



Fantastic States!

Allegra
June, 2015



This thematic week is the continuation of a discussion on the state we, at Allegra, [started in november last year](#). This previous thread explored ethnographically the state's construction in international relations, law, and diplomacy. This time, we focus on works that are suggestive of new ethnographic strategies for accessing the constitutive fabrics of the state. In order to deepen our ethnographic engagement with 'the state' and its margins, we present short ethnographic pieces that illustrate the emergence of 'the state' across a wide range of places, things, persons, and the multiplex social, cognitive, and affective relations between them.



The posts we collected for you problematize the idea of “the” state as a coherent unit, clearly differentiated from society. Instead they approach the state as a product of practices, in particular representational practices.

Following the work of anthropologists who have attempted to theorize the state as a fantasy (Navaro-Yashin 2002), as a fetish (Taussig 1992b), as an idea (Mitchell 1991), or as a fiction (Aretxaga 2003), this thematic week underlines the elusive, porous, and mobile boundaries of the state in various contexts where the ‘state’ is considered as ‘weak’ or ‘failed’ or when it attempts to assert its authoritarian power.

We start with an excerpt from Yael Navaro-Yashin by now classic ‘The Make Believe Space’, in which she explores Northern Cyprus as a space carved out as distinct and defined as separate after the Turkish invasion of 1974.

We continue with a text written by Umut Yildirm and illustrated by artist Bora Baskan, describing the gentrification wave in central Istanbul in relation to the plundering of old non-muslim Armenian buildings. This ethnographic piece is a meditation on façades that bear the traces of various state attempts at erasing the non-Turkish and non-Muslim elements of society.

On Friday, Jon Schubert investigates a ‘fainting wave’ that swept through Angolan middle schools in 2011. Instead of interpreting the phenomenon in terms of ‘somatisation’, Schubert reveals a pattern that is indicative of popular imaginaries of statehood in authoritarian regimes.

We conclude the week with a post by Kareem Rabie reflecting on the construction of the idea of the state in a place where state-building is constantly postponed; namely Palestine. Rabie takes the construction of Rawabi, a massive new planned town located 9 km north of Ramallah, and mostly funded by Qatar, to demonstrate how the Palestinian state is conceived by NGOs, donors, Palestinian capitalists and the Palestinian Authority primarily as a stable and profitable entity.

On Monday 8th, we reconvene with a post written by Tessa Diphoorn and Tom



Kagwe which presents a case adjudicated upon by Kenya's Court of Appeal on May, 8th, on a recommendation made by the Independent Policing Oversight Authority (IPOA) of Kenya which 'oversees' the work of the National Police Service. The case illustrates how various state bodies compete against each other, thus providing insight into the heterogenic forms of statehood that characterises the Kenyan polity.

Finally, Allie's review team put together a list of recent publications on the anthropology of the state: keep your eyes open for books that you may want to review for us!

Enjoy!

References:

Navaro-Yashin, Yael. 2002. *Faces of the State: Secularism and Public Life in Turkey*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Taussig, Michael. 1992. "The Magic of the State." *Public Culture* 5 (1) (September 21): 63-66.

Mitchell, Timothy. 1991. "The Limits of the State: Beyond Statist Approaches and Their Critics." *The American Political Science Review* 85 (1) (March): 77.

Aretxaga, Begona. 2003. "Maddening States." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 32 (January 1): 393-410.