

The European Association  
of Social Anthropologists (EASA) network on  
Anthropologies of the State (AnthroState)  
CONFERENCE

# FUTURE STATES

30–31 August 2023  
Rīga Stradiņš University, Latvia

## Organisers

The conference is co-organised by Anthropologies of State (AnthroState) network of the European Association of Anthropologists and Rīga Stradiņš University.

## Scientific Committee

- Martijn Koster, Radboud University, Nijmegen, Netherlands
- Mette-Louise Johansen, VIVE, Aarhus, Denmark
- Keye Termette, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, USA
- Klāvs Sedlenieks, Rīga Stradiņš University, Latvia

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## 30 August

RSU Pharmaceutical Education and Research Centre, 21 Konsula Street

**9:00-10:00 Registration & Coffee**

**10:00-10:30 Opening and greetings (Room #204)**

**10:30-12:30 Session 1**

**Panel 1a: Crisis and Beyond (Room #204)**

Chair: **Anouk de Koning**

***Seeing State Futures in Perfect Storms: lessons from disaster relief interventions in Malawi***

**Tanja Hendriks, KU Leuven**

Despite its planetary scale, the responsibility to deal with the effects of climate change-induced disasters rests primarily with states. Countries like Malawi thus find themselves in a 'perfect storm': having contributed least to causing climate change, it bears the brunt of its impacts, exacerbating its already disadvantaged predicament. As a disaster-prone and donor-dependent state, Malawi's reliance on humanitarian assistance when disaster strikes, presents a conundrum: even though it lacks the capacity and resources to deal with disasters in its territory, the Malawi state is simultaneously indispensable to disaster governance and relief interventions. Conceptualizing the state not as an empirical entity but as instantiated relationally in civil servants' everyday practices, this paper is based on 12 months of ethnographic fieldwork conducted in 2019; the year of disaster relief interventions after Cyclone Idai. Focusing on district-level civil servants working with the Department of Disaster Management Affairs, I detail their interactions with colleagues, disaster-affected citizens, humanitarians and international collaborators. In showing how they navigated the demands placed on them by drawing on their sense of duty, I suggest that studying relief interventions throws into sharp relief how the state itself is instantiated as well as what it is up against in today's world.

***"Alive by sheer luck": Citizenship and the unpredictable in Greece***

**Katerina Rozakou, Panteion University of Social and Political Sciences**

Ten years in austerity in Greece and a series of overlapping crises (migrant reception, covid-19 pandemic, climate crisis) have turned crisis into a chronic situation rather than a rupture to a (presumed) normality (Vigh 2008). Moreover, the already devalued Greek state has been further morally devalued in the eyes of its citizenry. The citizen-state relationship has been reconfigured and being a Greek citizen is often deemed as an undesirable or "vertiginous" (Knight 2021) position characterized by temporal disorientation. The commonly used expression "being alive by sheer luck" reflects the predominant feelings of insecurity and unpredictability. At the same time, migrants who apply for citizenship arduously navigate the administrative arrangement, aspiring to become Greek citizens formally and legally. Encountering an ever-shifting framework, they experience a different sense of unpredictability and the effects of temporal power in various bureaucratic delays and changing regulations. This paper draws upon the encounters between citizenship applicants and diverse actors (state agents, non-state actors, other brokers) mediating in the citizenship acquisition process to address the questions of citizenship and the unpredictable in Greece. How do these diverse actors experience the unpredictable and what configurations of citizenship emerge in these encounters? What are the temporalities of these citizenships?

## ***A self-devouring state: Towards a genealogy of the state power in postwar Bosnia-Herzegovina***

**Larisa Kurtovic**, University of Ottawa

This paper blends ethnographic, historical, and conceptual insight in order to make sense of the changing perception of state power in postwar-Bosnia-Herzegovina, a post-socialist and internationally managed country, characterized at once by an excess of ethnic representation and ordinary and extraordinary forms of social neglect and abandonment (Povinelli 2011). Moving through a series of ethnographic scenes unfolding over the last 15 years, I show how “the state” has evolved from an object of desire to a form of spectral post-presence (Dunn 2008), to something self-devouring and cannibalistic (Kurtović and Hromadžić 2017), that is not only post-biopolitical but potentially detrimental to life and the future itself. I connect each of these sites of transformation to long-durée processes tied to remapping of political and economic power in the postwar period, which include, for example, the proliferation of clientelist relationships tied to nationalist and non-nationalist political parties, as well as the ongoing forms of plunder of industrial, infrastructural, and natural resources. In the last act, the paper zooms in on the intersection of catastrophic rates of emigration and demographic decline, and the accelerating extraction of lumber, sand and hydropower as the most recent sites where the self-devouring logics of the postwar state power are made material and concrete.

## ***Nothing is Certain, Other than Uncertainty Itself”: How Young Turkish Cypriots Think About the Future***

**Lily Gibbs**, University of Kent

For young Turkish Cypriots, the future is often unimaginable, not only because of widespread global uncertainties, but also because of the ongoing state of limbo that exists in the unrecognized Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. The lack of recognised nationhood coincides with international demonisation, historical violence, economic embargoes, and geographic isolation to create a context of socio-political entrapment for Turkish Cypriot youth. This presentation will explore the ways in which young Turkish Cypriots – the first generation without lived experience of the war – think about the future of both states in Cyprus, the future of the conflict that divides the island, and how these futures will impact their own. The wider doctoral project questions what young people do when their state has little to offer them, and uncertainty becomes the only constant. Drawing on preliminary findings from ethnographic interviews, this paper will focus on the idea of (un)certainly in relation to the present situation in Northern Cyprus, the future of the contested state, and the experiences of Turkish Cypriot youth.

**Panel 1b: Citizenship** (Room #305)

**Keye Tersmette**

## ***Crafting new figures in the Dutch welfare state***

Author: **Charlotte van der Veen**, Universiteit Leiden

A myriad of in-between figures populate the social domain: peer workers, buddies and role models are employed to ‘stand next to citizens’, thereby fulfilling promises of closeness. Social professionals also take on new roles. Increasingly, they have to facilitate networked collaboration and encourage citizens’ active participation in social welfare. The emergence of these new figures and roles in the Dutch welfare context are refashioning state-citizen relationships. These new figures exist at the interface of what is imagined and made real, turning abstract policy goals into realities. In this paper, I trace how the rationalities underpinning the Dutch welfare state give these intermediary figures a central position in the Dutch welfare context. Using the example of one such figure, the ervaringsdeskundige or peer worker, I ask how these

new institutional identities are forged in policy texts, how they are made real in practice, and what new welfare relations they enable. I examine how these figures are written into policy documents and examine which stories they are and are not allowed to tell. I end by asking: What do we learn about new welfare relations when we take these figures as starting point?

## ***Framing ‘Fear for the Future’ as a Concept to Study the Embodied Subjectification of Youth and University Students – An Introduction***

**Tirthankar Chakraborty**, Freie Universität Berlin

Democracy has been touted as an essential condition for development. Yet, the tremors of undemocratic practices, including the routinisation of violence and fear, can be felt in the functioning of democracies across the globe. While dissent and debate have been celebrated as the pillars of democracy, the erosion of both has not gone unnoticed, especially in the case of India as it slides towards soft authoritarianism. By framing the concept of ‘fear of the future’, this paper explores how fear can be operationalised to dissuade young students from exercising dissent and be ‘good’ citizens with ‘bright futures’. I argue that the notion of ‘success’ prompts the newly-minted citizens to stay away from protests as there can be potential harm that can befall the individual. I use Butler’s ‘grievable bodies’ as a framework to engender the epistemological capacity of the state to make examples of dissenters to subjectify (Foucault 1983) the mass and draw the contours of what falls within and beyond the norms defined by the state.

## ***Prefigurative visions: Comparing Greek and Dutch welfare state imaginaries***

**Martha Kapazoglou**, Vénicia Sananès, Leiden University

After a decades-long celebration of individual responsibility, accompanied by the dismantling of welfare institutions, the state is back. Across Europe, states and citizens are experimenting with doing welfare differently. In these new welfare arrangements, states and non-state actors are collaboratively crafting new socio-political futures. Our paper explores these new visions comparatively through an analysis of two policy texts that seek to reform welfare at different scales, the Master Plan for the neighborhood of Zuidooit in Amsterdam and the National Strategy for Social Integration and Poverty Reduction in Greece. We understand policy texts in two ways: as statements and carriers of values and identity (Yanow, 1996), and as prefigurative (Cooper, 2020). Offering new solutions to where other policies have failed, policy texts are artifacts that foretell and craft new socio-political futures. They are prefigurative as they engage in remaking the public good – commonly desired and desirable ideals. We situate the two policy texts in their sociopolitical moment, which will inevitably affect how their prefigurative visions will unfold in practice. As such, we unpack the different ways the role of the state and its citizens are represented, imagined and envisioned in the Dutch and Greek society.”

## ***Exploring the (re)making of collectivities in the Dutch welfare state***

**Yannick Drijfhout**, Leiden University

“Local” and “active” citizenship in self-supporting communities are of increasing importance in Dutch welfare state arrangements. The state appeals to collectivities to take up new role in welfare governance and provision. Municipal authorities seek to foster communities by opening up spaces for local interaction and creating new positions for citizens vis-à-vis the state. In this paper, I use the case of Bospolder-Tussendijken (Rotterdam), a neighborhood I studied over the past two years, to examine the interactions between top-down endeavors and bottom-

up initiatives in the context of such governing through communities policies. I focus on policies and programs that emphasize collectivities to realize new visions and futures of the welfare state. I thereby focus on the interaction between policy documents that foreground the neighborhood as a locus for change through community practices, and practices in which these collectives become practice through ‘doing collectivity’. I explore how in the case of Bospolder-Tussendijken, strategies and techniques aimed at collective welfare governance and provision are deployed; and ask how they link community discourse to everyday social life, networks and initiatives, and in doing so (re)shape imaginings and practices of collectivity.

**12:30-14:00 Lunch** RSU Dzirciema street 16. Cafeteria

**14:30-15:45 Session 2**

**Panel 2a: Welfare** (Room #204)

Chair: **André Thiemann**

***States, citizens and the multiple logics of welfare***

**Anouk de Koning**, Leiden University

Welfare programs are key elements of social contracts between states and citizens. Yet anthropological studies of welfare in Europe and the US rarely examine such programs as sites for the elaboration of state-citizen relations. Instead, they often limit their gaze to the welfare program itself, highlighting its disciplinary features.

This paper zooms in on Amsterdam’s Parent and Child Teams, a welfare program that provides free youth help and parenting support and monitors and fosters child well-being. It traces how state-citizen relations were crafted by Parent and Child Teams in an ambiguous moment in and beyond neoliberalism.

I argue that in order to understand these relations, we need to pay attention to the complex make up of welfare institutions. Welfare institutions are comprised of various elements that articulate different views, commitments and logics, which may well contradict each other. As a result, they rarely reproduce one clear political rationale. I illustrate this through an analysis of the ambiguous state-citizen relations enacted by the Parent and Child Teams, which were animated by shifting political and relational logics.

***Prefigurative practice in Norwegian public health policy***

**Emma Lengle**, University of Oslo

My ongoing PhD research explores prefigurative practice in the Oslo City Public Health Strategy for 2023-2030, a policy process initiated by the Oslo City Government to target social inequality in health. The Oslo Strategy promises to reduce social inequality in health by formulating a set of common definitions, goals, and approaches to inequality to be implemented across Oslo City health and welfare initiatives. My project examines the intentions, assumptions, and biases embedded in the coming-into-being of the Oslo Strategy, and their relation to the Nordic universalist welfare imaginary. Situated in the field of political ethnography, I ask how prefigurations of social equality are negotiated in the Strategy, how forms of evidence are called upon to justify these visions of transformation, and how voices are lifted or silenced in ensuing debates. My project is in the early stages of fieldwork and the methods I employ include practice-oriented document analysis, semi-structured interviews, and participant observation. I have identified that, while Oslo policymakers attempt to establish social inequality in health as a core characteristic of contemporary Norwegian society in the Strategy, they simultaneously embed ideals of a future state of health equality within their policymaking practices.

***“Give us back the right to decide!”: Perceptions of medical personnel about the role of the state in health care development***

**Mārtiņš Daugulis**, Riga Stradiņš university

In 2020, the Latvian Ministry of Health introduced a new approach to collecting the opinions of patients, physicians, and representatives of institutions involved in oncology care - a design thinking method. It was carried out by a group of social scientists (social anthropologists and political scientists) in order to take into account both the experience of users and the limitations of the political system as part of the preparation of the “Plan for Improving Health Care in Oncology 2022 - 2024”. Previous methods of policymaking-meetings with stakeholders within existing collaborative formats and legislative frameworks-have been challenged by low stakeholder input and general distrust of the government approach to policymaking. The purpose of this article is to assess medical staff perceptions of the role of state in health care development. What state-performance are stakeholders willing to accept and co-perform?

Conclusions: There are several perceptual paradoxes that can be concluded: “democracy stealing the vote” to “democracy of doctors”; a desire for a “state to turn on and off”. The general feeling that the state is too weak to enforce right decisions but too strong to enforce wrong decisions is prevalent in the perceptions analyzed.

**Panel 2b: Democracy** (Room #305)

Chair: **Klavs Sedlenieks**

***Democratic refusal: silent citizenship in Oman***

**Keye Tersmette**, Harvard University

Oman today is an absolute monarchy, with the country’s legislative and executive powers vested solely in the person of the sultan. The previous sultan, the late Qaboos bin Sa’id (r. 1970-2020), introduced different forms of representative councils, whose authority was limited to consultation and advice, through which the Omani population could exercise a modicum of democracy. The extension of the franchise to all adult Omanis in 2003 marked a milestone in this process of democratisation, but in recent elections voter turnout has plummeted, to below 50% in the latest round. In this presentation, based on a fieldwork spanning a decade (2011-2020), I offer an analysis of the refusal of younger Omanis to participate in ostensibly democratic mechanisms. I reflect on the optimism in the wake of the 2011 Omani spring and the pessimism and outright cynicism that sprung from the widespread disillusion that followed. The consultative council’s lack of real power is but one factor for the electorate’s abstention: I argue that conceptions of what it means to be a good citizen likewise causes Omanis to turn away from the ballot box.

***Identity politics in polarised Brazil: state, elections and representation in Pernambuco***

**Flávio Eiró**, University of Groningen

How is identity politics transforming electoral competition in Brazil? Having conducted ethnographic research among politicians and campaign workers, I analyse their often overlooked perspective to understand how these actors make sense of the changing political landscape, their own role in it, and the strategies they use to claim legitimacy (and monopoly) over their own identities. My research spans from 2018 to 2022, covering the exact tenure of President Jair Bolsonaro, including field visits and data collection during the three elections that took place during this term. My study offers insights into what Brazilian politics will increasingly become: a politics where the identities of political candidates are not only central to defining voters’ choices but also the locus of competition for legitimacy and hegemony. Who is allowed

to use their own identities as political platforms? Which identities can be used by the Left, and which by the Right? What are the expectations for those who do capitalise on certain identities, and how these frame elected politicians performance and construction of the state? These are some of the words this presentation will seek to answer.

***The role of the state in transitioning societies. From current structural weakness to where? (Comparative cases between Albania and Montenegro.)***

**Elira Luli**, Luarasi University

**Mirela Metushaj**, Aleksander Moisiu University Durres

Western Balkan societies have witnessed a never-ending political and socio-economic transition for over three decades. Recent developments evince that de-democratization practices and procedures threaten democratization processes and that autocratic tendencies are pressing forward in this region.

Initially, most Western Balkan countries emerged as independent states after the disintegration of the former (post-90s), experiencing bloody conflicts and embarking on state-consolidation paths with difficulties and ethnic hatred relationships. During this period, Albania came out of severe isolation - from one of the harshest communist systems in the eastern block, while Montenegro coexisted with Serbia until 2006.

This paper aims to present a general overview of the Western Balkans states structural weaknesses descending into a detailed comparative analysis between Montenegro and Albania, trying to understand the state governance performance struggle between very archaic and progressive forces during transition. How efficient the dialectic relationship between society/public and governance is in these states, and what results are accomplished in practice?

Lastly, what are the prospects and capacities for these states set in such unpredictable contexts, boundaryless threats, political blindfold, and malign influences to fortify the leverages of democracy and meet public needs and aspirations.

**16:00-17:00** **Welcome drink**  
RSU Pharmaceutical Education and Research Centre, Lobby

**19:00** **Dinner** Fazenda Agenskalns, 7 Nometnu street

## 31 August

RSU Pharmaceutical Education and Research Centre, 21 Konsula Street

**8:30 - 9:00** **Coffee** RSU Pharmaceutical Education and Research Centre, 21 Konsula Street

**9:00-9:10** **Opening and information about AnthroTalks series**  
(Keye Tersmette)  
RSU, 16 Dzirciema street, Hippocrates lecture-theatre

**9:10-10:40** **Keynote**

***The (Im)Potent State: On Sovereignty, Spectacle, and Speculation***

**Rebecca Bryant** (Introduced by Martijn Koster), Utrecht University

Bigness is back. In a world of tiny houses, caravan living, and calls to shrink our desires and economies, Dubai-like cities are springing up around the globe. From high-speed railways to massive bridges, many of the world's leaders are building more and more massively. This paper explores the relationship between spectacles of the built environment and new configurations of sovereignty. More than a decade ago, Wendy Brown asserted that border walls proliferating around the world were signs of the decline of sovereignty and desires to reclaim it. In the years since, authoritarian leaders and movements around the world have gained followers and strength. This paper first constructs a genealogy of sovereignty as the governance of time before coming to the historical relationship between fascism and futurism. Like today's authoritarian leaders, fascists of the twentieth century relied on spectacularity to stage new geopolitical futures. The new element of today's authoritarianism, the paper argues, is its entanglement with real estate markets and speculation. While megaprojects may project visions of geopolitical futures, it is only when investors begin grabbing up land around a megaproject that the hype around it starts to seem real. The economic "boost" that results produces a state of confidence, giving credence to the idea that authoritarian leaders hold some potent key to potential futures. For those who might oppose them, megaprojects often induce political resignation because of the irreversibility of the changes they produce.

**10:40-11:00** **Coffee break** RSU Pharmaceutical Education and Research Centre, 21 Konsula Street

**11:00-12:50** **Session 3**

**Panel 3a: State and the City** (Room #204)

Chair: **Flávio Eiró**

***Land Transformation, Transformed Lands: Imagining the State as Infrastructure in Southwest China***

**Xuyi Zhao**, Boston University

My project examines state authority and its effects in the course of rapid urbanization and the making of a brand-new urban center in Southern Chengdu, the capital city of Sichuan Province in Southwest China. Drawing on 15 months of ethnographic fieldwork, I seek to discuss two aspects of state-engineered urbanization: first, land transformation as a top-down process that involved state rescaling, administrative restructuring, the increase in land values, and massive relocation

of local people; second, transformed lands as emerging cityscapes that not just powerfully reshape local economic and social formations, but also creates state-orchestrated urban spaces for realizing a new vision of city and city life. City-making and infrastructure investment can, as I found among different interlocutors, generate a myriad of affective resonances by way of socially imagining the state, especially when the grand urban planning itself remained a myth for the commoners. On the one hand, the spatiotemporal imagination of linear development channels migrants and new settlers into a future-oriented mode of living that intimately ties individual social mobility with the “potential” of a nascent city. On the other hand, such imagination of continuous development and infrastructure building often clashes with day-to-day experiences of immobility, stagnation, and suspension.

### ***Politics of the periphery: Reconceptualising the political from the margins of Recife, Brazil***

**Martijn Koster**, Radboud University

How residents of urban peripheries engage with the state is generally conceptualised as non-standard citizenship, informal politics, or protest. While these residents are already marginalised by the state, theorisations of their politics still centre upon the state and its social contract. Such theorisations risk a theoretical marginalisation of residents’ engagements with the state, as they tend to see these as a derivative kind of politics that is ‘less than’ the state and its formal policies and citizenship regimes, or only as ‘anti’-state forms of protest. I counter this disparity by reconceptualising periphery-state engagements from the vantage point of the periphery. I connect residents’ own concepts and practices to recent decolonial debates that pluralise and decentre our understandings of the political. I approach the variety of practices inherent in periphery-state engagements as a politics of the periphery, a diverse politics in its own right and on its own terms that emerges from local modes of agency of marginalised populations. Drawing on fieldwork in low-income neighbourhoods in Recife, Brazil, I use emic moral notions such as ‘um bom pai de família’ (a good family father), ‘enrolação’ (beating around the bush) and ‘política nojenta’ (disgusting politics) to rethink the political from the periphery.

### ***The knee-jerk path toward brighter futures: ethnographic notes on project making in an Egyptian desert city***

**Carl Rommel**, Uppsala University

The Egyptian state loves to frame glorious futures through megaprojects. Whether as desert cities, bridges, fish farms, or housing schemes, projects (mashari’) promise cleaner, faster, thriftier and more efficient state and economy. Individual Egyptian future making tends to be project-shaped too. Millions of ordinary citizens launch small, informal business projects (also mashari’) to shape brighter tomorrows.

Based on fieldwork in Badr City, this paper spotlights “the project” as an organizational form where state and citizen’s futures coalesce. Established in the 1980s in the desert east of Cairo, Badr was long a ghost town. After the 2015 decision to build a New Administrative Capital nearby, however, its location became more attractive. Today, construction workers, real-estate investors, entrepreneurs and the military flock to Badr to make their worlds anew through projects.

My material illustrates that projects are habitually spoken of as the knee-jerk path toward improved Egyptian futures. Because of its recognizability, projects entice state, capitalists and hustlers alike, rendering dreams of disparate scales structurally similar. This isomorphism gives the state’s megaprojects a sliver of popular legitimacy. The Egyptian state’s desert dreams might be megalomaniac and wasteful (Sims 2015), but it resonates with a citizenry who are also many times aspirational projectors.

### ***Seeking justice but lacking resources to take responsibility for the future***

**Catherine Raya Polishchuk**, University of Vienna

In their quest to provision locals with a just city, local state actors in Vienna (Austria) struggle to put into practice the kind of state they themselves desire. On the one hand, the municipality has the ambition to provide its residents with “sustainable”, “just” and “affordable” housing. On the other hand, real estate has become enmeshed in global market systems, leading to rising housing prices, gentrification and inequalities across the city. How can we understand a setting in which state actors cannot control the state’s relations with citizens or with the economy? In this contribution, I examine the power relations, imaginaries and values at play that withdraw the control over the future state from those enacting policies in its name. I argue that the commodification of housing together with state actors’ own low financial resources inhibits them from taking responsibility for the future they are contributing to. I base my analysis on ethnographic fieldwork I have conducted with an Urban Renewal Office, a public service facility enacted in a PPP between a Municipal Department and architectural firms. Here I have witnessed state officials envision and work towards an inclusive and just state yet being unable to enact such a state.

### **Panel 3b: Disillusions with the state** (Room #305)

Chair: **Mārtiņš Daugulis**

### ***“Economy” as the ideal form of governance in a former socialist town in the Baltics***

**Marija Norkunaite**, University of Oxford

This paper is based on an ethnographic study of three predominantly Russian-speaking former socialist towns in the Baltics: Visaginas in Lithuania, Daugavpils in Latvia, and Sillamäe in Estonia. In all three places, the state was perceived as selfish and indifferent to the residents. The imagined solution was to have a khoziain, which is a Russian term denoting the head of a household. In scholarly literature, the desire for a khoziain is often interpreted as a preference for a strong-hand leader (Malewska-Szalygin 2018). Conversely, in Visaginas, Daugavpils, and Sillamäe, khoziain stood for a set of governing principles the most conducive to human well-being. This is because khoziain is engaged with economy (khoziaistvo). This type of “economic” governance is contrasted to “politics,” and judged as a more caring form of power, as it is perceived as grounded in practices of “seeing” and “knowing” the other as a human being, irrespective of their ethnic roots and/or mother tongue. I thus argue that in Visaginas, Daugavpils, and Sillamäe, khoziain emerged as a critique and an alternative to the national and neoliberal state, and was based on the ideal of the domestic economy (Gudeman and Rivera 1990) as a model extrapolated on the state level.

### ***International Intervention and the Sovereignty Trap: On the Supervised State in Macedonia***

**Andrew Graan**, University of Helsinki

This paper examines the tensions between states’ sovereign visions of the future and practices of internationally supervised political reform. In Macedonia (now North Macedonia), American and European diplomats have long held a prominent role in the country’s politics. On the one hand, these diplomats routinely signal the sovereign responsibility of the Macedonian state over political decision-making. Yet, through media interviews and press conferences, these diplomats also broadcast their policy preferences and thereby intervene in Macedonian political decision-making. Drawing on long-term ethnographic fieldwork, this paper examines the public speech of US and EU diplomats in Macedonia and analyzes the rhetorical strategies by which they

simultaneously assert and compromise the country's sovereign right over political decision-making. As the paper argues, this dynamic fueled perpetual anxiety about the character and quality of Macedonia's sovereignty. Both Macedonian political leaders and US and EU diplomats thus engaged in recurrent assertions and evaluations of Macedonian sovereignty. However, rather than defusing public anxieties about Macedonia's sovereignty, these political performances only renewed and intensified them. In this context, the question of sovereignty functioned as a trap, that is, as an ever anxious space of sovereign performances that could not possibly satisfy the contradictory expectations placed upon them.

### ***This thing, or where dwells the sovereignty of the state?***

**Livnat Konopny-Decleve**, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

I will present a paper based on fieldwork and interviews with radical Jewish left activists who left Israel following their dissent over Israel's policy and their disillusionment with the possibility of making a change.

Contrary to the literature which describes state power as vertical, dissidents referred to the sovereign power using the term 'this thing' as a complex array of practices, emotions, and physical expressions and experiences, which surpass the state and its mechanisms of control. 'This thing' is found not only in the state policy the dissidents oppose but also in their means of resistance.

This view of the political realm drives the activist to distance their physical body from the political one, by abandoning both the state and activism. Once abroad, activists realize that 'this thing' is part of a global political system and gain a different perspective on the political situation in Israel-Palestine. Some of them find ways to regroup abroad to unlearn their Zionist upbringing. This article will explore their attempts to dismantle 'this thing' while imagining collaboration with other dissidents from the Middle East as part of a larger struggle.

### ***Resilience at the margins of the city: an empirical investigation of resilient neighbourhood making***

**Sabrina Rahmawan-Huizenga**, Leiden University

Policy-makers search for new state-citizen arrangements of state and semi-state actors, social entrepreneurs, community organisations and individual citizens to create social resilience (Hall et al. 2013). However, they often prove to be less collaborative, democratic and responsive than anticipated.

Based on an ethnography of "resilient neighbourhood making" within the city of Rotterdam, we scrutinize practices of "doing" resilience at the margins. We discern small forms of resistance in daily practices of resilient neighbourhood-making: i.e. critique expressed by citizens about unpaid labour of women (voluntary community work) as primary example of resilience; the public outrage about commercially selling a (state-owned) community building with important social functions; a resident who provides meals for fellow residents through a hidden soup-kitchen in the basement of his flat.

Common to these forms of unrecognized resilience is that they escape institutional check and balances of resilience as governmental program and point attention towards governmental precarization (Lorey 2015); a type of governing through uncertainty in which precarity is maximized while security is minimized. By offering alternative visions for world-making and living together, these practices potentially disrupt resilience as an institutional program of governance, perhaps offering a view on 'real' forms of resilience (King et al., 2021).

**12:50-14:15 Lunch** RSU Dzirciema street 16. Cafeteria

**14:15-15:45 Session 4a** (Room #204)

Chair: **Martijn Koster**

### ***Anthropology of a postsocialist state: about the edited collection "Anthropology of State" published in 2017 in Belgrade, Serbia***

**Marina Simić, Miloš Ničić**, University of Belgrade

In this paper we would like to present our edited collection issue of the Bulletin of the Institute of Ethnography of Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences, focused on anthropology of state, predominantly from a postsocialist perspective. Papers in this collection are concerned with the political and economic transformation of the states of the former Yugoslavia in a specific way – through an analysis of state institutions and state effects, while focusing on the very idea of the state both as an idea and as a set of institutional and extra-institutional practices, placing those practices in a broader context of political-economic changes in Europe. In this sense, featured authors dealt especially with institutions that are considered paramount to understanding the way the modern state functions, including various state institutions, the monopoly of force and the security of state borders, but also the effects of the state beyond the borders of its institutions. Finally, by focusing on state from the postsocialist perspective, we are advocating the value of such an investigative direction for the anthropology of a state in general and on a global scale.

### ***State of the (future) situation***

**Sven da Silva**, Radboud University Nijmegen

Alain Badiou's philosophy is highly relevant due to its insistence on the possibility that the construction of something truly new is possible. His theory of the Event, instigated by those who neither belong nor are included, gives us tools for an anthropological theorization of change. Referring explicitly to the structure of the state, Badiou makes a critical distinction between "the situation" and the "state of the situation". The situation presents individuals and counts them as belonging to a given site, whereas the "state of the situation" re-presents the same individuals as members of given categories, including them as part of a governmental system. The Event ruptures repetition and inclusionary power. Those who neither belong nor are included spark the event when they suddenly become completely visible, changing the situation entirely. In this paper, I draw on my ethnographic fieldwork in Recife, Brazil—where I conceptualize "the slum" as "evental site"—to shed light on Badiou's core concepts, placing it in dialogue with the anthropology of the state.

### ***A Futures' Perspective on the Serbian Government of Relations***

**André Thiemann**, Czech Academy of Science

This paper develops a relational approach to the state by studying how representations of the state are translated into practice by diversely embedded actors within the complex, strategically selective government of relations. Where people have to deal with major social and political transformations, including restructurings of the welfare state and environmental crises, new politics are innovated in often unplannable encounters and negotiations. In Serbia, social mobilisations addressing the increasingly frail connection between solidarity and citizenship have become frequent in recent years. A relational understanding of these mobilisations suggests that the generalising activist claims that the state is absent and uncaring mean that the citizens – and we anthropologists – should push to transform the state to make it more responsive, redistributive and representative, because "reshaping the social fabric at scale requires some kind of institutional engagement, even if that means reconceptualizing institutions from the





