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**Caring States, Ambivalent Families: How the Gift of State-paid Senior Home Care Reconfigures the Internal State-Society Boundary in Serbia**

Based on long-term fieldwork, the paper tackles the tension between micro-politics and macro-policy to complicate hegemonic discourses about the uncaring, absent state. The Yugoslav welfare state and its post-socialist Serbian successor reduced spending and transformed services since the 1980s. Following the financial crisis of 2008, the IMF urged Serbia again to form a leaner state operating more “economically”. Even social workers now draped their sometimes-expanding care for the population with discourses about its imagined opposite, family values. Meanwhile, local state help was seldom elicited by citizens – rather it came as a surprising and suspect gift to them. In the new local state service ‘Elderly Care at Home’ started in 2008, old people at first had to be convinced to take in the state-paid carers. I shadowed the movement of carer Ljilja, who opened the doors to the multiple homes forming her emerging elder care network. Ljilja, the elderly, and their other social relations soon began to exchange multiple gifts like information, gossip, presents, coffee, food, and shared life cycle rituals (birthdays and funerals). The elderly retained the conventional discursive boundary between the bad state and the good family, while allowing the intimate intertwining of both in practice. In contrast to audited and fragmented care time documented for e.g. Western European and US state-paid elder care, I observed surfacing flexible space-times conducive of responsive care. These flexible space-times were locally appreciated as family-like but remained little acknowledged as state-based – and thus they poorly survived subsequent state reform cycles.

**Andre Thiemann** is a political and economic anthropologist working on contemporary Europe with a long-standing interest in West Africa. After he defended his dissertation, *State Relations: Local State and Social Security in Central Serbia* with highest honours (summa cum laude), Andre was a research fellow in the ZIF Research Group ‘Kinship and Politics: Rethinking a Conceptual Split and its Epistemological Implications in the Social Sciences’, at Bielefeld University. Subsequently, he was a Junior Core Fellow at the Institute for Advanced Studies at CEU Budapest, and the CEU Dept. for Sociology and Social Anthropology, before joining the Riga Stradins University. Andre has published in *Social Analysis*, *Contemporary Southeastern Europe*, the *Bulletin of the Ethnographic Institute SASA*, and in several edited volumes. His post-doctoral research project at the Riga Stradins University examines the global value chains of raspberries and sea-buckthorn.