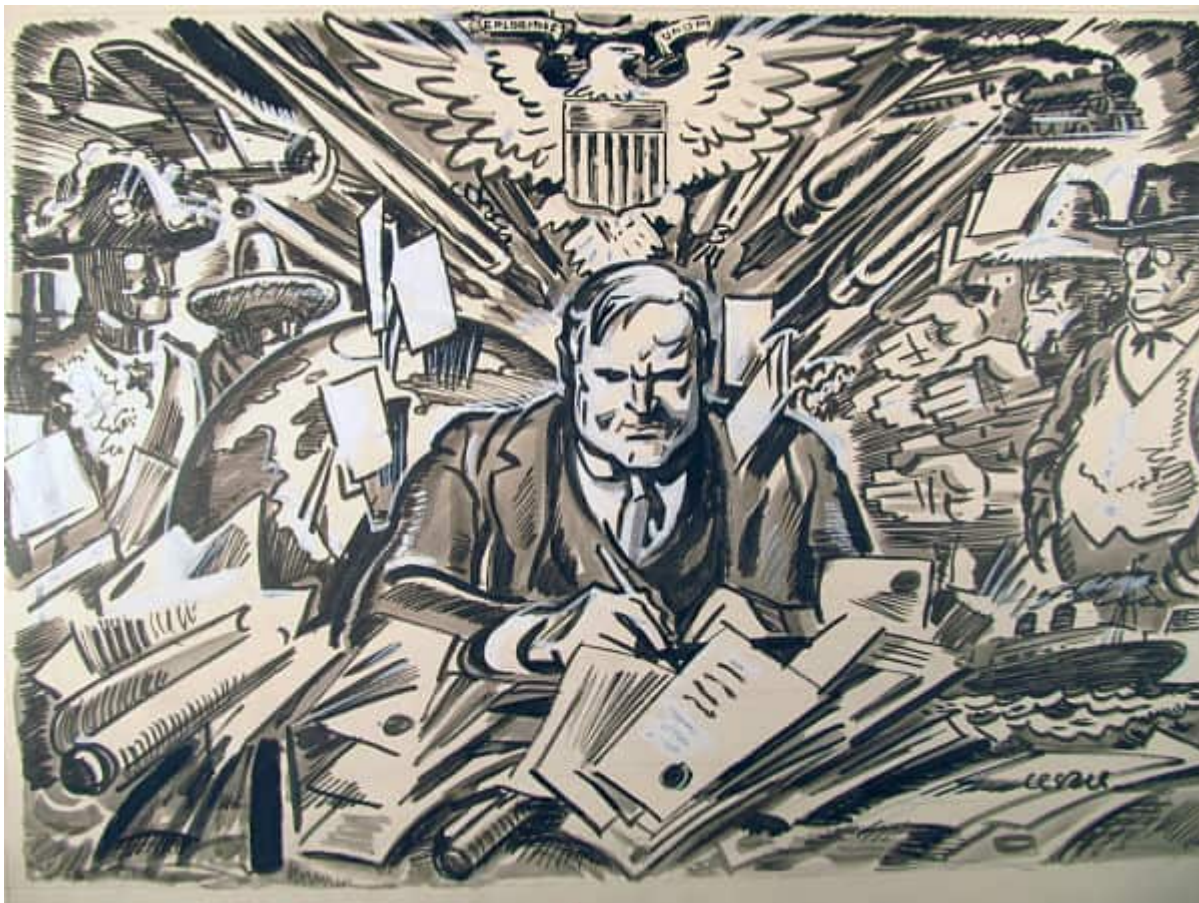




# Recent Publications on the 'Anthropology of the State' #AnthroState

written by Allegra  
November, 2014



We recently featured a review on the 'Anthropology of the State' with Madeleine Reeves's new publication on [Border Work: Spatial Lives of the State in Central Asia](#). To accompany this week's theme on the 'Anthropology of the State', our thematic list covers more recent work on stately topics. Ranging from reflections on the *State of Crisis* (Bauman) to more ethnographic explorations of *States at Work* (Bierschenk and de Sardan), stateness is in the center of all of them. As with our last list on [Human Rights](#), there will be no Call for Reviews as we are



still busy with our old lists.



Bauman, Zygmunt, and Carlo Bordoni. [\*State of Crisis\*](#). 2014. Cambridge: Polity Press. 180 pp. Pb: €18.90.  
ISBN: 9780745680958

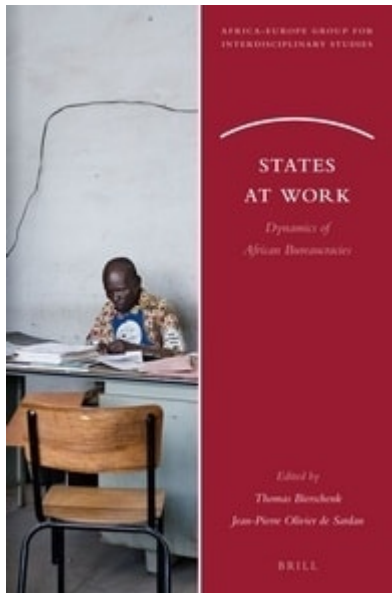
Today we hear much talk of crisis and comparisons are often made with the Great Depression of the 1930s, but there is a crucial difference that sets our current malaise apart from the 1930s: today we no longer trust in the capacity of the state to resolve the crisis and to chart a new way forward. In our increasingly globalized world, states have been stripped of much of their power to shape the course of events. Many of our problems are globally produced but the volume of power at the disposal of individual nation-states is simply not sufficient to cope with the problems they face. This divorce between power and politics produces a new kind of paralysis. It undermines the political agency that is needed to tackle the crisis and it saps citizens' belief that governments can deliver on their promises. The impotence of governments goes hand in hand with the growing cynicism and distrust of citizens. Hence the current crisis is at once a crisis of agency, a crisis of representative democracy and a crisis of the sovereignty of the state.

In this book the world-renowned sociologist Zygmunt Bauman and fellow traveller



Carlo Bordoni explore the social and political dimensions of the current crisis. While this crisis has been greatly exacerbated by the turmoil following the financial crisis of 2007-8, Bauman and Bordoni argue that the crisis facing Western societies is rooted in a much more profound series of transformations that stretch back further in time and are producing long-lasting effects.

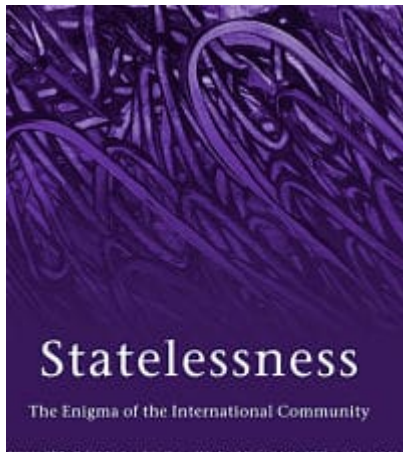
Bierschenk, Thomas, and Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardan. 2014. *States at Work. Dynamics of African Bureaucracies*. Leiden: Brill. 400 pp. Pb: €62,00. ISBN: 9789004264786.



*States at Work* explores the mundane practices of state-making in Africa by focussing on the daily functioning of public services and the practices of civil servants. Adopting mainly an ethnographic approach as a basis for theorizing, the authors deal with topics including: bureaucratic cultures and practical norms, operational routines in offices, career patterns and modes of appointment; how bureaucrats themselves perceive and deliver goods and services and interact with service users; the accumulation of public administration reforms and how the different bureaucratic corps react to the 'good governance' discourse and new public management policies; the consequences of these reforms for the daily working of state bureaucracies and for the civil servants' identities and modes of



accountability; and the space that exists for bottom-up micro-reforms that build on local innovations or informal arrangements.



William E Conklin

STUDIES IN INTERNATIONAL LAW

Conklin, William E. 2014. [\*Statelessness: The Enigma of the International Community\*](#). Oxford: Hart Publishing. 380 pp. Hb: £60.00. ISBN: 9781849465076

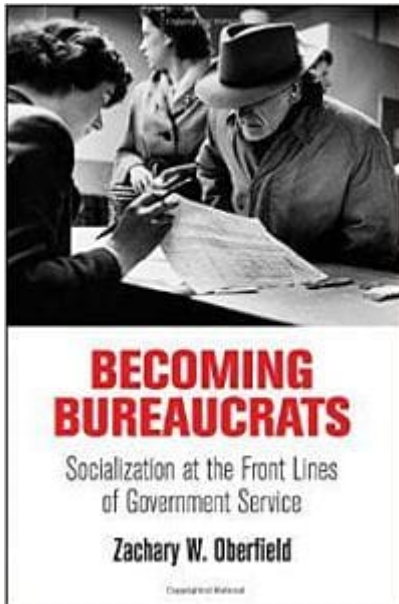
‘Statelessness’ is a legal status denoting lack of any nationality, a status whereby the otherwise normal link between an individual and a state is absent. The increasingly widespread problem of statelessness has profound legal, social, economic and psychological consequences but also gives rise to the paradox of an international community that claims universal standards for all natural persons while allowing its member states to allow statelessness to occur. In this powerfully argued book, Conklin critically evaluates traditional efforts to recognize and reduce statelessness. The problem, he argues, rests in the obligatory nature of law, domestic or international. By closely analysing a broad spectrum of court and tribunal judgments from many jurisdictions, Conklin explains how confusion has arisen between two discourses, the one discourse inside the other, as to the nature of the international community.





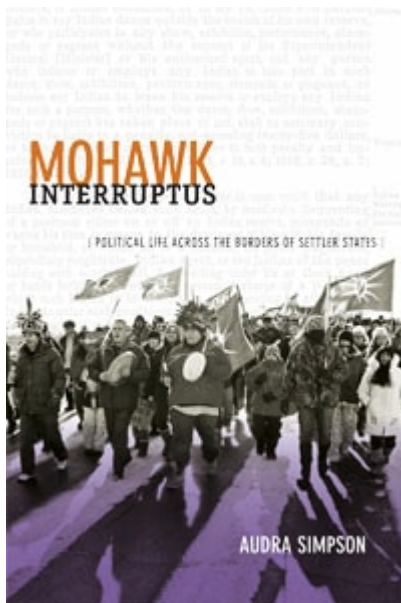
Lavie, Smadar. 2014. [\*Wrapped in the Flag of Israel: Mizrahi Single Mothers and Bureaucratic Torture.\*](#) Oxford: Berghahn Books. 214 pp. Hb: \$39.95. ISBN: 9781782382225

What is the relationship between social protest movements in the State of Israel, violence in Gaza, and the possibility of an Israeli attack on Iran? Why did the mass social protests in the State of Israel of summer 2011 ultimately fail? *Wrapped in the Flag of Israel* discusses social protest movements from the 2003 Single Mothers' March led by Mizrahi Vicky Knafo, to the "Tahrir is Here" Israeli mass protests of summer 2011. Equating bureaucratic entanglements with pain – what, arguably, can be seen as torture, Smadar Lavie explores the conundrum of loving and staying loyal to a state that repeatedly inflicts pain on its non-European Jewish women citizens through its bureaucratic system. The book presents a model of bureaucracy as divine cosmology and posits that Israeli State bureaucracy is based on a theological essence that fuses the categories of religion, gender, and race into the foundation of citizenship.



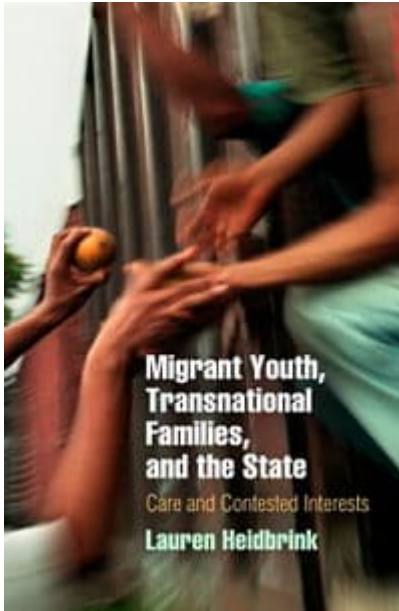
Oberfield, Zachary W. 2014. [\*Becoming Bureaucrats. Socialization at the Front Lines of Government Service\*](#). Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press. 272 pp.  
Hb: £39.00. ISBN: 9780812246162.

In *Becoming Bureaucrats*, Zachary W. Oberfield traces the paths of two sets of public servants – police officers and welfare caseworkers – from their first day on the job through the end of their second year. Examining original data derived from surveys and in-depth interviews, along with ethnographic observations from the author’s year of training and work as a welfare caseworker, *Becoming Bureaucrats* charts how public-sector entrants develop their bureaucratic identities, motivations, and attitudes. Ranging from individual stories to population-wide statistical analysis, Oberfield’s study complicates the long-standing cliché that bureaucracies churn out bureaucrats with mechanical efficiency. He demonstrates that entrants’ bureaucratic personalities evolved but remained strongly tied to the views, identities, and motives that they articulated at the outset of their service. As such, he argues that who bureaucrats become and, as a result, how bureaucracies function, depends strongly on patterns of self-selection and recruitment.



Simpson, Audra. [\*Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life Across the Borders of Settler States\*](#). Durham: Duke University Press. 280 pp. Pb: \$23.95. ISBN: 9780822356554.

*Mohawk Interruptus* is a bold challenge to dominant thinking in the fields of Native studies and anthropology. Combining political theory with ethnographic research among the Mohawks of Kahnawà:ke, a reserve community in what is now southwestern Quebec, Audra Simpson examines their struggles to articulate and maintain political sovereignty through centuries of settler colonialism. The Kahnawà:ke Mohawks are part of the Haudenosaunee or Iroquois Confederacy. Like many Iroquois peoples, they insist on the integrity of Haudenosaunee governance and refuse American or Canadian citizenship. Audra Simpson thinks through this politics of refusal, which stands in stark contrast to the politics of cultural recognition. Tracing the implications of refusal, Simpson argues that one sovereign political order can exist nested within a sovereign state, albeit with enormous tension around issues of jurisdiction and legitimacy. Finally, Simpson critiques anthropologists and political scientists, whom, she argues, have too readily accepted the assumption that the colonial project is complete. Belying that notion, *Mohawk Interruptus* calls for and demonstrates more robust and evenhanded forms of inquiry into indigenous politics in the teeth of settler governance.



Heidbrink, Lauren. 2014. [\*Migrant Youth, Transnational Families, and the State. Care and Contested Interests.\*](#) Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press. 208 pp. Hb: \$49.95. ISBN: 9780812246049.

Each year, more than half a million migrant children journey from countries around the globe enter the United States with no lawful immigration status; many of them have no parent or legal guardian to provide care and custody. Yet little is known about their experiences in a nation that may simultaneously shelter children while initiating proceedings to deport them, nor about their safety or well-being if repatriated. *Migrant Youth, Transnational Families, and the State* examines the draconian immigration policies that detain unaccompanied migrant children and draws on U.S. historical, political, legal, and institutional practices to contextualize the lives of children and youth as they move through federal detention facilities, immigration and family courts, federal foster care programs, and their communities across the United States and Central America.