Performing the state: Everyday practices, corruption and reciprocity in Middle Indonesian civil service
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Chapter I

Introduction: On relations and obligations

The photo displayed on the front cover was taken on an early Monday morning in September 2008. It depicts civil servants during a typical Monday morning roll call. This photo was taken on the assembly field adjacent to the mayor’s office in Kupang. However, photos of similar roll calls outside government offices, schools, and police stations can be taken throughout Indonesia every Monday morning. This roll call, although lasting no more than fifteen minutes, exemplifies a key paradox that has spurred my research and analysis.

A little after seven o’clock, civil servants began pouring out of the mayor’s office and parking lot to make their way to the assembly field while chatting, joking, and texting. The field was lower than its surroundings and was unshielded from the sun, which was already starting to make its scorching presence felt despite the early hour. A raised Indonesian flag waved in the center of the field. Facing the field was a podium which did have a shield protecting those underneath it from the sun. Approximately twenty civil servants in their trademark khaki outfits walked onto the lower field. Meanwhile the department heads, recognizable by the dark green and blue of their uniforms, gathered on the podium forming orderly lines. Down below, more civil servants entered the field and slowly started to organize themselves in neat rows as well. They formed separate blocks according to department and stood in lines with their feet slightly apart and their hands on their backs. In front of each block the head of a sub-department stood. Although over two-hundred civil servants worked at the mayor’s office’s various departments, I only counted approximately eighty after the last ones joined their colleagues on the assembly field.

At ten after seven, each sub-department head in turn stepped forward and loudly proclaimed how many members of their respective departments were present. After this, a male upper echelon civil servant dressed in dark-blue stepped up to a microphone which was placed on the podium. The speaker praised the Department of Governance since an impressive hundred percent of its work force was present at the assembly. He then scolded the Department of General Affairs for its embarrassingly low turn-out. His speech quickly turned to the importance of discipline. The ones that showed up for assembly should not follow the bad example of those that were late or did not show up at all. They should not follow the bad example of those that repeatedly call in sick for two days in a row, yet always come in on the third day because another day absent would require them to hand in a doctor’s note. They should not follow the bad example of those that leave during the day because they have to take their kids, husbands or wives somewhere. The speaker spurred all civil servants
present at roll call to always make sure they are on time. The speaker then turned to work ethics. He emphasized that all civil servants have to work in line with their predescribed tasks. They have to work effectively, so the mayor’s decisions will be properly carried out. Not laziness, but morality and ethics should guide the life of a civil servant. The speech continued for a little while, stressing similar themes of discipline, obedience and work ethics, after which another upper echelon civil servant on the podium took the microphone to lead everyone into prayer until, with a few shouted commands from the sub-department heads not unfitting the military, all civil servants stepped in line, turned around and casually walked off the field.

Certain things about this roll call emerge as characteristic of civil service in Kupang. There is, for instance, the display of hierarchical differences between upper and lower echelon civil servants, which comes to the fore in the color of the uniforms worn, and positioning on the field and podium. Furthermore, there is the strict adherence to proper bureaucratic form: the lining up in neat rows per Department, the perfectly timed shouted out attendance report, the exact fifteen seconds allotted to prayer, and the collective stepping aside and standing at ease. Additionally, the speech given by the official speaking into a microphone on the podium to the civil servants lined up below, and which brings to mind the kind of lecture a parent would give a disobedient child, suggests an expectation of subordination of lower level civil servants to their superiors.

Yet, as the photo shows, in the midst of this performance of bureaucratic propriety, hierarchy, and subordination, some civil servants quietly chatted with each other, others checked their phones, whereas again others sent text messages. This discrepancy between form and content, or image and practice of the roll call, is also exemplified by the low turnout. Although attendance of Monday morning roll call is obligatory, only a third of the total work force showed up. Besides a scolding during the speech, however, there would be no consequences for the latecomers. Moreover, the other examples of behavior unfitting a civil servant mentioned in the speech, such as pretending to be sick or leaving the office to pick up children from school, occur often but are never punished.

This Monday morning roll call illustrates a contradiction that continued to fascinate me throughout my fieldwork in government offices in Kupang. This contradiction concerned how to make sense of the discrepancy between the appearance of a well-organized, structured and disciplined state and the everyday hustle and bustle of office life that in many instances seemed to run counter to this appearance. Following current trends in state-society studies which distinguish ‘state image’ from ‘actual practices’, I therefore ask how a state image of wholeness and coherence is maintained when everyday office practices continuously contradict this image. In answering this question, this thesis pays specific attention to corrupt practices as an example of everyday office practices that contradict a ‘state image’ of wholeness, and asks why corruption persists despite recent post-Reformasi changes in the
national-legal framework. As a part of this attention to corrupt practices this thesis, furthermore, aims to refute an assumption, popularly held in Kupang’s discourse on corruption, that ethnicity and ethnic favoring decide political-economic logics.

This dissertation, therefore, aims to look at the consequences of Indonesia’s post-Suharto decentralization efforts as experienced in the government offices of the city of Kupang, Eastern Indonesia. As such, it fits into current approaches to thinking about state-society relations in social sciences that stress a focus on actual practices (as opposed to ‘state images’). I focused on ‘actual practices’ by conducting an ethnography of bureaucracy in city level government offices in Kupang. Because of this, this research also places itself in a long tradition of thinking about ‘bureaucracy’ and, in particular, attempts to offer explanations for certain ‘bureaucratic ills’ such as frustrating unintelligible procedures that make it impossible to obtain services, and the ways in which corruption is often central in these procedures. Such research is especially interesting in Kupang because of the great dependency of this town on the ‘state’ for direct, indirect, and illegal/illicit income, and for formal employment. Furthermore, according to Transparency International (2008), Kupang was Indonesia’s most corrupt town, thus increasing its appeal as a location for research on corrupt practices.

Based on the findings of this ethnography of bureaucracy I want to consider three fairly simple practical questions - how to become a civil servant, how to get a construction project (as a way to look into broader state-business dynamics), and how not to become governor (as a means of addressing more general state-politics relations). In answering these questions I make use of Bourdieu’s concept of various sorts of capital (Bourdieu 1986). In order to recognize how to ‘get things done’ in Kupang, it is helpful to look at the accumulation and exchange of money, connections, and education. What this dissertation hopes to show is that, first of all, the accumulation and exchange of capital that facilitates ‘getting things done’ hinges on the logic of reciprocal obligations that are implied in social networks. Although this comes to the fore most clearly in family networks, I claim this same logic is mimicked in other types of social networks. Secondly, ethnicity (a popular marker for social differences) is analytically useful only insofar as it can be transformed into social capital. Thirdly, ‘corrupt’ practices are actually facilitated by a well-disciplined adherence to the form of bureaucratic procedures -or perhaps in a more Migdallian fashion, adherence to ‘state image’ (Migdal 2001).

Kupang and regional autonomy

Kupang is the provincial capital of the Eastern Indonesian province of East Nusa Tenggara (Nusa Tenggara Timur –NTT). ‘Nanti Tuhan Tolong’ (God will help later) and ‘Nasib Tak Tentu’ (Uncertain/Unfixed Fate) are some of the unflattering nicknames given to the province –and not without reason.
East Nusa Tenggara is among the poorest provinces of Indonesia. Its infant mortality rate is markedly higher than the national average: approximately seventy deaths per 1000 live births compared with forty. Educational standards are not nearly equal to those of ‘developed’ countries or the capital Jakarta (World Bank 2007). With regards to economic growth, the eastern part of the archipelago lags behind the developments of the western part of Indonesia resulting in a relatively high dependence on the state instead of other non-agricultural sources of income which characterizes East Nusa Tenggara and its capital Kupang in particular. Indeed, Kupang is a state dependent town par excellence—it is simultaneously the administrative capital of the city of Kupang, the East Nusa Tenggara province, and—at least at the time of fieldwork—of the wider regency of Kupang as well. The state is the main provider of jobs, the main source of construction projects, as well as the main stepping stone to political careers and regional leadership positions.

The fairly recent implementation of regional autonomy has increased Kupang’s decision making and money allocation power. In response to the cries for reformation (Reformasi) and the severe monetary crisis that surrounded Suharto’s resignation from office in 1998, Indonesia followed the international decentralization trend with vigor. Shifting from

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2 At the end of 2007 the Regency decided to move its headquarters from the city of Kupang to the small town of Oelamasi. New offices for the Regent and Regency parliament there were finished in 2010.
3 The role of the state in Kupang will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Two.
being one of the world’s most centralized to being one of the world’s most decentralized states, Indonesia’s decentralization efforts have understandably been labeled a ‘Big Bang’ (Hofman and Kaiser 2004). Logistically and technically, Indonesia’s decentralization efforts have been considered successful. The implementation of direct district head elections that accompanies regional autonomy since 2005, furthermore, has also provided reason for optimism. For instance, examples from various locations in Indonesia have shown that the electorate uses its newfound power to put favored candidates in office while throwing out unpopular or corrupt incumbents (Mietzner 2006a; Mietzner 2006b). However, examples from vote-selling practices (Choi 2004), and a rise in ‘entrance fees’ for civil servants since the implementation of regional autonomy (Kristiansen and Ramli 2006) indicate that money politics and corrupt practices are (still) flourishing. Henk Schulte Nordholt (2004) also dampens expectations of a more transparent and democratic government by showing the persisting importance of influential actors and patrimonial ties on a local level, the increased means for regional elites to expand and maintain their networks, and the post-colonial characteristics of a blurred boundary between state, society, and market. While decentralization has not quite lived up to its ‘Good Governance’ democratic promise, it has brought more money to the regions and in doing so has made access to the local state and local state resources in places like Kupang –for jobs, projects, revenue- even more appealing. This raises the question of how to obtain access to the state –or, in my more practical phrasing- how to become a civil servant, how to get a construction project, and how to become a district head, in order to better understand how the everyday office practices that are the topic of this thesis are part of a more general social fabric in which reciprocal obligations are embedded.

State and society
Asking how to gain access to the local state and local state resources in a town that is characterized by state dependency in an era of regional autonomy requires one to turn to theoretical discussions on the 'state' and ways to study it. The state, namely, has not been an uncontested object of study for social scientists. One problem concerned the object itself: what is the state if not just government or bureaucracy? Furthermore, the way 'state' relates to 'society' has long been a topic of discussion. Are there boundaries between state and society and, if so, how are they constructed?

In postwar American social science an initial solution to this problem of studying and thinking about the state was to abandon 'state' from social science vocabulary altogether as an unhelpful ideological construct and replace it instead with 'political system'. However, this more empiricist endeavor substituted the problematic ideological construct with a limitless object of study, thereby still not offering a workable alternative to the study of the state (Mitchell 1991: 76-80). As a response to this in the late 1970s the 'state was brought back in'
not just as a shift in focus from 'society' back to 'state' but, more importantly, as an attempt to establish clear boundaries between state and society (see for instance Skocpol et al 1985). A general assumption of such state centered theorists was that the state can be viewed as an entity autonomous from society. Nevertheless, as Mitchell rightly points out, it is impossible to pinpoint a clear line separating the two and it is exactly this elusiveness of a state-society boundary that should be taken seriously (Mitchell 1991: 77, 83).

The pivotal turning point that prompted a new approach in studying state-society relations and one that recognized the 'state' as both a material force and ideological construct was a short essay written by Philip Abrams (1988). Instead of making a sharp binary distinction between state and society, Abrams distinguishes 'state system' from 'state idea'. In doing so he makes a clear distinction between the compelling idea of unity and coherence of the state idea while also accounting for an everyday reality that seems incongruent with this idea. Abrams two-tiered approach to studying state-society relations consequently influenced a number of scholars (see for instance Mitchell 1991; Hansen and Stepputat 2001; Migdal 2001; Sharma and Gupta 2006).

Most notably, in an attempt to bring similar notions to the attention of a wider audience of political scientists, Joel Migdal (2001: 15-16) also advocates a two-part theoretical outlook on the state. As he puts it,

> the state is a field of power marked by the use and threat of violence and shaped by 1) the image of a coherent, controlling organization in a territory, which is a representation of the people bounded by that territory, and 2) the actual practices of its multiple parts.

Similar to Abrams, Migdal therefore argues that we not only look at an image of wholeness but also lower the level of analysis to look beyond the image of the state as a single actor/entity and investigate the various actors within and outside the state that interact, cooperate, and compete with each other -thus to take into account the actual everyday practices engaged in by state actors that may contradict the state image of wholeness. Putting Migdal’s ideas into practice, Sharma and Gupta (2006) trace a genealogy of modern and (post)colonial conceptions of the state, and critically interrogate empiricist nation and institution centered approaches to studying the state. Instead, they emphasize the different shapes and meanings that states take on in particular contexts. Furthermore, apart from emphasizing symbolical aspects of the state (as an image or idea) they also promote focusing on the way the state works through everyday practices and representations, instead of searching for an origin of a universal state.

For scholars working on the state in Indonesia, this new two-pronged research agenda emerged with excellent timing. The sudden collapse of the seemingly strong and centralized New Order state after the political crisis of 1998 left many academics puzzled and in search
of new ways to understand the state in Indonesia. During the New Order era it was common to employ terminology such as 'bureaucratic polity' (McVey 1982) and 'bureaucratic authoritarianism' (King 1982) to depict a strong and effective military-dominated state with a stronghold over society. Possibly the most influential depiction of state-society relations in Indonesia is given in Anderson's essay 'Old State, New Society: Indonesia's New Order in Comparative Historical Perspective'. In this essay Anderson breaks up the taken-for-granted amalgam of nation-state in order to look at the way in which nation and state have related to each other from the colonial era to the New Order period in the 1980s. The New Order regime to him clearly embodies the 'representational' interests of state over society serving mainly the power interests of state-qua-state (Anderson 1983). For a long time this image of a strong Indonesian state, defending and strengthening state interests, dominated academic thoughts on the Indonesian state. The 1998 sudden developments and their aftermath, however, created space to doubt this assumed strength of the Indonesian state, to question the use of an exclusive state centered approach, to move away from ideological images of the state toward attention to actual state-practices, as well as to move away from center to region.

Furthermore, as Gerry Van Klinken and Joshua Barker (2009) show, not just the fall of Suharto and subsequent processes of decentralization and democratization motivated novel ways of thinking about the state. The two-pronged approach also offered a way of overcoming the uneasy—and in hindsight exaggerated—separation between the two main 'storylines', grafted on the Weberian ideal types of the ‘modern bureaucratic state’ and the ‘traditional patrimonial state’, which for decades dominated approaches to studying the state in Indonesia. The first ideal type emphasized a rationalization of state power and the rise of the modern bureaucratic state⁴, whereas the second focused on the ways in which politics in Indonesia differed from modern-day politics in the West.⁵ The realization that the ‘actual state’ in Indonesia is spread quite thin (Van Klinken and Barker 2009: 23) shook the first storyline, and the critical questioning within the discipline of anthropology of culture as a meaningful bounded whole left the second one untenable. Instead, a two-tiered approach of state-idea/state image and state-system/actual state practices offered a new and fruitful analytical approach to state-studies in Indonesia.⁶

This two-pronged approach to studying state-society dynamics is echoed in the main paradox this dissertation addresses concerning how to make sense of the discrepancy between the image of a coherent and controlling organization and everyday office practices that contradict this image of wholeness. Initially, this dissertation focuses on the ‘actual practices’ tier of this approach by zooming in on my three ‘how to’ questions among a

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⁴ The abovementioned authors would fit in this line of thinking.
⁵ A line of thought that emerges, for example, in Anderson 1972; Geertz 1980.
⁶ The best example of the current focus on the ‘actual practices’ tier is probably Barker and Van Klinken’s 2009 volume State of Authority: State in Society in Indonesia. Examples of scholars focusing more on the state-idea part are Pemberton (1994); Barker (1998); Li (2007).
particular state dependent social class, called the ‘political class’.\textsuperscript{7} This reveals, as we will see, that ‘getting things done’ hinges on the practice of family-like reciprocal gift-exchanges which are embedded in Kupang’s social fabric. Ultimately, however, this dissertation aims to relate the ‘actual practices’ tier to the ‘state image’ one to understand how a state image of coherence and control remains in place despite practices that contradict or taint such an image. Using Alexei Yurchak’s (2006) concept of ‘performative shift’ I argue that those efforts that uphold and maintain a coherent state image also, unintentionally, facilitate a continuation of the (corrupt) practices that contradict this image. In other words, I look at the social practices that help maintain a state image of wholeness which, in turn, enables social practices that counter that image. This dissertation thus addresses state-society relations not by viewing ‘state’ and ‘society’ as distinct entities separated by an elusive boundary but, instead, by focusing on the discrepancy and interrelatedness of state image/idea and social practices.

**Actual practices, corruption, bureaucracy**

Soon after having arrived in Kupang in early 2008 I met with the mayor who graciously granted me permission to conduct fieldwork in any government office under his jurisdiction. He allowed me, in short, access to a desk and chair in any department for as long as I wished, and also permitted me to conduct interviews with civil servants and join in everyday office activities. Over the course of an initial ten-month and subsequent two-month fieldwork stretch I spent time in the Departments of Governance, Information and Communication, Human Resources, and Public Works, getting increasingly comfortable with my new coworkers, office procedures, and –my main practical interest– how to ‘get things done’.

An unavoidable topic when trying to get acquainted with ways of ‘getting things done’ or ‘actual state practices’ in civil service in Kupang is corruption, or, rather, the Indonesian trinity of corruption, collusion, and nepotism (Korupsi, Kolusi dan Nepotisme –KKN). According to a 2008 Transparency International survey Indonesia ranks 126th on their International Corruption Perceptions Index along with Eritrea, Ethiopia, Guyana, Honduras, Libya, Mozambique and Uganda, that all have a rating of 2.6 on a scale of 10.\textsuperscript{8} A Corruption Perceptions Index was also made for cities within Indonesia. Kupang had the dubious honor of being perceived as Indonesia’s most corrupt city of 2008.

Throughout this dissertation we will come across plenty of examples of what might be termed ‘corruption, collusion, and nepotism’ in civil service and involving civil servants, such as Regional Secretaries helping family members obtain civil service positions in Chapter Five, employees of the Department of Human Resources threatening to delete the names of applicants from the list of newly accepted civil servants if they refuse to hand over

\textsuperscript{7} ‘Political class’ is a concept I borrow from Jacqueline Vel (2008). Exactly what political class means and who it comprises will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Two.

\textsuperscript{8} http://www.transparency.org/policy_research/surveys_indices/cpi/2008
some ‘smoothing money’ in Chapter Three, and contractors including an informal fee for Public Works employees in their calculations of the total costs of a project in Chapter Six. At the same time, however, these examples are rarely referred to as KKN. All civil servants I talked to condemned KKN practices. KKN clearly entails bad behavior, whereas most civil servants did not consider it wrong to choose family members over other applicants when in a position to hire new civil servants. On the contrary, not picking a family member was morally disapproved of. Furthermore, offering some extra money before or after a bureaucratic procedure – getting a permission letter, extending a visa, transferring motorcycle ownership papers- was often explained as a polite way of saying ‘thank you’. When lucky, offering some money might also help speed up long and tedious processes but, as will become clear, it takes more than mere economic capital to secure bureaucratic successes.

This ambiguity of practices that might be labeled as KKN comes to the fore in the many euphemisms surrounding money, such as those mentioned above. Money is never just money, it is a ‘smoother’ (‘smoothing money’ - uang pelicin), a way of expressing gratefulness (hence the expression ‘saying thanks with money’ – ucapan terima kasih diuangkan), or something given under the table without attracting too much attention to it (‘under-the-table-money’ – uang dibawah meja). Collusion and nepotism are, similarly, frowned upon, whereas ‘helping out’ (membantu) or ‘returning a favor’ (balas jasa) to close ones (kedekatan, kenalan, keluarga) is perfectly acceptable and understandable. KKN is what other people do, involves lots of money, and concerns mainly ‘elites’, whereas their own practices are expressions of giving thanks or helping out.

Corruption as I encountered in Kupang’s government offices was thus far from clear-cut: Kupang is perceived to be Indonesia’s most corrupt town, yet no one is corrupt – merely polite and helpful. It is, however, through trying to make sense of those ‘actual practices’ which not only seemed to contradict the state’s anti-KKN discourse which was tirelessly repeated in pamphlets, on stickers in offices, and in Monday morning roll call speeches but also seemed to go against an image of a strong, powerful, authoritative state, that it became clearer how to ‘get things done’.

Trying to understand why corruption was not corruption thus proved helpful. According to Daniel Smith (2007), however, anthropology has not concerned itself that much with explicit studies of corruption. He explains this by the discipline’s long-time focus on small-scale societies, by the time it has taken the discipline to ‘catch up to the changing realities in the places we study’, and also by ‘anthropology’s emphasis on local rationalities and cultural logics, and the largely sympathetic sensibility of anthropologists regarding their subjects.’ What political scientists would thus label as corruption, is called ‘gift exchange’, ‘moral economies’, ‘reciprocity’ or ‘patronage’ (Smith 2007: 9-10). Despite this general lack of studies on corruption, some literature on Africa does touch upon the intersection between state, society, and reciprocal obligations that I have found intriguing. Peter Ekeh (1975) took
the lead by distinguishing a ‘moral’ primordial public from an ‘amoral’ civic public, but since then concepts such as patrimonialism (Bratton and Van de Walle, 1994), prebendalism (Joseph, 1987), economy of affection (Hyden, 1980), politics of the belly (Bayart, 1993), and soft state (Myrdal, 1968: Goldthorpe, 1975)\(^9\) have helped to make sense of corruption, relationships and reciprocity in state contexts. These examples, nevertheless, do lean towards the traditional patrimonial ‘storyline’, described previously, used in Indonesia, which lost popularity due to the cultural debates in anthropology in the mid-eighties, which is something Smith also cautions against when stating that depicting culture as timeless or static clouds the influence of social and historical structures as well as political and economic forces (Smith 2007: 6).

Smith himself takes a more nuanced approach to the study of corruption in relation to state and reciprocal obligations, which is closer to my own focus on ‘actual practices’ (Smith 2001). He explores the social reproduction of corruption in the context of everyday instances of patronage as they occur in networks of kin, community, and interpersonal association in Nigeria.\(^10\) Central to his analysis is the ambivalence between the reciprocal obligations of kinship and the structures of power and inequality that characterize Nigeria. According to Smith, relationships of duty and obligation, constructed by ideas on descent and kinship, shape morality and behavior in everyday village life. These everyday reciprocal obligations in kinship bonds also mean that those who accumulate wealth are expected to redistribute it, thereby gaining recognition and prestige. Present-day patronage systems find their origin in such hierarchical reciprocal ties and obligations that characterize kinship relations (Ibid.: 349-351). The legitimacy of power, therefore, rests, ‘in part, on the ability of patrons to cultivate economic and political ties with their clients in a manner that evokes and recruits the emotional bonds and moral obligations of kinship’ (Ibid: 360). In reference to the exacerbation of ethnic politics, which processes of modernization and democratization give rise to (as with Indonesia’s ‘communal conflicts’ mentioned below), he claims that ethnicity as a political identity does not replace or become more important than other types of allegiance, especially those with lineage and community of origin. Instead, ‘individuals are able to hold many identities simultaneously, calling upon different levels of allegiance as necessary,’ even though lineage, place of origin, and kinship ties remain important (Ibid.: 360).

Similar to my research, Smith thus stresses the importance of reciprocal obligations within relationships that influence state-society dynamics. Furthermore, even though these obligations are most clearly expressed in kinship relations, they are by no means restricted to them. As such, ethnicity, instead of being something natural or self-evident, serves as yet another means for forming networks—albeit hierarchical—in which reciprocal obligations and

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\(^9\) For more elaboration see Osaghae (2006).
\(^10\) As a comparison it is interesting to note that Nigeria ranks 121\(^{st}\) on Transparency International’s International Corruption Perception Index with a score of 2,7, which is only slightly ‘less corrupt’ than Indonesia: 2,6.
expectations can thrive. Finally, Smith steers clear from explaining this interrelationship between state, society and reciprocal obligations in terms of an homogenous meaningful whole of culture as the Indonesian traditional patrimonial ‘storyline’ would have it. Therefore, as Smith interestingly shows –and as I hope to show- a focus on actual practices enables detailed and nuanced analyses that ‘blur the boundaries between state and society’ (Gupta 2006) without having to make grand claims about culture.

Yet, most anthropological analyses on bureaucracy, state-society dynamics, and reciprocity such as those mentioned above stem from Africa, India, or, as this one, Indonesia –non-Western countries. Even though it is no longer in vogue in anthropology to refer to bureaucracies (and states) in developing countries in terms of ‘failure’, ‘disease’, or ‘weak’, as a digression from an ideal typical Weberian rational-legal state or bureaucracy, international institutions still do. For instance, the IMF bailout of Indonesia after the economic crisis of 1997 and 1998 occurred only under the strict condition of administrative reforms founded on Good Governance footing, indicating a general assumption that there is an ideal typical state and ideal typical bureaucracy that ought to be conformed to. Moreover, since bureaucratic digressions are most often signaled in non-Western contexts (Transparency International 2008) this also supposes that ‘the West’ most clearly conforms to a Weberian rational-legal ideal-type, and that, perhaps, actual practices in ‘Western bureaucracies’ reveal no blurring of state-society boundaries.

Literature on Indonesian bureaucracy tends to show similar tendencies of distinguishing Western bureaucracies from those in ‘developing’ countries, and of assuming state-society boundaries. Much of what has been written about Indonesian bureaucracy concerns ‘wrongs’ within bureaucracy. Fagg (1958), for instance, noted the paternalistic character of Indonesian bureaucracy, and Smith (1975) lamented its lack of productivity. Conkling (1979) addressed the weak authority of superiors over employees in one article and depicted civil servants as morally flawed and ruled by desire (nafsu) and self-interest in another (Conkling: 1984). Buehler (2011), additionally, in a more recent article, discusses the state’s ineffectiveness in catering to the needs of its citizens. Oftentimes, these bureaucratic ills are explained in terms of differences between Western and Indonesian-or other developing countries’- bureaucracies.

For example, Riggs (1964) presented his notion of ‘sala’ bureaucracy of the prismatic society as an alternative to industrialized countries’ bureaucracies. Unlike Riggs, who did not view sala bureaucracy as an in-between stage from the ‘chamber’-type bureaucracies of traditional societies to the ‘office’-type bureaucracies of industrialized societies, many scholars did assume these ills were part of a transition or development towards a more Western rational-legal type of bureaucracy. Conkling, for instance, questioned the legitimacy of civil servants’ power in Indonesian bureaucracies, but took this for granted in Western bureaucratic contexts (Conkling 1979: 543). To him, weak authority and legitimacy
were, 'one of the most salient features of Indonesian bureaucratic organizations in contrast to our own', and he based his subsequent analysis on the assumption that Indonesia found itself in the processes of rationalization in traditional societies (Ibid. 1984: 269). Smith also made this distinction explicit when he suggested that incentives to increase productivity that work in Western industrialized societies might be ineffective in Asian ones (Smith 1975: 732). Of course, such viewpoints are also characteristic of the times in which they were written. Because of this, the implicit assumption present in these writings that state and society are separate entities is also not surprising. However, this tendency is still reflected in more recent publications on Indonesian bureaucracy. Buehler’s (2011) recent work on state’s ineffectiveness assumes the kind of state-society boundaries that, for instance, Van Klinken and Barker (2009), advocating a ‘state image’ versus ‘actual practice’ approach, rally against.

Although much of the ethnographic detail of previous work on Indonesian bureaucracy resonates with the ethnographic findings of this dissertation, the way in which this dissertation hopes to build on and continue this body of work differs in two ways. First, as discussed in more detail previously, this dissertation does not assume any boundaries between state and society. Second, I do not want to continue the assumption of a difference between ‘Western’ and ‘developing’ bureaucracies. This, then, opens up the opportunity to view practices that take place inside offices or that are carried out by civil servants as part of a more general social practice, in which -as I claim- reciprocal obligations are embedded, as opposed to viewing them as endemic bureaucratic pathologies. Viewing corruption, insubordination, weak authority, and failure to implement new rules and regulations as part of more general social practices rather than as symptoms of a deviating Indonesian bureaucracy, makes it possible to recognize similar practices in ‘Western’ bureaucracies, and thereby question their adherence to an ideal typical Weberian rational-legal bureaucracy.

Modifications of assumptions of the Weberian rational-legal basis of Western bureaucracies have certainly been made for a long time (see for instance Crozier 1964), but, perhaps, most directly by Michael Herzfeld (1992). Herzfeld tackles the supposed, rational, Weberian foundation of Western bureaucracies as a rationalization process in a move away from a *Gemeinschaft* type of society in which status, custom, and patronage matter—as we see so often in accounts of non-Western bureaucracy. He, instead, uncovers how notions of blood and nation influence bureaucratic categorization. Ideas on inclusion and exclusion, as well as a ‘secular theodicy’ that mystifies bureaucratic accountability all form the ‘symbolic roots’ of Western bureaucracy. What is interesting about Herzfeld’s account are his claims that Western bureaucracy is no less ‘symbolic’—notions of race, nation, blood as a basis for inclusion and exclusion; matters of luck or faith, secular theodicy, and practical ways of ‘getting things done’; resorting to use of various forms of capital—than non-Western bureaucracy.
Herzfeld thus illuminates the symbolic roots of Western bureaucracy and describes practices that resonate with those I encountered in government offices in Kupang. Similarly, I anticipate that my analysis of practices in Kupang will resonate with those in other bureaucratic contexts —instead of merely being a description of the exotic, the far away, or the ‘underdeveloped’. My focus on ‘actual practices’ thus led me to reconsider instances of KKN as framed as acts of politeness in order to give back or help out, which then revealed an underlying reciprocal current in which an opening up of relationships by means of gift-giving as well as relying on expectations of reciprocal obligations within already established networks matter. In trying to answer how to ‘get things done’ in Kupang I had to understand how relationships are created and how reciprocal obligations and expectations implied in networks make this creation of relationships important.

‘Belonging’ and creating relationships
When reading about Kupang, relationships are not necessarily portrayed as unproblematic or peaceful. Inter-ethnic relations, in particular, are viewed as challenging. Whereas I wish to emphasize the importance of creating relationships in getting access to the local state and local state resources, popular discourse in Kupang frames appropriation of state resources in terms of ethnic favoring, something I explore more in-depth in Chapter Three. Thomas Didimus Dagang (2004), for instance, claims that Kupang’s ethnic heterogeneity makes for ethnic preferencing in civil service. Everyday ethnic joking and stereotyping in Kupang, which I encountered during fieldwork, additionally fuels suspicions that ‘ethnicity’ is key to understanding social segmentation and access to the local state. Alo Liliwery, current Dean of the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences of Kupang’s Nusa Cendana University, has since long focused on problematic inter-ethnic communication in Kupang (1993), and argues that inter-ethnic communication in Kupang is influenced by social prejudice resulting from ethnocentrism which is present in all ethnic groups.

This framing of friction and discrimination in terms of ethnicity is not altogether surprising in Kupang since the town has quite a remarkable ethnic and religious composition. In contrast with most of Indonesia East Nusa Tenggara is largely Christian instead of Muslim. Almost sixty percent of the Kupang’s population of approximately 300,000 inhabitants is estimated to be Protestant, while Catholics make up approximately one fourth of the population. Muslims form a 16 percent minority, leaving very small Hindu and Buddhist populations (Kota Kupang In Figures 2010). Furthermore, even though the city of Kupang is located on the island of Timor its inhabitants originate from all islands of East Nusa Tenggara and beyond, resulting in an ethnically and religiously heterogeneous town.

The suspicions concerning problematic inter-ethnic (and inter-religious) relationships seemed to be confirmed on the 30th of November 1999, the day of the ‘Kupang incident’. This day was supposed to be a day of mourning in Kupang as a reaction to a series of
violence that took place in the Ketapang area in the capital Jakarta. Intentions were to peacefully commemorate these recent episodes of violence in the capital by holding an ecumenical service and halting all public activities (Human Rights Watch 1999). Before the end of the day, however, four mosques had been completely destroyed and four others half destroyed. Furthermore, twenty-three private homes, a Muslim boarding school, an Islamic court office, four Islamic schools, three shops, nine restaurants, thirty cars and motorcycles had also been devastated mostly in the Oesapa district of Kupang where many Muslim immigrants lived (Tule 2000: 95; Li 2000). This outbreak of violence was depicted as ‘ethnic’ and seemed to confirm Liliwery’s prediction of the volatility of inter-ethnic relations in Kupang. At first glance ‘ethnicity’ thus offered a self-evident and – at least to most in Kupang - a satisfactory explanation for why the ‘Kupang incident’ took place.

As a part of one of this thesis’ aims to critically review ethnicity as a social marker for processes of differentiation in Kupang, I, nevertheless, want to question the self-evidence and naturalness of ‘ethnicity’, and the assumption of inter-group relations as problematic on three accounts. First, when looking at Indonesia as a whole neither the Kupang incident nor the Ketapang tragedy were isolated occurrences. In fact, Indonesia’s transitional period from New Order rule to the post-Suharto era has been marked by an upsurge in conflicts that appeared to revolve around ‘communal’ identities such as the ones that took place in Ambon, West-Kalimantan, North-Maluku and Central Kalimantan, roughly between 1997 and 2002. In an interesting analysis of these instances of communal violence, Gerry van Klinken counters the popular conception that religious or ethnic frictions underlie these conflicts on two accounts (Van Klinken 2005; Van Klinken 2007). First, he shows that all these occurrences in some way involved an opening up of opportunities connected to the state on a very local scale – something facilitated by recent processes of decentralization and democratization (Van Klinken 2007: 82-99). Religion or ethnicity, in short, formed useful tools for local middle classes to compete for profitable local political and administrative positions that became available in the post-Suharto era. Second, the towns where these conflicts took place generally were middle-sized provincial towns that were characterized by high levels of deagrarianization and state dependency. The most unstable places of 1999 had deagrarianized most rapidly, causing an influx of migrants into town who – due to lack of industrialization- depended on state-related sources of income (Ibid: 38-44). By discerning structural factors that set the stage for the eruption of these occurrences of violence Van

11 The Ketapang incident refers to a series of violence that took place in the Ketapang area in Jakarta, which seemingly started as a fight between security guards of a gambling club and some thugs, but resulted in the burning of several churches and thirteen deaths.
12 For instance, similar to the locations Van Klinken describes (2007), the East Nusa Tenggara province, of which Kupang is the provincial capital, also ranks high on his ‘vulnerability to ethnic conflict’ index. In fact, it displays equal vulnerability to Central Kalimantan and Maluku and an even higher vulnerability to ethnic conflict than West Kalimantan (Ibid.: 41-44). This means that Kupang – like those other towns - is also characterized by high levels of deagrarianization and state dependency.
Klinken convincingly deconstructs the naturalness or self-evidence of ‘ethnicity’ and ‘religion’ in these conflicts.

Additionally, explaining violent occurrences in terms of ethnicity fits into a wider preoccupation with ‘belonging’. Like Van Klinken, Tania Li (2000), for instance, also shows how ‘communal’ identities—which in her case refers to ‘tribal’ or ‘indigenous’ ones—have risen to prominence in post-Suharto Indonesia, albeit in less violent circumstances. Li addresses the articulation of collective indigenous identity in post-Suharto Indonesia by comparing two, in many respects, similar locations in Central Sulawesi in an attempt to understand why one of these communities, ‘see[s] themselves in the “indigenous peoples” slot’ while the other does not. A particular historical trajectory, state programs, NGO activity and moments of opportunity all form a conjuncture at which a positioning and articulation of self-identification as ‘tribal’ becomes possible. Tribal or indigenous identity is therefore not self-evident, but rather a contingent yet ambiguous outcome of various seemingly unconnected global and local flows that collide and suddenly make ‘belonging’ prominent.

This preoccupation with belonging, furthermore, is not merely limited to post-Suharto Indonesia. This understanding of ‘local’ forms of belonging as a global conjuncture has proven to be useful in other regions as well. Peter Geschiere, for instance, uses it to explain the appeal of the notion of ‘autochtony’—to be born of the soil—in both Cameroon and the Netherlands (Geschiere 2009). Decentralization, democratization, and the tenacity of the nation-state converge in Western Africa in a way that makes the question of who ‘really belongs’ prominent, whereas historical construction and political manipulation facilitate the autochtony discourse in the Netherlands (see also Verkaaik 2010).

One paradoxical occurrence in a globalizing world of increased interconnectedness thus seems to be a peculiar obsession with ‘belonging’ (Geschiere 2009: 1-2), which in Kupang emerged most clearly in the form of the ‘Kupang incident’ and the way it was consequently explained. However, from the ‘elementary structures’ underlying kinship formation (Levi-Strauss 1969), to the character of ethnic boundaries (Barth 1969), to the ‘social fact of sides’ (Sahlins 1972: 189), questions of ‘belonging’, othering, boundary formations between social groups, and of Us versus Them have always been fundamental to the discipline of anthropology. Belonging, as Van Klinken, Li and Geschiere have rightly shown, cannot be understood without recognizing the importance of structural influences and conjunctures that facilitate the articulation of belonging. The question of who belongs, nevertheless, also entails considering who does not belong—be it the Pygme or the ‘allochtoon’ in Geschiere’s examples, or Muslims, Christians, and Dayaks in Van Klinken’s examples (2005). ‘Belonging’ is thus not only a ‘conjunctural’ concept but also a relational one.

As mentioned, however, relationships tend to be portrayed as problematic. In Kupang this comes to the fore most clearly in the violent example of the Kupang incident—‘Christian
locals’ opposing ‘Muslim newcomers’, but also shapes less violent examples, such as communication between ethnic groups (Liliwery 1994), and –to return to my particular topic- assumption concerning competition between ethnic groups in trying to get access to local state resources (Dagang 2004). As Joel Robbins claims, most anthropological analyses that address the role of relationships focus on, ‘the violence done in and through relationships, and they are motivated by the question of what people can do to put an end to the relationships that make their lives so bad’ (2003: 10). As he shows, this line of thinking is heavily influenced by a Hobbesian model of politics that assumes individuals set on maximizing own interests and pursuing personal gains. Countering this taken-for-granted liberal model of politics in an attempt to rethink political anthropology, Robbins instead proposes a Hegelian-inspired perspective in which political struggles focus on the formation instead of on limiting of relationships (Ibid.).

It is this relational line of thinking, finally, that helps modify assumptions regarding the self-evidence of ‘ethnicity’ and inter-group relations as problematic, and which, therefore, will form a far more useful basis of analysis than one that presumes a Hobbesian model of politics. The popular view in Kupang that relationships can best be viewed as problematic is, namely, already refuted by its clearest supporting example –the Kupang incident I just described. Unlike the instances of violence described by Van Klinken, the Kupang incident did not drag on for a long period of time. In fact, after only one day of unrest the violence dissolved, and Kupangese resumed their everyday lives. 13 Furthermore, as became increasingly clear to me during fieldwork, when wanting to understand how to access the local state and local state resources, not assumptions about relationships as problematic but a focus on building relationships is imperative. Relationships in Kupang are useful because of the reciprocal obligations and expectation implied in social networks. When wanting to know how to become a civil servant, how to get a construction project, and how (not) to become a district head it helps to look at the formation and consequent use of relationships. I do not mean to dismiss the role of problematic relationships, ethnic or communal violence, or inter-group distrust. In fact, in this thesis I give ample space to claims concerning ethnic differencing and ethnic preferencing. I merely wish to shift the focus on relationships slightly, to emphasize the importance of trying to create and maintain relationships, and to take as a starting point on relationships a question Robbins poses, ‘what kind of politics [do] relationship-seeking people produce?’ (Robbins 2003: 10).

13 Some scholars explain this in terms of the intrinsically peaceful ‘house-society’ that characterizes all peoples of East Nusa Tenggara (Tule 2000). Such ideas about the intrinsically peacefulness draw on similar assumptions regarding naturalness of ethnicity as those that claim inter-ethnic relations as inherently problematic (Liliwery 1994) and are, therefore, similarly unreflectively reifying.
Capital, gift-giving, reciprocity

Of main importance with regards to my interest in the formation of relationships is that relationships in Kupang imply reciprocal obligations. As we will see in Chapter Two this comes to the fore most clearly in family circles in which, on the occasion of an important life-event of a part of the larger family networks, contributions from other parts of the family can always be counted on. But examples of gift-giving are found in any type of network in Kupang and form an important key to answering my ‘how to’ questions. In Chapter Five, for example, civil servant Anderius recalls how members of his extended family contributed money in order to send him to high school in Kupang. In Chapter Three a mother plots a way to help her son get into the local police academy by offering an academy official money. In Chapter Four aspiring civil servant Valentino gets help from his influential uncle to ensure his acceptance into an elite preparatory civil service academy.

I prefer to analyze processes of gift-giving and reciprocal obligations in Bourdieuan terms of exchanging various forms of capital –economic, social, and cultural (Bourdieu 1986). Bourdieu defines capital as, ‘accumulated labor (in its materialized form or its “incorporated”, embodied form) which, when appropriated on a private, i.e. exclusive, basis by agents or groups of agents, enables them to appropriate social energy in the form of reified or living labor’ (Bourdieu 1986: 241). In short, economic capital refers to assets that are immediately and directly convertible into money. Social capital relates to membership to a group, it is the aggregate of the actual or potential resources, which are linked to possession of a durable network. Cultural capital –institutionalized, objectified or embodied- refers to non-material social assets such as knowledge, skills, education, and diploma’s. The distinctions between the different kinds of capital are largely analytical, and can be blurred in practice.

\[14\] Even though I wish to use Bourdieu’s concept of capital without stressing the concepts of ‘field’ and habitus it should be mentioned that these are, in fact, relational concepts, and of most use when applied together. Habitus can be viewed as the mediating connection between structure and agency. It’s the structuring mechanism for social practices that originates from within the actor. Viewed as dispositions –either cognitive, emotional or bodily-, they are acquired, mainly during childhood and structured by the social environment in which they are acquired. Fields, additionally, are relative autonomous social universes that can be distinguished from other such universes. A field is, furthermore, a relational space of positions and relations of power, thus emphasizing the connectedness between actors that occupy positions in the field on the one hand, and the cohesion between different forces in the field on the other. Positions and forces in the field are not just connected, but their position and change in position also influence the positions of others, due to the ‘magnetic logic’ of the field. Bourdieu referred to field as a ‘game-like’ structure -as a space of play or a space of struggle. In Bourdieuan terms, this dissertation thus concerns the bureaucratic field in which the game ‘how to get access to the state and its resources’ is played. How successful the participants of this game are depends on their relationship to the relevant forms of capital. This view of field as a game-like structure in which constant struggle takes place between differently positioned actors, and which is constantly in motion, closely resembles the way Migdal presents his state-in-society approach in which he represents the state as a field of power in which constant struggle over domination takes places among ‘loose coalitions’ (Migdal, 2001: 11-12, 16). Both scholars talk about the field, and emphasize process and struggle.
What is appealing about the concept of capital with regards to my interest in relationships and reciprocal obligations is that they can be exchanged, converted into different forms of capital, and accumulated—thereby enabling upwards social mobility into the ranks of what Jacqueline Vel (2008) has called the ‘political class’. The examples given above can, therefore, also be viewed as conversions of economic (money) and social capital (influential uncle) into cultural capital (admission to a school). Furthermore, it is not too far a stretch to use the concept of capital in Kupang—the various kinds of capital find its resonance in very Kupangese vernacular. ‘Close ones’ (kedekatan), ‘acquaintances’ (kenalan), and family (keluarga) are not incongruous with social capital, and ‘smoothing money’ (uang pelicin), ‘saying thank you with money’ (ucapan terimah kasih diuangkan), and ‘under-the-table-money’ (uang dibawah meja) concord well with economic capital. These examples of Kupang vernacular already imply the purpose of these kinds of capital as spending capital—as something that ought to be converted. ‘Money’ only becomes ‘thank you’ or ‘smoothing’ money when it is part of an exchange, thus when it is converted.

Membership of the political class (Vel 2008), a concept which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Two, is greatly enhanced by the ability to extract economic resources from the state. However, political class indicates social rather than economic stratification, and, consequently, not only access to state resources but also the accumulation and exchange of other kinds of capital are crucial for inclusion in this class. Therefore, a Bourdieuan focus on forms of capital, and in particular his ideas on conversion, are important in understanding the concept of political class: political class membership as a type of social stratification can only be obtained and maintained through the accumulation and transformation of more than economic capital. Finally, my preference for the use of capital is partly motivated out of resistance against the ethnic categories and typologies that were pressed upon me during my fieldwork. Weary of the reifying possibilities of ethnic categorization I propose to view ethnicity, in the context of the questions addressed in this dissertation, as a possible source of social capital.

Bourdieu is also quite attentive to reciprocity. In Outline of a Theory of Practice (1977) he, for instance, delineates the importance of temporality in gift exchange and shows how ‘manipulation of the tempo of the action’ opens up possibilities for strategizing (Bourdieu 1977: 4-15). By doing this, he touches upon those aspects of reciprocity that make the basic simple idea of gift-giving so attractive—namely the numerous complexities that can be spun from it. However, Bourdieu’s ideas on gift-giving presume strategizing, which is not quite what I want to emphasize. I agree with Bourdieu that strategizing and attempting to manipulate situations in one’s favor matter. In Chapter Five, for example, I will address young career civil servant Valentino’s shrewd planning of ways to use his ‘capital’ for speedy advancement of his career. Yet, gift-giving is not merely, or even mainly, about (individual) actors strategizing to move ahead in a bureaucratic ‘field’. Since gift-giving...
hinges on relationships and, more importantly, on the obligations that accompany relationships and gift-giving, strategies cannot always form its most notable aspect.

This becomes clear, for instance, in Chapter Two in which I describe how family obligations can be read from a ‘book of donations’ in which attendants jot down their donations at family parties. Giving a donation to those throwing a party assumes the recipients will reciprocate a donation at a future family party thrown by the donor. However, if such an event never occurs the donations given will never be reciprocated. Some, therefore, consider themselves greatly disadvantaged by these family obligations. Contractors discussed in Chapter Six, furthermore, may offer a large percentage of informal fees to project committees that are in charge of handing out construction projects, in anticipation of possibilities for skimming off the total amount available for projects, but obligations to Public Works officials and promises of ‘sharing the pie’ with fellow contactors in combination with an added burden of having to pay off anti-corruption investigators leave very little to be gained. Additionally, candidates for district head elections put a lot of money and effort into becoming district heads, but, as Kupang’s mayor shows in Chapter Five, after elections the implementation of government and personal reputation are greatly threatened due to unwise promotions of department heads –as a thank you for given support during election time, and to unreturned favors to connections –causing relationships to go sour. Therefore, I want to shift the focus in gift-giving from Bourdieuan strategy to a Maussian attention to obligation while still maintaining Bourdieu’s concept of capital.

When Mauss first introduced his essay on the gift in 1925 he partly wrote against a utilitarian liberal conception of individual man selfishly struggling to maximize personal gain (Douglas 2002: xiii-xxi; Robbins 2009: 46). Reflection on gift-exchange had almost disappeared from the writings of European thinkers from the end of the Napoleonic period to the end of the First World War, although gift-giving practices had been written about before then. In its stead, utilitarianism and liberalism took hold of Western thought. Interestingly, Liebersohn (2011) recently showed that gift-giving never wholly left Western thinking. Not only the ‘critics of modernity’ who propagated ideas of indigenous peoples as selfless communitarians acknowledged gift-giving, but even the most committed supporters of the liberal tradition could not do without the gift entirely. Nevertheless, gift-giving practices remained virtually hidden in post-Industrial Revolution Western thought until Mauss picked it up and made the principle of the gift –the obligations to give, to receive, and to reciprocate-explicit in a move away from individual self-interests to the importance of social relations (Mauss 2002 [1954]: 16-17).

Mauss convincingly portrays gift-giving as something that exceeds a mere economic transaction, and that should, rather, be viewed as a ‘total social phenomenon’ (Ibid.: 3),

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15 Such as Ferguson, Morgan, Engels, and Marx.
16 Such as Hobbes, Mandeville, and Smith.
involving the social, the religious, the political, honor, and reputation. He found support in the works of early anthropologists. Malinowski’s work on the kula in Melanesia, for instance, provided Mauss with a perfect rebuttal of views on gift-giving as merely commercial trade, since the clear playing out of the three-part rhythm of obligations in the kula ring signaled an importance of maintaining social ties and the closed system of obligations over economic transaction or gain (Malinowski 1984 [1922]). Boas’ work on the extreme example of gift-giving of potlatch in the American Northwest, furthermore, shows how honor -which can only be obtained by outdoing rivals in lavish displays of giving away wealth- is tied into gift-giving practices. Potlatch thus buttressed Mauss’ ideas on gift-giving as a total social phenomenon.

Sahlins, however, warns not to view reciprocity solely as balanced, an ‘unconditional one-for-one exchange’ that opens up and maintains relationships (Sahlins 1972: 190). Sahlins argues that although it might be tempting to view reciprocal exchange in terms of mutual benefit, reciprocity –in contrast to pooling- assumes sidedness, and the existence of two parties (Ibid.: 189). Balanced reciprocity, as a kind of equal exchange, is but one form on a continuum between generalized reciprocity and negative reciprocity, respectively altruistic transactions that require no return and attempts to obtain something without giving anything unpunished. The most interesting analyses of reciprocity can be made at the intersections between the digressions of balanced reciprocity, social distance, rank and material goods. The closer the social distance, the more reciprocal actions lean towards generalized reciprocity. I, for instance, recall being scolded by my research assistant when attempting to include a small amount of ‘thank you’ money in the fee I paid a clerk at the Immigration Office who had helped with my visa extension. The clerk was a close cousin of my assistant and they had lived in adjacent houses during their childhood. Handing him ‘thank you’ money was not only unnecessary, it was also a grave negation of the closeness between him and my assistant. Had the clerk solicited any extra money from me he would have committed the *faux pas* of negative reciprocity to someone close, whereas he would have transgressed the least had he asked someone socially more distant (Ibid.: 200-202).

In relation to rank, the kind of reciprocity between those of higher and lower rank similarly lean toward the generalized end of Sahlins’ continuum (Ibid.: 204-210). Those of higher rank are supposed to generously distribute. This has interesting implications for those wanting to achieve higher rank. As Sahlins states, ‘to be noble is to be generous …[and]… to be generous is to be noble’ (Ibid.: 207). Economic generosity can therefore be a ‘starting mechanism’ in order to obtain rank and leadership (Ibid.: 207; Gouldner 1960: 176-177). This is best exemplified during East Nusa Tenggara’s first direct gubernatorial election in which the Golkar Party candidate expends vast amounts of money in order to re-imagine himself as a Timorese king with all status, grandeur, and connotations of tradition that accompany it, as a way to increase his attractiveness to the electorate as a potential
governor. Sahlins’ addition of the role of rank, social distance, and a continuum of reciprocity to Mauss’ ideas opens up space to think about inequality, and has implications for class and hierarchy. To briefly refer back to Bourdieu, in order to get ahead in the bureaucratic field it helps if one can start off with a lot of capital as a ‘starting mechanism’.

Economic capital –in the form of possessions- is also tied into reciprocity in a more phenomenological view on gift-giving, which facilitates thinking about inter-class dynamics even more. My discussion on reciprocity so far in terms of Mauss’ principle of gift-giving and Sahlins’ schematic continuum of reciprocity emphasizes reciprocity as a system. However, taking a more phenomenological view of exchange as a form of mutual recognition also adds valuable insight to thinking about reciprocity (Robbins 2003; Robbins 2009: 47). Joel Robbins (2009) addresses the similarities between Mauss’ theory of reciprocity and Hegel’s theory of recognition. Central to Robbins’ comparison is the Hegelian assumption that mutual recognition is the basic condition of subject formation and sociality. This mutual recognition is achieved following a three-part sequence, which involves the giving, receiving, and returning of recognition, and which is closely tied to the possession, use, and –most importantly- exchange of property, not unlike Mauss’ three-part rhythm of reciprocity. In this view, the exchange of material goods is fundamental in the creation of personhood through mutual recognition, as it is in creating long lasting relationships (Robbins 2003: 16-17: Robbins 2009: 46).

These similarities addressed by Robbins between Hegel’s theory of recognition and Mauss’ theory of reciprocity have some important implications for gift-giving, especially when considering exchange relations between the ‘haves’ who make up the political class and the ‘have nots’ outside it, as we will see in Chapter Seven. A ‘pure gift’ or generalized gift, instead of being charitable or something that accompanies high rank, can also be seen as a refusal to recognize. The gubernatorial candidate discussed in Chapter Seven who visited a local market days before the election to hand out IDR50,000 bills to market vendors could aspire to be a generous patron who ‘recognizes’ the market vendors and will take their wishes and complaints to heart. He could just as well be out for their recognition of him (and their votes) without any intentions of mutual recognition or mutual reciprocation. As we will see in Chapter Three, furthermore, the Muslim coalition party that supported Kupang’s mayor during elections never saw their ‘gift’ of support reciprocated, which is not just an example of ‘negative reciprocity’ but also a refusal of the mayor to fully recognize the personhood of his former supporters.

I ended the last section with Robbin’s question regarding what kind of politics relationship-seeking people produce. As a start, I would propose the kind of politics that assumes an importance of gift-giving, since through gift-giving mutual recognition and

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17 See also Appendix 1.
mutual reciprocity can be achieved, and thus civil service jobs may be attained, construction contracts gotten, and district head positions reached.

State image: adhering to form as creating meaning

My methodological approach of focusing on the ‘actual practices’ tier of the two-pronged Migdal (2001) inspired approach to studying the state by conducting an ‘ethnography of bureaucracy’ in Kupang led me to appreciate the significance of creating relationships, and to see how ‘getting things done’ hinges on reciprocal obligations and expectation implicit in such relationships. This focus, however, also revealed that some of those practices involved in obtaining a position in civil service, getting a construction project, and becoming a district head closely rub against KKN or corrupt practices. Despite these seemingly contradictory practices, a Migdallian state image of coherence and unity remains unscathed. This, therefore, still leaves some unease as to how the ‘actual practices’ tier relates to the ‘state image’ or ‘state idea’ tier of this approach. Merely stating that an image of coherence, strength and unity is maintained, despite seemingly contradictory corrupt practices encountered in local government offices because these practices make so much sense when understanding the embeddedness of reciprocal obligations in Kupang’s social fabric, is somewhat unsatisfactory. I instead propose a stronger relation between state image and actual practices, and claim that it is precisely those efforts that uphold and maintain a coherent state image that, unintentionally, enable the (corrupt) practices that seem to contradict this image. To explain this I wish to draw on Alexei Yurchak’s (2006) attention to the interrelatedness of the ‘performative’ and ‘constative’ dimensions of speech and public discourse as helpful in offering a language through which to grasp the interesting paradox of ‘corrupt’ actual practices and an appearance of a coherent state image.

Yurchak describes how during late Soviet socialism a ‘performative shift’ took place, by which the performative dimension of authoritative speech and discourse became far more important than its constative meaning. To illustrate this, he describes how a participant of Komsomol meetings in the 1970s and 1980s would spend meetings reading books, yet would not fail to raise his/her hand automatically whenever votes had to be taken, all the while unsure and uncaring what was voted on. In other words, this participant adhered to the general form of an authoritative discourse ritualized in a meeting, without engaging with its meaning (Ibid: 24-25). Participation in the reproduction of form became increasingly important in all sorts of ritualized acts, such as meetings, speechwriting, and propaganda painting. Of key importance is that while the constative meaning of the discourse repeated and reproduced in performative acts lost importance, this did not render such ritualized acts empty or meaningless. Rather, these performative acts enabled various new and unexpected meanings unrelated to the constative meaning of authoritative discourse. Thus, for example, the performance of form enabled Komsomol members or office workers to maintain the
kinds of professional and personal relations necessary to engage in the kinds of activities that are important and meaningful to them and to live, what Yurchak calls, a ‘normal life’.

To sketch the theoretical context of Yurchak’s ideas, the terms ‘performative’ and ‘constative’ were originally coined in linguistics by John Austin (1999) to distinguish ‘constative utterances’, which are used to state facts, from ‘performative utterances’, which are statements that perform an act or do something in the world. Austin’s work on performatives and constatives has been expanded outside the field of linguistics. For instance, Judith Butler (1993) draws on Austin and Derrida’s (1977) work on performatives in the context of ritualized practice and discusses how subject formation is enabled by a constant reiteration of embodied norms, that is through repeated performative acts (Butler 1993). Cautioning against a tendency to suggest that the reiterative structure of norms either consolidates or destabilizes a particular regime of discourse Saba Mahmood, furthermore, emphasizes that agency –reiterability- cannot be equated with resistance (Mahmood 2005: 17-22). Yurchak similarly emphasizes the repetition of ritualized acts as important for understanding performativity. It seems to me, however, that the role of repetition or reiteration in performative acts differs for Yurchak, and Butler and Mahmood. Whereas for Butler and Mahmood the repetition of performative acts facilitates the continuous shaping of subjects or the maintaining of continuity as opposed to resistance, repetition for Yurchak can result in a drifting apart of the performative and constative dimensions of an act, or what he calls a ‘performative shift’. Instead of constantly maintaining a (gendered, classed, or religious) subject, repetition opens up a space for new meanings, thus enabling other, unanticipated outcomes. One such outcome is the performative shift Yurchak claims significantly contributed to the fall of the Soviet Union. Another outcome, I will argue, is the continuing corruption despite the performance of adherence to new laws and regulations that will be discussed in this dissertation.

Drawing on this line of thought, I am arguing that a similar ‘performative shift’ can be seen in Indonesia. The repetition of the performative dimension of authoritative discourse is very recognizable in an Indonesian context –just walk by any school or government office to see the rows of uniformed students and workers while flags are raised and Pancasila is recited. I want to suggest that, similar to Yurchak’s late-Soviet Russia, this has also led to a greater adherence to the performative dimension of the discourse (appearance of adherence to form), rather than to the constative dimension (actual adherence to regulations) in Indonesia. What is taken from the authoritative discourse is the importance of proper form –appearance of formality, not its constative meaning. The form of authoritative discourse is reiterated and reproduced in office performances, such as roll call, elaborate office procedures and routines, office documents, thereby giving an appearance of adherence to the authoritative discourse while losing its constative dimension. At the same time, however, the reiteration of form also
enables new meanings and practices which are unrelated to the constative meaning of the discourse.

**Doing research**
This study is based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Kupang between July 2007 and December 2009. In line with my research school’s approach, this thesis is largely ethnography driven. My emphasis on the importance of relationships, therefore, also stems from my fieldwork. In fact, relationships decided the course and direction of this research from the start. When I arrived in Kupang in February 2008 I initially stayed at the house of a family where I had already stayed the previous year while conducting preliminary fieldwork. I hoped to be able to carry out fieldwork inside government offices and to join whatever ‘actual practices’ might take place in Kupang’s civil service. However, I estimated my chances to ‘get in’ slim at best. Previous research experience in Indonesia had taught me about the notorious impenetrability of Indonesian civil service, especially when lacking a suitcase full of official letters of permission carrying official looking stamps and signatures. Much to my good fortune, however, it turned out that the son of the household, who had still been in school during my previous visit, now worked as the mayor’s aide-de-camp. He proposed to introduce me to the mayor and to try and get him to consent to my presence in Kupang’s city level government offices. After a brief introduction and conversation, the mayor agreed to let me carry out my research in all offices under his authority, and allowed me to occupy a desk and chair in any department of the city of Kupang’s administration.

I decided to spend time in different departments instead of merely staying in one in order to have a broader base for comparison. Nevertheless, in order to allow myself plenty of time to get immersed in everyday office activities, and for my new coworkers to get used to me, I stayed in each department for approximately two months. I chose to stay in four departments in total –Governance, Information and Communication, Human Resources, and Public Works. The first three departments are all located in the same building which also houses the mayor’s own office. I picked these sites, on the one hand, in order to have three similar sites from which to compare interviews and observations, and, on the other, in order to become a familiar face in the building. After the first six months I moved to Public Works in order to test ideas that had come up during my fieldwork in the first three departments. The Department of Public Works is known as a ‘wet’ department, meaning a place ‘flooded’ with money, and, because of that, as a very corrupt department. In order to see how important networks and reciprocal obligations are in obtaining state resources in Kupang’s civil service, I thought it best to move to a department through which most state resources flow. The tender that took place during my stay there, furthermore, helped provide insights into Kupang’s state-business dynamics. I already knew the first East Nusa Tenggara gubernatorial elections would take place in 2008. Therefore, I had also planned to follow these elections
during my stay as a means to look into state-politics relations. I followed the elections with the help of a PDI-P political party member and a group of assistants from local university Nusa Cendana. We gathered newspaper clippings, conducted around two-hundred semi-structured interviews with voters, participated in campaign rallies, and joined in party cadre trainings. In many ways, the elections research was a research in its own and differed markedly from my ethnographic research in the departments, which hinged on ‘hanging out’ from early morning to mid-afternoon, chatting and joking with civil servants.

My research interests of ‘how to get things done’ quickly turned to touching upon sometimes sensitive topics, such as corruption. Although research methods offer plenty of possibilities to address threatening questions in structured or semi-structured interviews, I found interviews most useful when wanting to get non-threatening information, when wanting to talk to upper echelon civil servants, and as a way to get familiar in a new department. Sensitive topics only emerged after having spent some time in a new department, and mostly came up in casual conversations. I cannot overemphasize the role that patience, humor and an ability to chit-chat have played in moving from formal conversation into discussing moral dilemmas concerning whether to hire a niece due to family expectations or to stick to office rules and hire the most qualified candidate, or whether to follow the boss’ orders in giving a project to a certain contractor or to dismiss that contractor because of administrative mistakes.

Talking about corruption, possible corruption, suspected corruption, or what might be interpreted as corruption was not something I could assume my informants would be willing to do with me. I found the term corruption, or more precisely KKN, greatly unhelpful in figuring out how my informants resolved their encountered moral dilemmas. First of all, KKN is part of a larger institutional post-Reformasi anti-corruption discourse - a distant concept seen on TV, on stickers, and in newspapers, but not a concept that has direct relevance to one’s own actions. Secondly, my respondents associated KKN with ‘bad’ behavior. I have not met informants who considered their various reasonings for dealing with dilemmas as containing morally reprehensible considerations. As mentioned above, when actions digress from office rules this was because of ‘helping someone out’ or because ‘saying thank you with money’ is a polite way to reciprocate a service. In my attempts to address the tension between the apparent adherence to form of bureaucratic propriety amidst practices that seemed to contradict this form, I therefore refrained from using moralizing terms such as corruption and KKN when addressing dilemmas. I did not consider it my role to be moralizing. I was merely interested in finding out ‘how to get things done’, thus how my informants reasoned about their actions and resolved their moral dilemmas.

18 Such as changing the wording, open-ended questions on self-administered questionnaires (Russell Bernard 2002: 33-35, 55), projecting the question on a non-present third party.
When assessing my own access to local state resources in Kupang in terms of capital, since this is my analytical tool of preference throughout this thesis, the son of the household where I initially stayed proved to be a most valuable kind of social capital. No doubt cultural capital, the pursuit of a PhD degree in the Netherlands, and perhaps symbolic capital as some sort of prestige derived from my status as a ‘Westerner’ and ‘researcher’ helped in obtaining the mayor’s permission to conduct research. Nevertheless, as an anthropologist from a former colonizing country, in my mid-twenties, female, unmarried, and in pursuit of a PhD degree, trying to participate in government offices in Kupang where upper echelon civil servants are mostly middle aged, male, with vast life and work experience, I did find myself in a peculiar web of power- and status relations. The largest drawback of my composition of capital was that it was difficult to get into the small circle of the office elite, which consisted mainly of older men. Although I managed to establish good relations with a small number of department heads, joining official upper echelon meetings, accompanying heads on business trips, or having informal dinners or drinks with upper echelon civil servants remained limited. The biggest advantage of my available capital, on the other hand, which proved greatly useful in answering my research questions, was my access to family lives and, in particular, to family parties. Being young, blonde and female I was the perfect accessory to show off during large family gatherings. As stated before, this study is largely ethnography driven. This analysis of ‘getting things done’ in government offices in Kupang is therefore also the result of the sites, situations, and informants that my particular composition of capital allowed me to access.

In order to protect the anonymity of my informants, I have changed their names. Only in those instances that I discuss certain upper echelon civil servants or other public figures that are well-known and easily traceable even if I would try to conceal their identity, do I use informants’ real names.

Organization of dissertation
The aim of this dissertation is to analyze state-society dynamics, by considering how a state image of wholeness and coherence is maintained when everyday office practices often contradict this image, in post-Suharto Indonesia, after the implementation of regional autonomy and direct district head elections from inside government offices in a provincial town thousands of kilometers away from the capital Jakarta. Using three fairly simple questions as a starting point I hope not only to give an impression of everyday life inside local bureaucracies, but also to address some stickier issues such as corruption, ethnic favoring, muddy business deals, and dirty politics. In doing this I will draw on the various concepts addressed in this chapter. Chapter Two serves as a welcome to Kupang. By taking

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19 During one particularly big wedding party the daughter of the house where I stayed pulled me aside at a certain point and ordered me, while whispering loudly in my ear, to stay close and sit at her family’s table, so everyone could see I was ‘their’ white person (bule).
the physical development of the town as a starting point I show how Kupang has developed from a town based on ethnic segmentation to one based on a very specific type of class segmentation –that of a state dependent ‘political class’ (Vel 2008). This chapter also shows the importance of reciprocal obligations and how they are played out in family networks. Chapter Three, then, addresses the question of how to become a civil servant and looks, in particular, at the role of ethnic favoring in bureaucracy. Once accepted into civil service, both ‘career’ and ‘content’ civil servants go through strenuous training before full acceptance into civil service. The techniques used to discipline ‘proper’ civil servants –and just what ‘proper’ civil servants are- is the topic of Chapter Four. Successful disciplining, nevertheless, also has some unintended consequences that help continue some of the bureaucratic ills administrative reforms are trying to erase. These consequences and how civil servants manage conflicting rules will be discussed in Chapter Five. After having spent some time among lower- and upper-level civil servants and learning about intra-office rivalries and dilemmas, Chapters Six and Seven address state-business and state-politics dynamics. In Chapter Six we will follow various contractors and Public Works officials during a tender and see how anti-corruption regulations and inspections appear to only add to abuses in the construction sector. In Chapter Seven we turn from intra-political class dynamics to relationships between political class and non-political class members. We will see how the political class manages the changes brought about by the implementation of direct district head elections during the first ever gubernatorial elections in East Nusa Tenggara, and, in particular, find out through candidates’ attempts to obtain votes from non-political class members how not to become governor. Finally, in the conclusion I will assess how useful my relational approach, emphasis on reciprocal obligations, and eschewing ethnicity has been, and if –perhaps- Kupang’s civil servants and government offices can offer valuable insights to KKN practices in other Indonesian settings, and, perhaps elsewhere.