

What is the State? An anthropological inquiry

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Description:

The question of what is the 'State' and how it operates has always been central to social sciences as much as the state itself has been central to living in modern societies. Social scientists, activists and radicals have for decades disagreed widely on the nature, role, and even existence of this thing called the state. And, as the world entered the era of globalization and neoliberal capitalism in the late 20th century, these questions came back to front.

Anthropology, a field once most preoccupied with the study of supposed 'pre-modern, traditional' societies, brings in a new perspective to studying the state. Through the lenses of ethnography and social theory – particularly the Marxist and Foucauldian traditions – the anthropology of the state explores state activities as a manifestation of global and local power relations by looking through the everyday encounters citizens have with the 'state,' and the conflicting imaginaries of the state that they develop based on them.

The goal of this course is to learn the different perspective anthropology of the state brings to understanding the state, examine different case studies into different aspects of state activity, and reflect on how we encounter the state in our daily lives.

Course Sessions:

1. What is the State today?

Trouillot, Michel-Rolph. 2001. 'The Anthropology of the State in the Age of Globalization'. *Current Anthropology* 42 (1), 125–38.

2. Marxist Inquiries

Abrams, Philip. 1988. 'Notes on the Difficulty of Studying the State (1977)'. *Journal of Historical Sociology* 1 (1), 58–89.

Optional reading:

Marx, Karl. 2010 (1852). *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, (excerpts)

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/18th-Brumaire.pdf>, 5-11, 60-4.

Gluckman, Max. 1940. 'Analysis of a social situation in modern Zululand.' *Bantu Studies*, 14(1), 1-30.

3. Governmentality and Bureaucracy 1: Boundaries of the State

Mitchell, Timothy. 1991. 'The Limits of the State: Beyond Statist Approaches and their Critics' *American Political Science Review* 85 (1), 77-96.

Optional reading:

Foucault, Michel. 2007. 'Lecture Four (on Governmentality).' in *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France 1977–1978*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire [UK]: Macmillan, 87-114.

Herzfeld, Michael. 1992. 'Introduction.' in *The Social Production of Indifference: Exploring the Symbolic Roots of Western Bureaucracy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1-16.

4. Governmentality and Bureaucracy 2: Bureaucratic Practice

Mathur, Nayanika. 2016. 'The Reign of Terror of the Big Cat.' in *Paper Tiger: Law, Bureaucracy and the Developmental State in Himalayan India*. Cambridge and Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 140-64.

Optional reading:

Gupta, Akhil. 1995. 'Blurred Boundaries: The Discourse of Corruption, the Culture of Politics, and the Imagined State.' *American Ethnologist* 22(2), 375-402.

5. State and Development: The Vision of the State

Li, Tania Murray. 2007. 'Development in the Age of Neoliberalism.' in *The Will to Improve: Governmentality, Development, and the Practices of Politics*. Durham, NC [et al.]: Duke University Press, 230-69.

Optional reading:

Scott, James. 1998. 'Nature and Space.' in *Seeing like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 11-52.

6. State and Development 2: Infrastructure

Harvey, Penny, and Hannah Knox. 2012. 'The Enchantments of Infrastructure.' *Mobilities* 7 (4), 521–36.

Optional Reading:

Harvey, David. 2001. 'Globalization and the Spatial Fix.' *Geographische Revue* 2 (3), 23–31.

7. Globalizing the State

Ferguson, James, and Akhil Gupta. 2002. 'Spatializing States: Toward an Ethnography of Neoliberal Governmentality.' *American Ethnologist* 29 (4), 981–1002.

Optional reading:

Gupta, Akhil, and Aradhana Sharma. 2006. 'Globalization and Postcolonial States.' *Current Anthropology*, 47(2), 277–307.

Ali, Kamran A. 1996. 'The Politics of Family Planning in Egypt.' *Anthropology Today*, 12(5), 14-19.

8. Hope For/Against the State

Jansen, Stef. 2014. 'Hope For/Against the State: Gridding in a Besieged Sarajevo Suburb'. *Ethnos* 79 (2), 238–60.

Optional reading:

Scott, James C. 1985. 'Beyond the War of Words: Cautious Resistance and Calculated Conformity.' In *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (pp. 241-303). Yale University Press.