She describes the processes of applications and renewals for permits, for citizenship or for family reunification in Bologna. The decentralized office is strict in its rules for the presentation of the correct documentation for permit issue. However, analysis of migrants' paper trails reveal that these various documents present a very different 'life' to the one that really exists. Thus, while the system of documentation intrusively enters into the lives of individuals, in reality there is a gap between one's everyday life and that portrayed in one's paperwork. This fact coupled with the flexible, changing nature of contemporary immigration law endows migrants with a sense of uncertainty and risk, yet also creates possibility and hope. Migrants described being able to navigate effectively the changing contracts with the state in the decentralized advice centre as a process of becoming a proficient player in *il sistema paese* (the system of the country): Her article argues that, paradoxically, through their enduring practice of Italy's exclusionary bureaucratic documentation regime, migrants learn to be 'Italian'. Overall Tuckett demonstrates how decentralized administration and flexible laws of amnesty generate a precarious, if hopeful, citizenship.

These articles together remake our theoretical understanding of contemporary bureaucracies, showing that their economic and managerial techniques are founded on, and generate, ethical and affective claims and conflicts. As anthropologists, we are able to move beyond the focus of economists and development studies scholars on the provisioning of public goods into a terrain hidden by their technocratic framings. But we are also able to trace the unintended social, ethical and political effects of these framings as they unfold in attempts by states and transnational organizations to refashion themselves according to technocratic models. Ultimately, this special issue serves as a commentary on a contemporary moment of flux in institutional life and contributes to a new theoretical and political debate on the public good.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank both the Centre for Research in the Arts, Social Sciences, and Humanities (CRASSH) at the University of Cambridge and the Departments of Anthropology at both Cambridge and the London School of Economics for generously supporting the original conference that led to this volume. This event had many inspiring participants who are not included in this special issue, but greatly influenced it. We would like in particular to record our gratitude to the anonymous journal reviewers and to: David Bholat; Hannah Brown; Brenda Chalfin; Liana Chua; Stefan Dorondel; Harri Englund; Akhil Gupta; William Gould; Paula Haas; Matthew Hull; Manpreet Janeja; Sian Lazar; Noa Leuchter; Fiona McConnell; Mihai Popa; Prashant Sharma; Alexandra Schwell; Trevor Stack; Umut Yuldrim.

References

- Allison, A. 2012. Ordinary Refugees: Social Precarity and Soul in 21st Century Japan. *Anthropological Theory* 85(2): 345–370.
- Anders, G. 2010. *In the Shadow of Good Governance: An Ethnography of Civil Service Reform in Africa*. Leiden: Brill.
- Appadurai, A. 2011. The Ghost in the Financial Machine. *Public Culture* 23(3): 517–539.
- Arendt, H. 1958. *The Human Condition*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- Ballesteros, A. 2012. Transparency in Triads. *Political and Legal Anthropology Review* 35(2): 160–166.
- Barry, A. 2002. The Anti-Political Economy. *Economy and Society* 31(2): 268–284.
- Bear, L. 2007. *Lines of the Nation: Indian Railway Workers, Bureaucracy and the Intimate Historical Self*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Bear, L. 2011. Making a River of Gold: Speculative State Promises and Personal Promises in the Post-Liberalisation Governance of the Hooghly. *Focaal* 61(Winter): 46–60.
- Bear, L. 2013. ‘This Body is Our Body’: The Productive Powers of Viswakarma and Ranna Puja in a Neo-liberal Shipyard. In *Vital Relations: Kinship as a Critique of Modernity* (eds) F. Cannell & S. McKinnon, 155–178. Santa Fe, NM: SAR Press.
- Bear, L. 2015 *Navigating Austerity: Currents of Debt on a South Asian River*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Berlant, L. 2007. Nearly Utopian, Nearly Normal: Post-Fordist Affect in *La Promesse* and *Rosetta*. *Public Culture* 19(2): 272–301.
- Best, J. 2012. Bureaucratic Ambiguity. *Economy and Society* 41(1): 84–106.
- Caple James, E. 2012. Witchcraft, Bureaucraft, and the Social Life of (US)Aid in Haiti. *Cultural Anthropology* 27(1): 50–75.
- Chalfin, B. 2014. Public Things, Excremental Politics, and the Infrastructure of Bare Life in Ghana’s City of Tema. *American Ethnologist* 41(1): 92–109.
- Chatterjee, P. 2004. *The Politics of the Governed*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Chatterjee, P. 2008. Democracy and Economic Transformation in India. *Economic and Political Weekly* 43(16): 53–62.
- Cooke, B., & U. Kothari. 2001. *Participation: The New Tyranny?* London: Zed Books.
- Dalakoglou, D. and Kallianos, Y. 2014. Infrastructural Flows, Interruptions and Stasis in Athens of the Crisis. *City: Analysis of Urban Trends, Culture, Theory, Policy, Action* 18 (4–5): 526–532.
- du Gay, P. 2008. Max Weber and the Moral Economy of Office. *Journal of Cultural Economy* 1(2): 129–144.
- Elyachar, J. 2012. Next Practices: Knowledge, Infrastructure, and Public Goods at the Bottom of the Pyramid. *Public Culture* 24(1): 109–129.
- Foucault, M. 2010. *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France 1978–79*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Ferguson, J. 2013. Declarations of Dependence: Labour, Personhood and Welfare in South Africa. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* (N.S.) 19(2): 223–242.
- Graeber, D. 2012. Dead Zones of the Imagination: On Violence, Bureaucracy, and Interpretive Labor. The Malinowski Memorial Lecture, 2006. *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 2(2): 105–128.
- Gupta, A. 2012. *Red Tape: Bureaucracy, Structural Violence, and Poverty in India*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Harriss-White, B. 2003. *India Working: Essays on Society and Economy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Harvey, D. 2005. *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Herzfeld, M. 1993 [1992]. *The Social Production of Indifference: The Symbolic Roots of Western Bureaucracy* (2nd edition). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Hetherington, K. 2011. *Guerrilla Auditors: The Politics of Transparency in Neo-liberal Paraguay*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Hull, M. 2012. *Government of Paper: The Materiality of Bureaucracy in Urban Pakistan*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- James, E.C. 2012. Witchcraft, Bureaucracy and the Social Life of US Aid in Haiti. *Cultural Anthropology* 27(1): 50–75.
- Knight, Daniel. 2015. Opportunism and Diversification: Entrepreneurship and Livelihood Strategies in Uncertain Times. *Ethnos* 80(1): 117–144.
- Laidlaw, J. 2013. *The Subject of Virtue: An Anthropology of Ethics and Freedom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Mathur, N. 2012. Transparent-making Documents and the Crisis of Implementation: A Rural Employment Law and Development Bureaucracy in India. *Political and Legal Anthropology Review* 35(2): 167–184.
- Mathur, N. 2015a. A 'Remote' Town in the Indian Himalaya. *Modern Asian Studies* 49(2): 365–392.
- Mathur, N. 2015b. *Paper Tiger: Law, Bureaucracy, and the Developmental State in Himalayan India*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Maurer, B. 2002. Repressed Futures: Financial Derivatives' Theological Unconscious. *Economy and Society* 31(1): 15–36.
- Miller, D. 2002. Turning Callon the Right Way Up. *Economy and Society* 31(2): 218–233.
- Mitchell, T. 2002. *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Technopolitics, Modernity*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Mitchell, T. 2007. The Properties of Markets. In *Do Economists Make Markets? On the Performativity of Economics* (eds) D. Mackenzie, F. Munieza & L. Siu, 244–275. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Navaro-Yashin, Y. 2012. *The Make-Believe Space: Affective Geography in a Postwar Polity*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Ong, A., & S. Collier. 2005. *Global Assemblages: Technology, Politics and Ethics as Anthropological Problems*. Chichester: Wiley Blackwell.
- Osella, C., & F. Osella. 2000. The Return of King Mahabali: The Politics of Morality in South India. In *The Everyday State and Society in India* (eds) C.J. Fuller & V. Benei, 137–162. Delhi: Social Science Press.
- Power, M. 1997. *The Audit Society: Rituals of Verification*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Roitman, J. 2004. *Fiscal Disobedience: An Anthropology of Economic Regulation in Central Africa*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Reeves, M. 2011. Fixing the Border: On the Affective Life of the State in Southern Kyrgyzstan. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 29(5): 905–923.
- Robbins, J. 2013. Beyond the Suffering Subject: Toward an Anthropology of the Good. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* (N.S.) 19(3): 447–462.
- Roy, A. 2003. *City Requiem, Calcutta: Gender and the Politics of Poverty*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Samuelson, P. 1954. The Pure Theory of Public Expenditure. *The Review of Economics and Statistics* 36(4): 387–389.
- Sharma, A. 2008. *Logics of Empowerment: Development, Gender, and Governance in Neoliberal India*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Shore, C., & S. Wright. 2000. Coercive Accountability: The Rise of Audit Culture in Higher Education. In *Audit Cultures: Anthropological Studies in Accountability, Ethics, and the Academy* (ed.) M. Strathern, 57–89. London: Routledge.

- Shore, C., S. Wright & D. Pero. 2011. *Policy Worlds: Anthropology and Analysis of Contemporary Power*. EASA Book Series. Oxford: Berghahn.
- Silver, L. 2010. Spaces of Encounter: Public Bureaucracy and the Making of Client Identities. *Ethnos* 38: 275–296.
- Stiglitz, J. 2006. Global Public Goods and Global Finance: Does Global Governance Ensure that the Global Public Interest is Served? In *Advancing Public Goods* (ed.) J.-P. Touffut, 149–164. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.
- Stoler, A. 2004. Affective States. In *A Companion to the Anthropology of Politics* (eds) D. Nugent & J. Vincent, 4–20. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Strathern, M. 2000. New Accountabilities. In *Audit Cultures: Anthropological Studies in Accountability, Ethics, and the Academy* (ed.) M. Strathern, 1–18. London: Routledge.
- Weber, M. 1994. Parliament and Government in Germany under a New Political Order. In *Political Writings* (eds) P. Lassman & R. Speirs, 130–271. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Weston, K. 2012. Political Ecologies of the Precarious. *Anthropological Quarterly* 85(2): 429–455.

Laura Bear is Associate Professor of Anthropology at the London School of Economics. She is the author of three books: *The Jadu House: Intimate Histories of Anglo-India* (2000); *Lines of the Nation: Indian Railway Workers, Bureaucracy, and the Intimate Historical Self* (2007) and *Navigating Austerity: Currents of Debt on a South Asian River* (2015).

Nayanika Mathur is a British Academy Postdoctoral Fellow at the Department of Social Anthropology, University of Cambridge. She is the author of *Paper Tiger: Law, Bureaucracy, and the Developmental State in Himalayan India* (2015).