

Anthropology of the State, the law, bureaucracy and the police. With examples from West African and Germany

The anthropology of the state is the study, predominantly but not exclusively, by ethnographic methods, of public services ('bureaucracies') and their actors ('bureaucrats'). Bureaucracy is one of the most important 'traveling blueprints' that shape the contemporary world. Like other organizations, bureaucracies are marked by a tension of formal and informal rules. Since its foundational moment in the 1920s, the basic tenet of organization studies has been that organizations, including public ones, cannot be understood on the basis of official charts and regulations alone. This gives ethnography, and an anthropological approach in general, its pre-eminent role in the study of the state, as ethnography is the only methodology by which informal practices can be accessed.

Through lectures and the discussion of selected readings, and based on empirical work done in West Africa and Germany, we will try to understand how anthropologists study the state and public bureaucracies (like the police), with an additional glimpse at the law.

Session 1: Anthropology of the state

- *Required reading: Bierschenk, Thomas, and Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardan. 2014. "Studying the Dynamics of African Bureaucracies. An Introduction to States at Work." In States at Work. Dynamics of African Bureaucracies, edited by Thomas Bierschenk and Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardan, 3-33. Leiden: Brill.*

Session 2: Street-Level bureaucracies

- *Required reading: Lipsky, Michael. Street-Level Bureaucracy. Dilemmas of the Individual in Public Services. New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1980 (pp. xi-xviii, and 3-25)*

Session 3: State, bureaucracy and policing. An anthropological and historical perspective

- *Required reading: Martin, Jeffrey. 2007. "A Reasonable Balance of Law and Sentiment: Social Order in Democratic Taiwan from the Policeman's Point of View." Law & Society Review 41 (3):665-698.*

Session 4: Bureaucrats as para-ethnologists

- *Required reading: Sedgwick, Mitchell W. (2017). Complicit Positioning: Anthropological Knowledge and Problems of 'Studying Up' for Ethnographer-Employees of Corporations. Journal of Business Anthropology, 6(1).*

Session 5: States and bureaucracy in Africa. Anthropological perspectives

- *Required reading: Bierschenk, Thomas, and Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardan. 2014. "Ethnographies of Public Services in Africa: An Emerging Research Paradigm." In States at Work. Dynamics of African Bureaucracies, edited by Thomas Bierschenk and Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardan, 35-65. Leiden: Brill.*

Session 6: What is legal pluralism? With an example from West Africa

- *Required reading: Moore, Sally Falk. 1973. "Law and social change: the semi-autonomous social field as an appropriate subject of study." Law and Society Review:719-746.*

Session 7: Studying legal practices in Benin ethnographically

- *Required reading: Bierschenk, Thomas. "The Everyday Functioning of an African Public Service: Informalization, Privatization and Corruption in Benin's Legal System." Journal of Legal Pluralism 57 (2008): 101-39.*

Session 8: How to study bureaucracies ethnographically

- *Required reading: Olivier de Sardan, Jean-Pierre (2015) The politics of fieldwork: Data production in anthropology and qualitative Approaches. In: Olivier de Sardan, J.-P. (2015), Epistemology, Fieldwork, and Anthropology. Palgrave Macmillan, New York, pp 21-63*

Evaluation

A test ("paper") of four pages (15000 signs) that the student will upload to Moodle not later than three weeks after the end of the course.