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Governance or Interpellation?

An Elaboration of Civil Servant Practice(s)

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How can we understand and analytically grasp the practices that "run the state"? Departing from a contemporary focus on *co-production* in governance regimes, such as *New Public Management* and *New Public Governance*, this article argues that the Althusserian concept of interpellation contemplates a focus on a necessary connection between a superior Subject (often understood as *the state*) and dependent subjects – generally absent in governance studies. Drawing on Hegel's concept of *the universal class* (*der allgemeine Stand*) and deploying the ethnologically-based *state and life-mode theory*, it is concluded that a state-subject can constitute a coherent and resilient whole only by encompassing a viable *civil servant life-mode*, and that the concepts *policy-developing*, *operationalizing*, and *policy-implementing*, together specify three different but interdependent and necessary dimensions of civil servant practice. A presentation of an empirical case of contemporary co-productive governance applies the developed concepts.

Co-production and the Question of Asymmetry

Over the previous decades, *co-production*[1] has become an almost unavoidable attribute of public governance in Denmark and other Western countries, allegedly replacing less inclusive governance regimes such as Traditional Public Administration and New Public Management.[2] In co-production approaches it is emphasized that public policies and services must be produced and implemented in collaboration with various "stakeholders" from the public sector and from civil society, be they private companies, interest organizations or citizens groups.

The rationale for co-production is multifaceted. On the one hand, it is meant to create innovative solutions for improved resilience and legitimacy by incorporating and empowering all relevant interests into the projects, whether these are community development, integration of refugees, social welfare, education, or something else. On the other hand, co-production has been viewed as a neoliberal tactic by which the public sector reduces its responsibilities by off-loading them onto private or civil society actors who then operate public welfare schemes and services (Tortzen 2016; Triantafillou 2017). However, with the claim that societal solutions today are co-produced by multiple stakeholders comes the risk that we lose sight of wherein the governance lies.

This article builds on the ethnological state and life-mode theory (e.g. Højrup 2003). The theory provides a conceptual basis for analyses of governance, enabling an understanding that goes deeper than merely identifying the characteristics of governance regimes, as it is concerned with in what "governance" is actually anchored. As seen within the state and life-mode theory, any idea that "governing" is occurring relies on the assumption of asymmetry between two distinct forms of subjectivity: a superior Subject – that the theory refers to as the *state-subject* – and *dependent subjects*. This asymmetry indicates why society cannot develop in just *any* direction, and thus also why co-production – as the prominent feature of contemporary governance – cannot be taken at face value; the respective agendas for the state-subject and the dependent subjects are not realized on equal terms.

This article develops the life-mode concepts further and asks what kinds of social practices are needed to "realize" governance in the sense that they are responsible for carrying through politically set agendas. Put in plain words: *how* are states "run"

[1] Co-production is one of several concepts that point to an allegedly increased citizen and stakeholder involvement in governmental processes. Other concepts are co-creation, co-design and network governance. In governance practices and scholarly literature these terms are used more or less arbitrarily (Tortzen 2016: 23; Voorberg, Bekkers & Tummers 2015).

[2] Bøgh Andersen et al. 2017; Rhodes 2017; Torfing & Triantafillou 2017; Tortzen 2016; Voorberg, Bekkers & Tummers 2015.

in practice? I argue that *policy-developing, operationalizing*, and *policy-implementing* constitute three mutually distinct *dimensions* of *civil servant practice* required for this realization. Since a state's quest for governance must be manifested in an enactment of one form or another, the questions of *why* we have states and *how* they are enacted mutually impinge upon one another, and they cannot easily be separated. Nevertheless, the distinction between the why and the how, between the constitution of a state-subject and the way it operates, is important to counterbalance the tendency in many governance studies, to take governance for granted as a pre-given and discrete social fact that we observe in various forms.

A Life-mode Theoretical Approach

Since the 1980s when the state and life-mode theory was founded at the Department of European Ethnology in Copenhagen (based on an Aristotelean, Hegelian, and Marxian conceptual framework), the theory has been further developed in conjunction with broadly laid out empirical investigations. A basic research aim is to understand the diversity of everyday social practices; the ways they condition, complement, or contradict each other and how they simultaneously coexist and thus constitute a larger whole. The present article draws on elaborations and material from the project *Neoculturation of life-modes during the current transformation of state system and world economy – the challenges, variations, and changes in cultural life-modes*, that began in 2013 (see lifemodes.ku.dk). The project has been funded by the Danish Velux Foundation and will be published in the two-volume book *Life-modes in a Changing World Order* (Højrup & Jul Nielsen forthcoming).

Below, I first summarize the key concepts from the current research about governance regimes in the governmentality tradition. This is followed by an outline of the theoretical framework of state and life-mode theory, where the theory's explanation of what is constitutive of states will be briefly reiterated. Based on that, I present how the novel concepts I propose here concerning civil servant life-mode contribute to the theory. Finally, to demonstrate how the developed concepts can be applied in empirical analyses and what insights can be achieved by doing so, I briefly examine the conceptual framework in light of a single empirical case from Denmark. The case is based on a social project among vulnerable groups in a neighbourhood of the Danish capital and is based on student research submitted for a teaching course I conducted in European ethnology in Copenhagen (Holm et al. 2020).[3]

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[3] Permission was received from the student researchers of this case to discuss their work in this article.

Towards Still More Civic-based Governance?

Scholars studying changes in governance regimes agree that new paradigms both replace and build upon former ones. The most dominant current governance paradigm, New Public Governance (NPG), has built on its predecessor: New Public Management (NPM), which was subjected to critique during the 2000s for its detailed regulation and its market-based quantitative focus on performance targets. NPM, in turn, grew out of a critique of its predecessor, Traditional Public Administration (TPA), also termed Old Public Administration (Dunleavy & Hood 1994). TPA is generally equated with the Weberian rule-driven form of administration, referring to Weber's early work on the bureaucracy, in which governance is understood as highly hierarchized and uni-centric with the state as the pivotal point (Bøgh Andersen et al. 2017; Torfing & Triantafillou 2017; Tortzen 2016; Voorberg, Bekkers & Tummers 2015).[4] It is generally agreed that these different concepts of governance have not been developed theoretically with specific characteristics that would make them mutually distinct from each other. Rather, they are convenient recapitulations of empirical changes in governance models and instruments, later refined as ideal types (Kirlin 2001; Lynn 2001; Tortzen 2016: 27). As such, they are open-ended in the sense that other paradigms (i.e., other refinements of recurring empirical features) could be claimed to be equally important. Among these are Neo-Weberian State and Digital Era Governance (Torfing & Triantafillou 2017: 30). The government models overlap and coexist in everyday governance practices.

However, in merely accentuating different traits that mark governance in different periods, we lose sight of how these regimes can be said to constitute governance. The idea of a historical trajectory – from TPA over NPM to NPG – reflects a broader ideology that claims ever more citizen involvement as the contemporary order of the day. But is today's governance principle really the involvement of multiple stakeholders and bringing together their joint opinions to set society's course? Is it correct to see the most important core of today's governance to be the endpoint of a trajectory from uni-centric, state-based governance to a multi-centric, network-based, participatory governance? Indisputably, the increasing involvement of civil society – be it private companies, NGOs, or citizens – is a characteristic and influential part of contemporary governance. This does not mean, however, that the networking activities contain the clue for how society has developed, and thus that the key principle constituting governance at any given period in time is found respectively within the state itself (TPA), in the market (NPM), or in networks (NPG).

Observing contemporary governance, it is important to understand how NPG-based initiatives operate, but I posit that this kind of co-production cannot in itself explain the direction in which societies move. As scholars of governance have observed, many

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[4] Weber's writing on bureaucracy can be found in Weber ([1921–22]1978: 956–1005).

co-production projects disappoint some of the stakeholders who see their views or agendas side-lined or undermined (Tortzen 2016). There is a need to understand why some stakeholders manage to fulfil their agenda in co-production processes while others do not. Moreover, the fact that some stakeholders' ideas are used while others are disregarded cannot be explained solely in terms of contestations between older and newer governance paradigms. After all, most governance practices clearly contain features of TPA bureaucracy, NPM performance targets and NPG co-operation. As I argue, to understand why some agendas are favoured and others ignored, what is needed is the concept of a superior subject that stands external to the arena of partnership relations.

Theory

State and life-mode theory draws on a classical notion of *praxis* (as elaborated particularly by Aristotle, Hegel, and Marx), that is, a subject's purposeful and self-conscious intervention towards an object that is viewed as part of a will-less nature. The concepts of *modes of production* and their interrelated *life-modes* have been developed on this theoretical foundation (Højrup 2003). Life-modes are conceptually specified in relation to the respective modes of production with which they are associated. The concept of life-modes – like the concept of modes of production – should not be regarded as empirical containers (unlike the way in which Marxists often use the concept of class), but as concepts that explicate those features required to maintain a viable existence. Thus, life-modes and modes of production constitute each other and are merely two different ways of specifying the concept of praxis: as work and production.

Within state and life-mode theory it is argued that we can only understand such relations of production and associated social practices if they are conceptualized as components of some sort of survival units, that is, as parts of viable societies. Human life-modes and modes of production rely on specific conditions for their endurance – conditions that they themselves cannot generate and can be provided only by a higher-order subject. It is here that a concept of *state* is implied, understood as an entity able to provide for its own conditions and recognition as a self-defending survival unit, either through its own forces or as part of an alliance. Importantly, the defensive measures of states – such as mobile military forces and fixed forces such as rivers, mountains, fortifications, as well as the will of the population to defend itself – tend to be so effective that the struggle for political recognition continues to be split along the lines of mutually recognizing states, with no possibility for one state to defeat all others.[5]

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[5] See Kaspersen and Gabriel (2005), Højrup (2003) and Boserup (1990) regarding the elaboration of the theorem (distilled from the writings of German war theorist C.V. Clausewitz, 1780–1831) of the *defensive* being a more efficient form of warfare than the *offensive* (other things being equal).

Accordingly, the theory proposes the basic distinction between *dependent subjects* (these include citizens, companies, corporations, etc.) and a *self-defending subject* or *sovereign subject.* This sovereign subject is usually identified as a nation-state – and identified with the term *state-subject* – but empirically, it can range from a tribal unit to complex modern states. This self-defending, sovereign unit builds up sufficient defensive capability to prevent other states and aspiring states from approaching it as a mere object of nature. The aim of a state-subject is for other states to identify it as a self-conscious subject, as a *will in the world.* Understood in this way, state-subjects are always – also during times of peace – involved in what is termed *sovereignty work.* They do this work externally to maintain recognition from other state-subjects, and internally to build up sufficient internal strength to constitute such a defensible whole vis-à-vis their component populations. This internal sovereignty work – aiming at safeguarding the sufficient *defensive depth* – is inseparably connected with what we as ethnologists see as *everyday life.* It is carried out by providing necessary conditions for particular forms of production, social lives and ethics, in other words, by recognizing the practices through which the ambiguous and contradictory forging of a particular *political will* is seen to be required for the state's viability.

In accordance with this theoretical development, the traditional Marxist distinction between the political, economic, and ideological levels of the social formation is conceptualized instead as three preconditions for the defence capability that together make up the required and sufficient levels of a state's praxis: (1) The *political* level forms the *goals* of the state-subject, it forges the political will. (2) The *economic* level provides the necessary means; here material resources are produced and the provision of means of physical force is ensured. (3) The *ideological* level safeguards the orderly activation of means – constituting the *interpellation* of dependent subjects – ensuring that the means are purposefully activated to reach the specific goals; interpellation ideally ensures that the state-subject's external relations are in sufficient accordance internally with the dependent subjects' differentiated practices and aspirations. The requirements of the defence mode thus set limits on political, ideological, and economic substructures of the state (Højrup 2003: 176).

Cultural history, in this sense, can thus be understood as a continuous struggle of (what can be understood as) dependent subjects fighting to maintain and improve the conditions for their differentiated practices (e.g. life-modes) by being recognized by state-subjects; these state-subjects, for their part, struggle to survive in the world by upholding sufficient defence capability internally and externally so as to maintain recognition by other state-subjects.

Interpellation – and a Self-defending State-subject as Precondition for Social Practice?

As described, today's governance involves the *goals* of more stakeholders than was previously common. However, I claim that the success of these stakeholders depends on their ability to serve a state-subject for which their goals are only *means*. If governance increasingly today is realized in various and instable settings, it is even more important to explore *its limits* and how it cannot take just any form. The issue of who is capable of promoting their agenda and under what particular circumstances is key here. That is why, in the search for *possible* forms of governance, the researcher needs to conceptualize a subject of another order, which I here conceptualize as the state-subject, and ask what precisely constitutes this governing subject.

It is broadly recognized that "a state" is a particular set of relationships and practices. As sociologist Bob Jessop has shown, scholarly debates revolve around whether this particularity is derived from society – reflecting the dynamics of economy and civil society – or, whether the state is an independent force (Jessop 2013: 279). My point of departure is that the state is a defensible entity, which means that its internal milieu contains both the sufficient resources (the economic level) and, despite conflicting interests, a sufficient level of state-support from the population (the ideological level) to achieve external recognition. This implies that the state cannot be reduced to a reflection of society's different interest groups. Neither is the state an independent force, since civil society, as epitomized for instance by the *economic* and *ideological* levels, constitutes a crucial part of its internal strength. Without proper defensive depth, the practice of the state as a subject cannot be viable.

The state as a lived reality – that I particularly focus on here – is often treated as somewhat disconnected from its constitution as a particular form of practice. Anthropologists Aradhana Sharma and Akhil Gupta (2010) are concerned with what they call the "cultural constitution" of the state, with this term referring to how the state manifests itself in the life of its citizens (Sharma & Gupta 2010), for instance "through everyday practices and encounters" and "through public cultural representations and performances" (ibid.: 27). I agree that these are important issues, but I posit that the endeavour to explore *how* the state is realized is more fruitful if one considers *why* the state is there in the first place as a superior form of subjectivity.

The key concept of *interpellation* is inspired by the French philosopher Louis Althusser (1971) and, as indicated, the concept refers to the process where the state invokes its citizens as particular subjects in a manner whereby they (ideally) recognize themselves in that subjectivity and comprehend the opportunities for the satisfying practices it

offers. This is similar to Foucault's self-subjectivation, the self's disciplinary work on itself to meet discursive expectations (Peters & Appel 1996; Villadsen 2004). In the state and life-mode approach, interpellation is regarded as a necessary concept that connects the two mutually distinct but interdependent forms of subjects: a self-defending state-subject, and dependent subjects such as citizens, companies, institutions, and organizations. The dependent subjects ideally – despite their heterogeneity and recurring dissatisfaction or resistance – realize desired forms of conduct such as in the contemporary neoliberal political economy where citizens overall are self-sufficient and adaptable, or where companies manage to transform their production to high-end goods that politically are regarded to be the key to maintain a competitive edge in the global economy.

What constitutes the state for Althusser differs from the understanding in state and life-mode theory. In line with the Marxism of his time and despite his notion of relative autonomy, Althusser regards the state as a superstructure on an economic base, mainly serving as an instrument of domination by the ruling classes (Althusser 1971). The state is in this sense basically a reflection of civil society, as Althusser's student Poulantzas (2003: 82) maintains, seeing it as a terrain of class antagonisms, as "the condensation of a class relationship of forces". As I see it, this conception does not allow for an understanding of the complexity involved in the actual operating of a state. The multitude of state-related practices in central and decentral administrations, on streets and in institutions and the various agendas that are pursued, cannot be reduced to the tools of different "classes". Neither is it fruitful, however, to postulate that governance simply springs from everywhere or anywhere, autonomously.

Civil Servant Practice

The understanding of the state as unceasingly preoccupied with externally- and internally-oriented sovereignty work has vital corollaries for the concept of a civil servant life-mode. This concept is not, as are the other concepts of life-modes, derived from a (concept of a) mode of production, but from the concept of the state-subject.[6] Civil-servant practice connects potentially disparate interests of state, local administration, and different civil society groups, and sets the conditions for civil society and for the modes of production and market-based life-modes. The necessary balancing of a state-subject's external survival and internal cohesion constitutes the quest for this life-mode. In this sense, the civil servant life-mode constitutes the praxis side of a state-subject.

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[6] In modern state forms (Højrup & Jul Nielsen forthcoming). For previous elaborations on the civil servant life-mode which have served as inspiration for the present text, see in particular Vejen Hansen (2004) and Buus (1999, 2008).

Hegel, who almost a century before Weber theorized about the civil servant, termed civil servants *der allgemeine Stand* (the universal class) (Hegel 1833). For Hegel, as in state and life-mode theory, the state constitutes the whole that unites the diverse parts of society.[7] Hegel asserted that civil servants stood in contrast to market-based groups such as craftsmen, entrepreneurs, and investors, who fulfilled the very idea of the market by pursuing their self-interests. Civil servants had the purpose of working for *das Allgemeine* (the universal, the common good):

> The universal class [der allgemeine Stand], or, more precisely, the class of civil servants, must purely by virtue of its character as universal, have the universal [das Allgemeine] as the end of its activity. (Hegel [1821]2000: §303)

Hegel saw the purpose of civil servants – to work towards universal interests, in other words those of the state – as determining their recruitment, conduct and attitude towards their tasks:

> The objective factor in their appointment is knowledge and proof of ability […] What the service of the state really requires is that men shall forgo the selfish and capricious satisfaction of their subjective ends […] there lies the link between universal and particular interests which constitutes both the concept of the state and its inner stability. (Hegel [1821]2000: §291, §294)

This mirrors Weber's later writings, and as others have pointed out, Weber's conception builds largely on Hegel's work (Avineri 1995: 160; Jackson 1986: 146). The differences in Hegel's and Weber's writings on civil servants has been discussed in Jackson (1986) and Shaw (1992). Shaw argues that Weber's conception of the civil servant emphasizes instrumental rationality but lacks Hegel's understanding of the civil servant's rationality as practical (referring to Aristotle's distinction between craft [*techne*] and practical wisdom [*phronesis*]) (Shaw 1992: 383). This depiction of Weber is disputable, but my conception also emphasizes how the civil servant is constituted by features beyond mere instrumental rationality.

In any event, there is common agreement about what can be regarded as "classic" civil servant codes of conduct and bureaucratic norms. These include impartiality (to balance civil society's various self-interests), incorruptibility (refraining from pursuing personal interest), equity (treating citizens equally), legality, fairness, and

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[7] However, Hegel, in contrast to state and life-mode theory, sees the state as constituted from within, not from without (Boserup 1990). See also reflections by Jessop (2013: 346) on the state as in one sense being an institutional order like others in a given social formation, yet comprising "the whole".

loyalty to the political superior. Contemporary administrative practice appears to add novel features to these characteristics. Nevertheless, I find it appropriate to maintain a focus on these key features of a civil servant life-mode in order to grasp the basic mode of operation entailed in the balancing act between the internal and external prerequisites for the state-subject's survival.

The employment arrangements of civil servants have altered over time and have significantly changed since the 1990s, alongside the marketization and decentralizing of the public sector generally. Historically, civil servants – in return for their impartiality and independence in relation to society's other recognized and necessary life-modes – were provided with a stable wage, life-time tenure, and retirement pension (Vejen Hansen 2004). Today, in most Western countries, only few public employees have formal appointments as civil servants, and the interchange of personnel between the private and public sectors is extensive. However, public employees are still expected to act according to principles of propriety, loyalty, and impartiality – and for good reason. If contemporary states now have an extended decentralized governance, as well as administrative processes in which elected representatives and individual citizens should be involved and consulted in decisions, this only makes the competences of civil servants more intricate.[8] The increased use of both major and minor private actors in public projects – businesses, NGOs, etc. – makes it a demanding task to ensure the interest of *das Allgemeine*, especially when the co-production involves stakeholders that work for profit or for idealistic goals related to their championed cause.

In sum, interpellation – or governance understood in this specific way – safeguards the necessary connection between two different forms of subjectivity: a self-defending state-subject and dependent subjects. Does the population share the right virtues? Is the level of education sufficient? Are unwanted social practices under satisfactory scrutiny so that they can be eliminated or modified into acceptable forms? This intricate balancing of the state-subject's external and internal well-being implies, I argue, a practice independent of the diverse interests of civil society (each pursuing their own particular goal) in order to safeguard the common interest of the state. The *sublation* (a translation of Hegel's *Aufhebung*, meaning the resolving) of the contradiction between the disparity of interests of society and the common interests of the modern state is key to a civil-servant life-mode and it is the precondition for it to be a recognized practice.[9]

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[8] Hence, I use the term *civil servant* in this article when I refer to public employees, although they most likely will be hired according to standard wage-earner contracts (hourly/monthly). In any case, their specific life-mode orientation cannot be determined from their formal employment relation.

[9] Because, notably, civil servants themselves make up different interest groups that pursue their own goals by means of educational institutions, organizations and networks, and overall by making arguments for why a particular profession is crucially needed, and why it is relevant to the political priorities of the state.

The Civil Servant Life-mode Connects State and Society

The practices of "civil servants" (no matter their formal contract tie) permeate all parts and levels of society: when the social worker sits down with the badly-off citizen who is supposed to become self-supporting, when the policeman encounters citizens with suspicious behaviour, when the schoolteacher struggles with difficult pupils, when municipal technicians – or hired entrepreneurs – install new internet cables in the neighbourhood, as well as in a multitude of other contexts where the state meets the citizens. Moreover, civil servant practices are also realized in meeting rooms, away from clients, where strategies are laid out for how to run the state in the best way, taking into account also what other states do. Obviously, the ongoing sovereignty work takes place in a multiplicity of contexts, often at a great distance from any central administration. This is noted also in the scholarly tradition of governmentality where, for example, Michel Foucault spoke of the "*etatization* of society" and Nicolas Rose of the "de-statization of society" (Sharma & Gupta 2010: 9). Still, in order to explore the *particular ways* in which the state does or does not manifest itself in a decentralized manner, it is relevant to think of it in relation to its ongoing efforts to remain viable.

Empirically, it is obvious that states often must struggle to fulfill this requirement of internal and external recognition properly – or entirely fail to do it and collapse. Forging a *political will* – that acquires recognition both from outside and inside society – is a tremendously compound task, involving the ongoing mediation of various and often highly differentiated agendas. Sovereignty work – and the connected interpellation – is full of contradictory interests. Not many citizens see their everyday behaviour as something that serves a state-subject except in times of deep crisis such as during the Covid-19 pandemic or warfare. On the contrary, many regard their well-being as dependent on an *absence* of state interference so that they can pursue their freedom. That this freedom ultimately relies on their status as citizens in a viable state might be a distant concern. The contrasts between interests are manifest in diverse and concrete contexts: when budgets are cut or increased, when educational reforms entirely change conditions for teaching staff, or when labour market reforms threaten existing standards for workers and trade unions (while perhaps providing new opportunities for incoming migrant workers and entrepreneurs). In all such contexts, the will of the state-subject (itself made up of divergent interests in constant negotiation) clashes with various groups in society, which all wish to maintain or improve their way of life.

It is a fundamental challenge to bring into accordance the differentiated and opposing interests of dependent subjects with the political will, that is, the overall goal of a state-subject (to a degree that is sufficient to maintain viability). This is especially evident in liberal democracies, based as they are on the ideology and understanding

that it is the diverse interests and agendas among the populace that determine the very course of society. With governance paradigms such as NPM, in which these interests are supposed to manifest themselves through the market, and NPG, in which citizen involvement also in less market-imprinted forums and networks is expected to set the course, this ambiguity becomes even more prominent.

Three Variants of Civil Servant Life-mode

In order to grasp the complexity implied in the task of balancing the conflicting needs of a state-subject's political will and its dependent subjects, I conceptually specify civil servant practice into three distinct and necessary dimensions. These three dimensions respectively develop, operationalize, and implement this will. I posit that these dimensions will be found across different governance regimes, that is, in TPA, NPM, NPG and others.

The *policy-developing* dimension covers the continuous strategic work of developing the political will (among and across the diverse interests involved, all of which strive to realize their own agendas) in a form that ensures the maintenance of the state's sovereignty domain as a recognized entity within the state system. This sovereignty project assigns a key role to a distinct civil servant praxis, which I call the "policy-developing variant" of *the civil servant life-mode* (the dimensions of civil servant practice can all be understood as variants of the general concept of the civil servant life-mode). In a democracy, this policy-formulation work takes place in collaboration with elected political representatives in town councils or parliaments. These policy-making and policy-refining civil servants do not simply execute politicians' agendas.[10] The task is to come up with ideas, present future scenarios dependent on measures taken, and in general provide political decision-makers with appropriate information and options. For instance, in Danish governmental practice, this formulation of policy options by the civil servants might take place through face-to-face meeting with politicians, through participation in commissions (or by identifying policy experts that can participate in these). The goal of this policy-developing work of civil servants is to reach a proper understanding as to which societal practices, which forms of subjectivity, which life-modes, and which modes of production should be cultivated for protecting the domain of sovereignty.

The second dimension of civil servant practice is the *operationalizing*, epitomizing "the operationalizing variant" of the civil servant life-mode. The strategies crafted by the policy-formulating civil servants and politicians must be operationalized in a bureaucracy – be it in the form of directives, guidelines, or more subtle procedures for

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[10] Weber also discusses this role (Lassman & Spears 1994: 160f.), but without determining its relation to other forms of civil servant practice.

administrative managing such as facilitating citizen-involvement in an appropriate way. Within all parts of the social whole, in the central administration as well as in provincial public offices, a bureaucracy must develop these protocols – which are always based upon and dependent on previous administrative conduct – in order to shape the bureaucratic infrastructure and provide for a realization of politically established goals. The state-subject needs to make dependent subjects feel self-determined in pursuing what they regard as their own particular objectives, without jeopardizing what is regarded to benefit the whole society. This requires a continuous effort to integrate the above-mentioned policy-developing work benefitting the state-subject with the policy-implementing work for dependent subjects (see next paragraph). The operationalizing dimension constructs the bureaucratic and administrative conveyor belts linking policy-development to policy-implementing systems.

The "policy-implementing variant" of a civil servant life-mode comprises the necessary enactment and execution of the political will and thus of the strategically developed means aimed at dependent subjects. This takes the form of street-level work, front-line services and other functions targeting the public as clients or users. Needless to say, also the above-mentioned civil servants committed to both policy-developing and operationalizing will typically share a fundamental apprehension about concerns expressed by dependent subjects. For instance, employees mainly occupied with the policy-developing dimension take citizen-related issues into consideration when developing strategies, and bureaucratic operationalizers must also have the well-being of dependent subjects in mind when they mediate between the state-subject and the needs of different citizens groups. For example, they set bureaucratic frameworks that they feel will be meaningful for the citizen or – as is typical today – facilitate citizen involvement in controversial issues of interest. However, as regards the *policy-implementing variant* of the civil servant life-mode, the point of departure lies predominantly in the well-being of the target group: the user, client, pupil, student, patient, pensioner, disabled person, welfare recipient, etc. To be successful, this dimension must involve an ethos of care, comfort, aid, cultivation, disciplining, or education of the citizen in accordance with the professional training and ethics of the civil servant in question. Thus, it is no coincidence that those front-line civil servants who execute policy-implementing may come to regard the state-subject as working against "their" target group – worsening the conditions for their pupils, their unemployed cases, their elderly patients, their vulnerable clients.

Importantly, the variant terms do not refer to concrete persons, but literally to *dimensions* of civil servant practice. However, when referring to these dimensions as variants of civil servant life-mode in informal conversations, one might have specific

employees in mind. In such contexts, more straightforward – but less distinct – terms for the three dimensions could be, respectively, *policy-developers*, *bureaucrats* (or *operationalizers*) and *street-level bureaucrats* (or *front-liners*). Michael Lipsky's (1969) influential and inspiring classic work on street-level bureaucrats points out features similar to those here described for the policy-implementing dimension. However, his description deviates from my conceptualisation on two points: first, his street-level bureaucrats are seen only in contrast to the government (or the civil servants closely related to it), and they are posited as the link to the citizens. Second, street-level bureaucrats are regarded as concrete occupational groups, disregarding how specific employees often balance dimensions that are not at the core of their occupation. For example, although front-line social workers helping an unemployed youth primarily enacts the policy-implementing dimension, they might also be committed to carry out tasks that ordinarily lie in the operationalizing dimension (which may give rise to the experience that there is "too much bureaucracy" and unnecessary "excel-sheet work").

Moreover, it is important to underline that the three variants should not be seen as Weberian ideal types. They are distinct from each other, and potentially in opposition to each other, yet they are mutually connected and equally necessary. They are inherent in the common concept of civil servant life-mode and constitute a more specified way of comprehending the particular dimensions of the running of the state at the analytic level. For instance, the practices of a frontline person in the health sector must relate also to operationalizing and policy-developing dimensions (such as making orderly filing and bearing policy guidelines in mind). Additionally, the three dimensions do not denote particular realms of activity. Bureaucratic operationalization also takes place in the central administration, and policy-development can take form in a local community job-centre, sometimes disguised as alternative solutions.

As part of the ongoing operating of a state, these dimensions – that I claim are imperative for the state's survival – are best fulfilled by subjects that have internalized the features connected to them. The contradictions, and thus potential tensions, between the three life-mode variants of the civil servant life-mode make it likely that particular employees are motivated mainly by the characteristics connected to one of the three dimensions and will concentrate their activities on one of them.[11] In

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[11] Since the dimensions taken together make up a conceptual whole, one must assume, and preliminary inquiries confirm, that they also exist "within" the dimensions themselves. For instance, the dimension of operationalization itself, contains aspects of *development* (e.g. when new bureaucratic priorities, such as more citizen-involvement, are developed), *operationalization* (when e.g. such plans are converted into specific procedures), and *implementing* (when e.g. officials, although their work does not involve clients or users, are expected to internalize the good reasons for increased citizen involvement).

this respect, the variants of civil servant life-mode somewhat resemble Foucault's *subject positions* that connect subjects to a particular discourse (Peters & Appel 1996; Villadsen 2004). Important differences are that the dimensions of civil servant practice are derived from the goals of the state and mutually determining. I am reluctant to use *discourse* as an "explanation" for a subject position since it remains unclear why a particular discourse dominates in a particular period of cultural history. Still, I would find it necessary to ask whether it is possible to understand a particular discourse (such as the discourse of citizen involvement underlying contemporary NPG) as an aspect of sovereignty work – an understanding that would also provide a key to the conditions for it (and for instance, in the case of NPG, the *limits* to citizen involvement). Thus, my point of departure of the state as a necessarily self-defending entity should not be regarded as an all-explaining postulate, but as a proposition suited to raising relevant questions about possible forms of practice and conduct.

It is relevant to mention here – but for space reasons not possible to expand the argument further – that civil servants indeed themselves are subject to interpellation. They are trained not only in the right *general* virtues of impartiality, incorruptibility, legality etc., but also with more distinct qualities connected to their specific disciplines (the excellent analyst, the proficient controller, the good teacher, etc.) This is often manifested in struggles between different disciplines (e.g., should adolescents with mental health issues be treated by psychologists using talk therapy or psychiatrists in favour of psychopharmacological drugs?).

It is relevant to infer that the importance here put on the alleged incessant realization of a state-will in society seems to be contradicted by the fact that vast areas of service-provision since the 1990s have been subcontracted to private actors, whether firms, consultants, or NGOs. This decentralization concerns not only physical tasks such as cleaning, maintenance, rubbish collection, urban planning, etc., but also takes place in service provision of areas such as health care, social work, drug rehabilitation, and education. The introduction of NPM 30–40 years ago increased the participation of market-actors, and with NPG, ever broader segments of civil society have been brought in to run the state.

While we can readily observe an increasing number of non-state actors as symptomatic of contemporary governance, the key question remains as to the character and degree of influence of these actors. Private companies or other kinds of non-state stakeholders pursue their own agendas but need to do it without jeopardizing the viability of the state-subject, which might lead to a loss of their recognition (or, conversely, lead to the collapse of the state). Put into praxis terms: to ensure that they can be maintained as governing agents, these actors must pursue their own goals so that

these goals ultimately work as means for the state-subject's own goal of maintaining internal and external recognition. The point is, moreover, that the performance of non-public actors ultimately is the responsibility of the public employees that have contracted them. In other words, people that I here conceptualize as civil servants (and in this case typically of the operationalizing variant), have the task to continuously assess whether private service-providers should remain recognized as a kind of ersatz civil servants capable of realizing the political will.

A Case of Non-public Civil Servants?

To illustrate the analytical potential of the developed concepts, I briefly examine them with respect to one case of contemporary co-production where the public sector and other actors were brought together. This case was in the field of social and employment policy initiatives, and is indeed not representative of all state activities. The case concerned a co-productive project, beginning in 2019, aimed at improving employment possibilities among vulnerable citizens in Denmark's capital, Copenhagen. The case derived from a teaching course, Governance Practices in the Competition State, at the Ethnology Section, University of Copenhagen, that I taught during the autumn semester, 2019. In the project investigated by my students (Holm et al. 2020),[12] an NGO and small businesses were brought together in an effort to help people out of a job become self-supporting. In addition to knowledge of the public debate about this project, one of the four students had association with it through his part-time work in the NGO. Alongside policy papers, the students based their report mainly on seven semi-structured interviews. Interviews were made with two female social workers connected to the NGO, Emma and Karen, who were in charge of the project. The students interviewed them both separately and together. In addition, interviews were made with a male and female head of two of the small businesses involved, as well as with a male and female client that got part-time employment through the project (Holm et al. 2020).

According to Karen, the most senior of the two social workers in the NGO, the project idea was created by one of their social welfare clients, who expressed the desire to take on a job for a limited number of hours if the income tax burden was removed. This idea developed into national law for a trial period in 2019–20. The case thus demonstrates that although interpellation is ultimately about asymmetry, this asymmetry is much more than a top-down arrangement; policy-development can emanate "from below", far from the central administration. The project gave socially vulnerable citizens (typically long-term welfare recipients with substance abuse or mental health issues)

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[12] Please see note 3.

the right as "free-jobbers" to earn up to 20,000 DKK (2,600 €) a year without having to suffer a reduction in their welfare benefits. One of the goals of the project, was to connect the "free-jobbers" with employers from small local businesses, who could display their role in the project with a unique badge or label. For the project implementation, a local, well-established, and self-governing social institution with over a century's experience of working with socially marginalized citizens was permitted to administer the program. In other words, the project was by and large allocated to non-public actors, the long-established NGO and the small businesses involved. In this sense, the project epitomized a partnership configuration that is so common today and seems to operate beyond the state with largely non-public actors involved.

The NGO that was involved as organizer of the project, experienced an inherent conflict with the municipal employment office (run by "ordinary" civil servants). The office was supposed to manage these clients but made certain demands on them regarding regular meetings, assessments, and job training, following the overall political agenda of demanding self-sufficiency from all citizens. Karen and Emma who were in charge of the project operation found these demands to be completely misplaced.

Not unusual for social workers in an NGO, and consistent with Karen and Emma, is that allegiances and empathy lie with their clients. Accordingly, their ability to act "freely" can be regarded as a precondition for their continued motivation and participation in the project. However, as it turned out, the case revealed that to continue with the project, they were urged to cultivate the argument that their alternative kind of employment work – because of the special nature of their socially vulnerable clients – remained in accordance with the goals of "the political will", hereby substantiating that their approach was complementary to that of the municipal employment office's more traditional job creation programs with its emphasis on neoliberal self-sufficiency. In other words, in order to maintain their practice, Karen and Emma – following the train of thought behind the concept development – could not limit themselves to an *implementing* dimension, although this was clearly where their motivation lay. Since this project was rather marginal within the municipal administration, they were also compelled to ensure that the *operationalizing* dimension of the project was in place. Karen and Emma thus had to legitimate their project in bureaucratic terms by monitoring and evaluating progress, as Karen phrased it, by "doing casework […] you know, the contact to the municipality, and also documentation etc. … balance sheets, all of the 'funny' stuff … the excel-show [laughing]". Hereby they provided arguments for a continuation of the project. They were even invited to Denmark's second largest municipality, Aarhus, to present the project and make it attractive for municipal employees there. This task made them very proud, yet they also wondered why they, from an "autonomous

project" as they phrased it, instead of employees from the municipality, should tell staff from other municipalities how to run a project like this. Since they were successful in all these efforts – the project was extended for a further two-year period, 2021–22 – it can be argued that the two social workers even contributed to the future formation of a political will concerning ways of safeguarding social cohesion in this particular area of the state's social policy. However, this outcome would not have been possible if not "regular" civil servants (both operationalizing and policy-developing variants) and specific allied politicians were ready to advocate their ideas on a higher level.

To merely analyse this case by reiterating the features of NPG governance does not provide an understanding of the contradictions inherent in it or the restraints put on the persons involved. The social workers in this NGO defined themselves as being an alternative to "the system" and on the clients' side, yet, at the same time, if they wanted future recognition of their practice, they had to adopt systemically-based civil servant virtues. They had to demonstrate that their work was properly managed (epitomizing the operationalizing dimension) and substantiate that their particular scheme also fulfilled a higher purpose of the state (epitomizing the policy-developing dimension). If they failed to do it the project might be ended due to insufficient job creation, to not waste taxpayers' money, or because the local businesses merely pursued their self-interest by obtaining cheap labour.

Besides being an illustrative example of a citizen-involving, co-productive New Public Governance that broadly marks contemporary governance, the case reveals theoretically and analytically how even governance of this citizen-involving kind implies, by necessity, all three dimensions of civil servant practice. This adds support to my argument that these are features that are inseparable from operating a state as such (and I posit that they will thus be detectible across governance regimes such as TPA, NPM and NPG).

Concluding Remarks

I have argued that it is possible to usefully examine the way in which a state is "run" by building on the concept of a civil servant life-mode. As further development of this concept, I have proposed three mutually dependent variants of the life-mode as constituting the "practices that run the state". Each life-mode variant – that is, *policy-developing*, *operationalizing*, and *policy-implementing* – represent a particular dimension of civil servant practice, and all are required to realize the *political will* of the state-subject.

I have argued that a focus on governance regimes as constituting the key to understanding societal change can be misleading since it does not clarify *in what*

governance is ultimately anchored. The shifts in governance regimes are not properly understood if they are merely seen as an inherent and independent development in which one paradigm gradually replaces another. Rather, competition among different regimes is a matter of achieving recognition by a particular state-subject as *the* favoured governance instrument in a particular period, such as the present focus on *co-production* as the feature of the prevalent governance regime of New Public Governance.

In my emphasis on a state-subject that continuously must forge a political will, I do not imply that the goals set by it are without ambiguity or contestation. Typically, and easily observable in liberal democracies, policy objectives are the result of only a temporary truce between conflicting interests, and they are constantly subjected to change. I also do not imply that the policy goals are the most sensible in order to accomplish what they are intended to achieve, namely, to maintain the viability of the state-subject. In fact, states collapse or dissolve due to bad decision-making. Rather, I wish to stress here that governance is inseparable from a state-subject and must be understood against this background. For this reason, a modification of the Althusserian term *interpellation*, based on the ethnological state and life-mode theory, is suggested, emphasizing this connection.

Interpellation is pivotal to ensuring an alignment between a state-subject and the diverse social practices of a society. Interpellation helps maintain recognition of the state, internally as well as externally. It is a matter of great complexity to forge this alignment, connecting the necessity of a state-subject to constitute *one* will and the *diverse* practices of a society with the diverging and often contrasting goals that these encompass. From this follows the requirement that the social practices of civil servants have specific characteristics, untied to particularistic interests within civil society. In state and life-mode theory – drawing on Hegel's notion of *der allgemeine Stand* – the concept of a civil servant life-mode has been seen as a useful tool for understanding the social practice that runs the state.

Understood as a life-mode in the above sense, civil servants are involved in continuous sovereignty work at several levels. Of the three mutually conditioning dimensions of civil-servant practice that I have proposed, the *policy-developing* dimension helps develop the political will of a state-subject and the means to achieve it, the *operationalizing* dimension provides for the necessary bureaucratic conditions to realize the means, and the *policy-implementing* dimension realizes the means sufficiently enough to maintain the viability of the state-subject within the diverse practices of society.

Whether these concepts can provide powerful analytical tools for understanding civil servant practice must be tested through continued encounters with ethnography. Our investigations until now (Højrup & Jul Nielsen forthcoming) concerning municipal

developmental processes as well as social and integration projects have showed how, by comprehending the governance as interpellation, the *limits* of co-production can be revealed. Governance, no matter how many stakeholders are included, cannot lead society in *any* direction. While this is probably a principal lesson, the more specific way that processes and contradictions are managed will vary immensely, depending on which field or project is scrutinized. However, based on the concept development and the mutual relationship between the three variants of the civil servant life-mode, I posit that examples like the street-level projects discussed above can only be properly understood by integrating the importance of a state-subject and the dimensions of operationalization and policy-development. Likewise, civil servant practices, even when preoccupied with high-level policy formulation, can only be understood by considering also operationalizing as well as implementing dimensions.

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