**Infrastructural State Relations:**

**Pipes, Roads, and the Relational Anthropology of the State**

Andre Thiemann & Ezgican Ozdemir

**Abstract:**

Developing an infrastructural extension of the relational approach to the state, our contribution discusses the “material condensation” of state relations. The relational anthropology of the state (Thelen, Vetters, von Benda-Beckmann 2017) has creatively combined classic social anthropological network analyses of government, Foucauldian boundary work between images and practices of the state, and their effects – modalities of government. Refuting culturalism, in our view the explanatory potential of the relational approach lies in its long-submerged roots in heterodox Marxist analytics of power (see also Gupta 2012). Attention to the double meaning of “relation” reveals that internal processes of the state connect it to disparate societal processes (Ollman 2001, 2003, Thiemann 2016). We push this materialist insight further by pursuing a comparative investigation of a large-scale water pipeline project in northern Cyprus and a small-scale road construction in central Serbia. The Turkish state-funded water infrastructure unearths culturally-embedded power relations between a patron state and a de-facto state. Meanwhile, in the Serbian case citizens struggle with inadequately maintained infrastructures and the ruins of the Yugoslav “withered away state”. Thus, their renewed attempts to invest in their infrastructural environment also signal a novel engagement with their state. While we maintain that history and space are open processes (Lefebvre 1991; Massey 2012), these cases lead us to reengage with Nikos Poulantzas’ (1978, 123) characterization of the state as the material condensation of a historical relationship of forces, prefiguring an intersectional analysis of antagonistic struggle (Mouffe 2013) in infrastructural “techno-politics” (von Schnitzler 2016, Anand et al. 2018). Thus, we analyze the state as a materially condensed relation bearing the risks of too much and too little government. The materialist attention to infrastructures allows us to analyze contemporary power struggles and the formation of new political subjectivities in relationship to the state.