

Shifting States

Booklet of abstracts

**EASA Anthropologies of the State
network conference**

Amsterdam, 22-24 October 2025

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AnthroState Conveners

Elizabeth Challinor (CRIA-FCSH-UNL)

Flávio Eiró (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam)

Klāvs Sedlenieks (Rīga Stradiņš University)

Local Organising Committee

Flávio Eiró (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam)

Martha Kapazoglou (University of Amsterdam)

Anouk de Koning (University of Amsterdam)

Wiebe Ruijtenberg (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam)

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Day 1 – 22 October 2025

No morning programme

Time	Activity	Room
13:00-14:00	Registration and coffee	REC E1.50
14:00-15:30	Panel Session 1.1 Exploring new concepts in the study of the state	REC E1.17
	Panel Session 1.2 Shifting states of deservingness: Enactments, entanglements, and (re)negotiations	REC E0.15
	Panel Session 1.3 Mutuality of states, citizens and domination	REC E0.14
	Panel Session 1.4 Between empathy and critique: The politics of writing about state actors (Workshop for early career scholars)	REC B5.12 (Common room)
	Coffee break	
15:30-16:00		
16:00-17:00	Keynote by Alice von Bieberstein	REC A1.03
17:00-18:30	Welcome drinks	Dokzaal

Day 2 – 23 October 2025

Time	Activity	Room
09:00-10:30	Panel Session 2.1 Politics and power from the courtrooms to the street	REC E1.17
	Panel Session 2.2 Creative brokerage: the labour of shaping the state	REC E1.50
	Panel Session 2.3 Building infrastructures, making states	REC E0.14
	Panel Session 2.4 Postcolonial orderings in Dutch social policy	REC E0.15
	Coffee Break	
10:30-11:00		
11:00-12:30	Panel Session 3.1 Deserving care	REC E1.17

Time	Activity	Room
	Panel Session 3.2 The patchwork state: Delegation, sponsorship, and DIY governance	REC E1.50
	Panel Session 3.3 Retooling care and welfare	REC E0.14
	Panel Session 3.4 Imaginative methodologies to study the (shifting) state (roundtable)	REC E0.15
	Lunch Break	
12:30-14:00		
14:00-15:30	Panel Session 4.1 Houses, homes and politics: Approaching shifting state-resident relations from the urban margins (part 1)	REC E0.14
	Panel Session 4.2 Shifting states and their histories in institutional care (part 1)	REC E0.15
	Panel Session 4.3 Underground states: Theorising power from below (part 1)	REC E1.17
	Panel Session 4.4 Legal fictions and relational judgments: Reading law, personhood, and legitimacy across contexts	REC E1.50
15:30-16:00	Coffee Break	
16:00-17:30	Panel Session 5.1 Houses, homes and politics: Approaching shifting state-resident relations from the urban margins (part 2)	REC E0.14
	Panel Session 5.2 Shifting states and their histories in institutional care (part 2)	REC E0.15
	Panel Session 5.3 Underground states: Theorising power from below (part 2)	REC E1.17
	Dinner (by registration)	
19:00-21:00		

Day 3 – 24 October 2025

Time	Activity	Room
09:00-10:30	Panel 6.1 Inside intimate welfare, outside citizenship? Migration, inequality, and relational governance in European welfare states (part 1)	REC Eo.14
	Panel 6.2 Understanding the state through (non-state) tree activism (part 1)	REC Eo.15
	Panel 6.3 Software and shifting formations of sovereignty: Scrutinising digital public infrastructures	REC E1.17
	Panel 6.4 State affects	REC E1.51
10:30-11:00	Coffee Break	
11:00-12:30	Panel 7.1 Inside intimate welfare, outside citizenship? Migration, inequality, and relational governance in European welfare states (part 2)	REC Eo.14
	Panel 7.2 The state and the city	REC E1.17
	Panel 7.3 Visible and invisible threats and expectations and the state in the Guianas	REC E1.51
	Panel Session 7.4 Local government in Indonesia	REC Eo.07
12:30-14:00	Lunch Break	
14:00-15:30	Panel 8.1 The shifting dynamics of borders and state power (part 1)	REC Eo.14
	Panel 8.2 State agents	REC Eo.15
	Panel 8.3 25 Years after Reformasi: Indonesia's shifting state between democracy and authoritarianism (part 1)	REC E1.17
15:30-16:00	Coffee Break	

Time	Activity	Room
16:00-17:30	Panel 9.1 The shifting dynamics of borders and state power (part 2)	REC E0.14
	Panel 9.2 Shifting modes of governance	REC E0.15
	Panel 9.3 25 Years after Reformasi: Indonesia's shifting state between democracy and authoritarianism (part 2)	REC E1.17
	Panel 9.4 Tactics and strategies of refusal in welfare	REC E1.51

Day 1 – 22 October 2025



Panel sessions 1

Panel 1.1: Exploring new concepts in the study of the state**Chair:** Elizabeth Challinor (CRIA-FCSH-UNL)**The lattice state: Welfare brokerage and entrepreneurial citizenship after India's rights turn**

Amanda Gilbertson (University of Melbourne)

Implementation and enforcement of India's Right to Education (RTE) Act relies on a variety of non-state actors – NGOs, activists, private school principals and corporate social responsibility fund managers. We argue that this is symptomatic of a particular form of governance that we call the lattice state, which entails enterprising individuals and organisations stepping into gaps left open by the state. Rather than conceptualising the state as a coherent unified entity with some issues of border integrity that are accidental features of a weak or 'leaky' state, we understand the gaps as an integral and constitutive feature of the structure. Drawing on ethnographic research on RTE implementation in Lucknow, we describe the roles played by a complex network of actors and identify three features of this welfare provision – young professionals from the corporate sector partnering with the state, corporate social responsibility funds supporting government projects, and working-class 'brokers' accessing state resources via civil society intermediaries rather than political party networks. Although different actors share methods and ideologies, only the better resourced are recognised by the state and corporate capital as 'entrepreneurial citizens', while the working class are dismissed as 'brokers'.

Beautiful losers: Competitive city-making and governing by disappointment in urban Spain

Alexandra Oancă (KU Leuven)

Using Spain's competitive process for the European Capitals of Culture title, I will focus on the ways in which competitive norms and anxious comparisons replace the typical procedures of urban governance and European building. This practice of evaluating cities based on their proximity to 'Europeanness' and 'cultural capital' fosters European integration in an ambivalent, often violent, manner, through a production of increasing numbers of 'losers.' Drawing on close ethnographic engagement with policy-makers, EU technocrats, street-level bureaucrats in Cordoba, Burgos and Brussels, as well as cultural managers, experts, artists, and other professionals involved in the competitive process, I will show how the management of disappointment and failure - what I call 'governing by disappointment' - allows EU institutions to intervene in the less inaccessible space of urban governance, skipping national and regional levels of governance; it is reinforcing European identity through wounded attachments to the competitive process and the over-significance of failure. Disappointment, instead of being anathema to governing, becomes instrumental: learning to be disappointed in your city becomes a path to becoming a governable European subject.

Governance through shifting: The case of Turkey

Ayşe Akalin (Istanbul Technical University)

This is a world that, on the one hand, is constantly in motion, while also being marked by walls, tariffs, and more. In making sense of what gets shifted around and what gets moored (Hannam et al., 2006) or disrupted (Chan, 2021), one possible explanation is the changing relationship between 'political borders' and 'economic frontiers' (Mezzadra and Neilson, 2019), with territories acquiring disparate significance—potentially leading to the multiplication of forms of governance over their populations (Ong, 2000). In this line of thinking, while the nation ostensibly stays intact, the growing tendency is to govern it through a concept that imagines its territories, populations, natural resources, and so on, as if they were detachable. When the larger context itself is marked by multiple and diverse shifts simultaneously in operation, governing requires a 'politics of mobility' capable of detaching and/or reattaching the constituting components of the nation, when necessary, through mechanisms such as scaling, circulation, or politics of operation. Using cases from Turkey, this presentation will probe whether those regimes that grant an enhanced role to the executive branch have a particular vested interest in reshaping spatial politics through shifting the constituting components of the nation.

The state and the Afterworld

Klāvs Sedlenieks (Rīga Stradiņš University)

How can we understand what individuals think about the state or the political community, and how they imagine the relationships within it? The most straightforward approach would be to observe their actions – yet this offers limited insight into the concepts and ideas they hold. Alternatively, one might conduct interviews, though their reliability is often contested. In this presentation, I propose an indirect method: examining conceptions of the afterlife as a means of reflecting on this life and its political order. This approach, admittedly, also depends on interviews or self-reflection and thus lacks the advantages of direct observation or participant observation. The theoretical framework draws on classical assumptions – from Marx to Weber and Durkheim – concerning the relationship between social reality and religious ideas. Empirically, it builds on examples from preliminary interviews conducted in recent years in Latvia.

Panel 1.2: Shifting states of deservingness: Enactments, entanglements, and (re)negotiations

Chairs: Lilliana Buonasorte (University of Bristol), Rae Hackler (University of Bristol), Eline de Jong (University of Antwerp)

Discussant: Andreas Streinzer (University of Vienna)

State-granted entitlements are meant to be clearly demarcated, eligibility-based categories – in which a person neatly does or does not fit. Through the official mechanisms of the State, resources are standardised and subsequently allocated. Here, State institutions rely on bureaucratic mechanisms of allocation: pre-defined schematisations, classifications, and quantifying systems of metrification. Benefits, housing, and resettlement are held officially as rights to be claimed. Yet in practice, State-granted entitlements prove to be increasingly conditional. In an effort to fit into neat categories, dimensions of lives which are messy, ineffable, and un-compartmentalisable become silenced (Bowker and Star, 2000). The concept of deservingness allows anthropologists to highlight the moral dimensions of these processes ethnographically and theoretically. Enacted under the logics of neoliberal governance, (in)dividuals are often forced to navigate biographical compression amidst 'shrinking eligibility criteria' (Roulstone, 2015 p.678). People are oftentimes left to navigate unspoken but understood moralised perceptions of deservingness: do I fit? Should I try to fit? And what do I fit into? Our panel draws upon the seminal collection *Ethnographies of Deservingness* (2022), edited by Jelena Tošić and Andreas Streinzer, who define (un)deservingness as a "processual and relational notion rather than a condition" (2022, pp.6).

The politics of conditionality in Flemish social housing: classifying the “deserving” tenant

Elaine de Jong (Utrecht University)

This paper explores how the Flemish regional government mobilises moralised categories of deservingness through recent reforms to its social housing system. Based on ethnographic fieldwork with a social housing cooperative and critical discourse analysis of policy documents and political debates, I examine the 2023 social housing reform as a site where the state engages in classificatory labour - redrawing the boundaries of entitlement under the guise of neutrality and efficiency. While Flanders is a region within the Belgian federal state, it exercises full jurisdiction over housing policy through its devolved institutions. I treat this regional administration as a state-like entity in its own right, capable of shaping citizenship and belonging through its governance practices. Rather than addressing housing scarcity, the reform reframes access as a reward for civic and cultural conformity. Through mechanisms like local residency conditions, language requirements, labour market activation, and anti-fraud controls, eligibility is increasingly structured around rootedness, self-sufficiency, and integration. I argue this reflects a broader political configuration which I term 'communitarian neoliberalism', where neoliberal ideals of self-sufficiency and activation are fused with sub-state nationalist ideals of rootedness and cultural belonging. Deservingness becomes a central 'organising logic' (Sassen 2008) - a moral framework through which the regional state determines who may rightfully belong.

Nothing Quite Fits: Labels, Refugeeess, and Being in the In Between

Rae Hackler (University of Bristol)

The recent wave of Hong Kongers emigrating to the UK are not refugees. The UK government has designed a special resettlement pathway for them so that they bypass the asylum process. Created in 2021, amid the UK government's campaign against 'illegal' migration of the 'boat people,' whom the government claimed sought asylum 'illegally,' and growing public suspicion towards 'fake' asylum claims, the Hong Kong BN(O) visa creates a new category for Hong Kongers as 'deserving' asylum - so much so that they need not be refugees. Hong Kongers negotiate these conflicting notions of deservingness surrounding their situation. While many see themselves as 'cultural refugees,' who had to leave Hong Kong, they are hyper-aware of their special legal status outside asylum, and adamant that they aren't conflated with the 'burdeness,' 'illegal,' and potentially 'dangerous' asylum seekers. Hong Kongers highlight that they are allowed to work, and had to pay for their visas. Financial and social contribution to community and society, and not relying on government benefits is the key difference Hong Kongers see between themselves and asylum seekers - not the reasons they had to flee. This paper will explore how shifting governmental categorizations of deservingness shift how migrants negotiate belonging.

“Doing” Disability “right”: Enacting Cultural Narratives of Deservingness in Disability Benefit Tribunals

Lilly Buonasorte (University of Bristol)

To be a benefit claimant in the UK is to enter a space comprised of competing narratives; a cacophony of common-sense logics on what a disability claimant 'should' be. The benefits process, characterised by rigid biomedical classifications of disability, sits against a wider political landscape which portrays benefit claimants as 'undeserving' or 'workshy' 'scroungers' (Tyler, 2015). Discordantly, my interlocutors navigate unspoken but understood moral-biomedical standards of deservingness: do I fit? Should I try to fit? And what do I fit into? In this paper, I reflect on my ethnographic fieldwork at a Magistrates and Tribunal Centre – a space where disability benefit applicants dispute their rejected benefit claims. Here, disability benefit applicants, legal representatives, tribunal panellists and clerks all enact cultural narratives of deservingness. What qualifies a claimant as 'deserving' of disability benefits rests on the impression they make – their presentation, demeanour, negotiability and level of docility – as much as it does on the medicalisation of impairment itself. Deservingness, intentionally neutralised as 'eligibility', is morally bound to culturally hegemonic ideas of disability. Overarchingly, my paper proposes the following questions: How is 'eligibility' biomedically, morally and culturally bound? Through cultural enactments of deservingness, how might we reconceive disability as a relational category?

Panel 1.3: Mutuality of states, citizens and domination

Chair: Tessa Bonduelle (University of Amsterdam)

Making sense of the senseless: communal narratives in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Katja Skenderija (Universiteit van Amsterdam)

This research is situated in the unassuming town of Laktaši, Bosnia and Herzegovina. Though it has no prominent landmarks or historical importance, the town, in its roughly 150 years of existence, has faced five wars and five empires, leaving its people in a complex network of social relations and political divisions. The imprint of history is deeply etched into the fabric of everyday life. As a part of Republika Srpska, the much-contested Serbian entity in Bosnia, research about this region has predominantly centered on ethnic conflict and reconciliation. However, such approaches often risk reproducing ethnonationalist logics while overlooking the deeper social structures that shape communal life. By employing a Bakhtinian analysis of communal narratives collected during two months of fieldwork, this research aims to move beyond ethnonationalist frameworks and foster a more profound understanding of individuals entangled in the web of geopolitics. It reveals how narratives of food (zadruga), fate (sudbina) and folk (narod), among others, shape local experiences of Being and Becoming and help people make sense of the senseless; violence, poverty and social deprivation.

Phantom in the pedagogy: Affective governance of/through fear to create a docile citizenry

Tirthankar Chakraborty (Freie Universität Berlin)

In this paper, I examine how a democratic state uses fear as a tool/method to create a subservient sensibility in the citizens. I explore the practices of arousing fear in the citizenry, how this fear is embedded, and how it shapes the everyday lives of those targeted, the students and youth in Calcutta, India during the 1960s and 70s – during the Naxalite revolution. I argue it to be the point of departure of state governance in a nascent democracy as massive surveillance, the crackdown on dissent, and governance through fear were routinized. This is observed through an ethnohistorical method of intensive fieldwork and archival research. Using the analytical framework of political affect, this study will theorise the institutionalisation of fear in the mind, body and habits of ordinary and extra-ordinary members of the student population and youth. The narratives in the paper point to the politics of memory, affective behaviours, change-in-sensibility and ideas, and how individuals and societies 'fall in line' to not be an outlier in the states' perspective. The routinization of governing by fear and the 'culture of silence' instilled by the democratic state has not been explored, especially in the context of South Asia, and particularly, India.

Governing through Contradictions. Insights into Soft Authoritarian State Practices in Turkey

Ulrike Flader (University of Bremen)

Recent years have witnessed an authoritarian transformation in Turkey. The separation of powers, independence of the judiciary, and democratic freedoms have been heavily curtailed by constitutional means: an undoing of democracy from within which is characteristic for many cases beyond Turkey. Proposing the concept of 'soft authoritarianism', the paper takes a closer look into the specific state practices. It argues that a new logic of governing is at play which centres on harnessing the contradictory. The - in itself contradictory - term draws attention to an inherent cunningness of these practices which combine authoritarian and democratic elements making them initially hard to recognize, but potentially quite durable. Drawing on empirical material, the paper illustrates how existing legal and administrative practices are re-arranged to cleverly masquerade their authoritarian goals. This provides them with legitimacy, makes them ambivalent and flexible. Highlighting their affective dimension, the paper also shows how these practices dismantle the opposition by producing a limbo between apathy and hope. Soft authoritarian governing therefore does not solely rely on fear and repression, as it might appear. Instead, it enables an affective management of the opposition, which goes beyond a Gramscian notion of the production of consent.

Panel 1.4: Between empathy and critique: the politics of writing about state actors (*Workshop for early career scholars*)

Chair: Charlotte van der Veen (University of Amsterdam), Martha Kapazoglou, University of Amsterdam)

Room: B5.12 (Common room)

In this workshop, we discuss the challenges of writing about state actors in the present moment. Committed to doing right by our interlocutors' worldviews, aspirations and dilemmas in our writing, we run up against a variety of ethical as well as practical questions about writing from a place between empathy and critique. In this workshop, we want to foster an informal and safe space for early career scholars to grapple with these questions together.



Keynote talk

Disavowed enemies: The criminalization of the Kurdish Freedom Movement and Germany's contradictory war on terror

Alice von Bieberstein (Humboldt-University of Berlin)

[Link for the livestream](#)

The talk examines the systematic criminalization of the Kurdish freedom movement in Germany from 1989 to the present, revealing how seemingly domestic security measures operate as extensions of transnational counterinsurgency warfare. Beginning with the first trial against Kurds in 1989 and institutionalized through the PKK ban in 1993, Germany's approach to Kurdish political organizing demonstrates a form of exceptional governance that is familiar from critical accounts of the global war on terror, but nonetheless troubles conventional narratives of German postwar pacifism and democratic inclusion.

The case illuminates the contention with contradictions in contemporary security governance: while Germany supports Kurdish forces against ISIS in Syria as a contribution to the global war on terror, it simultaneously criminalizes expressions of Kurdish political activism at home through constructions of "membership in" or "sympathy with" a "terrorist organization." This differential cross-border assemblage yields domestic prosecutions and trials that are anything but spectacular or staged for a domestic audience to be rallied behind the national cause of a defence of freedom against terrorism. The conviction of terrorists is rather subject to public disavowal, while non-citizens are routinely subject to an administrative violence of asylum rejections, residency denials, and deportation orders that strip those affected of rights without being subject to any criminal conviction.

The talk argues that the Kurdish case represents a paradigmatic example of how migration and citizenship politics have become entangled with cross-border counterinsurgency logics in ways that extend beyond traditional imperial military interventions. Rather than operating through direct state violence abroad, this configuration defends particular geopolitical alliances—especially with Turkey and Israel—through domestic mechanisms of exclusion and expulsion.

Significantly, the forms of legal and administrative repression pioneered against Kurdish organizing have since expanded to target Palestinian solidarity movements and climate activism, suggesting a broader shift toward a form governance that operates through the construction of 'enemy' formations within, who can be criminalised in the absence of crime. This analysis contributes to understanding how contemporary state violence operates across the domestic/international divide, revealing new articulations between police logics and military imperatives in the post-Cold War security apparatus.

EXHIBITIONS

Finding the Inner Voice in the Void

Evija Stirna (Independent researcher and member of the Latvian Association of Anthropologists)

The watercolours displayed in the exhibition invite an anthropological discussion on the multidimensional space of shifting states in the villages and towns of the Eastern European borderlands. Here, concerns over the potential disappearance of NATO military infrastructure from the European landscape reveal new dimensions of social void, where the flows of circulation - human migration, the movement of resources, and the exchange of ideas become fragmented and unstable. Local artists' initiatives in unused urban spaces uncover new forms of participation and identity, opening dialogues on how the void might be filled with artistic and aesthetic presence, while simultaneously renewing and transforming the directions of these flows. The research draws on methods of visual anthropology and the watercolour technique to analyse the local landscape as a sensual, political, and constantly moving experience. In this context, art becomes a means of imbuing the social void with meaning and generating new models of circulation between people, ideas, and space. The exhibition highlights the art community's engagement with political space and the defence landscape, creating new points of contact between aesthetics and society in the uncertainty of a shifting and circulating space.

Picturing Scholasticide

Wiebe Ruijtenberg (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam) representing the Picturing Scholasticide Collective

Picturing Scholasticide is a multimodal exhibition initiated by staff and students of Leiden University to publicize the social and legal effects of Israel's effort to destroy Palestinian institutions of higher education. In partnership with Palestinian photographers and web designers, the exhibition aims to commemorate, build awareness, and support the rebuilding of education institutions in Gaza and across Palestine.

Day 2 – 23 October 2025



Panel sessions 2

Panel 2.1: Politics and power from the courtrooms to the street

Chair: Jill Alpes (CESSMA-Paris; Lebanese American University)

Recruiting through litigation: The making of the authoritarian state in courtrooms

Berkant Caglar (University of Minnesota)

What social, political, and cultural tools do authoritarian states use to recruit new subjects for their cause, and how do they communicate with contentious publics? Diverting from single accounts of oppression, my presentation engages with courtrooms as affective places where the authoritarian state intimidates political activists with hierarchical litigation tools and creates fear over political trials in mundane domains. The cultural intertwinement and conversion between fear and consent is ethnographically important to unpack, yet often difficult to grasp. Depending on 15 months of ethnographic research in Turkish courtrooms and engagement with queer and trans claimants, I argue that the Turkish state does not only force activists to officially come out in the court — compelling them to present themselves as political subjects before a judge —but also come out to its supporters as a charismatic and punitive state capable of incarceration. I analyze these encounters with the state's judiciary and ethnographically contemplate how courtrooms emerge as recruitment channels for authoritarian state projects and minority governance. I eventually show that authoritarian states must seriously engage with judicial mechanisms and secular forms of the judiciary and are often hindered by the production of courthouses as affective places in politically turbulent times.

Judicial power and public distrust: Navigating court cultures amidst political turmoil in the Netherlands

Danse de Bondt (Raad voor de Rechtspraak)

This paper explores the role of judges amid increasing polarization, declining trust in state institutions, and the rise of right-wing populism. While much focus is placed on how citizens experience the state, it is equally important to consider the perspectives of those who wield state power. Judicial decisions are often politicized, with judges accused of bias and their authority questioned, reflecting broader shifts in governance and institutional trust. This growing distrust extends beyond criticism of individual judges to the judiciary as a whole, affecting judicial practice and the functioning of courts as social institutions. More so, courts do not function in isolation; judicial decisions are shaped by formal law, courtroom culture, and interactions among judges, lawyers, and broader society. Situating judicial institutions within broader transformations of the state, this paper explores how Dutch courts serve as spaces where formal rules and informal practices intersect. Drawing on legal and political anthropology, the paper examines how judges exercise discretion in decision-making and navigate the informal politics of everyday judicial work amid political turbulence. The paper is part of an early-stage research, ethnographic fieldwork will be conducted between February and August 2026.

From persecution to liberation: Reimagining justice and the state with former Nicaraguan political prisoners and exiles

Julienne Weegels (University of Amsterdam)

This paper explores the ways in which young Nicaraguan protesters (re)narrate their experiences of persecution and imprisonment, and how they conceive of justice and the state, since the brutal repression of the 2018 anti-government uprising—which left more than 300 dead, 2,000 injured and hundreds detained (GHREN, 2023). Amid this highly politicized institutional landscape, protesters and detainees self-organized and began drawing from human rights, international law and transitional justice frameworks to construct justice and truth-finding projects, but also to reimagine what a democratic state could look like. Critically opening up the panorama for change, I examine how their (re)imaginings of justice inform their (re)imaginings of the state and vice versa. Drawing in particular from interviews and ethnographic encounters with Nicaraguan refugees organized in the Netherlands (particularly around two activist and arts-based Nicaraguan justice-seeking initiatives), I explore how they seek to build community by imagining and enacting restorative futures, creating emotionally and politically charged spaces that at once confront the Nicaraguan authoritarian state and contest the enforced separations and pressure to assimilate exerted by the Dutch asylum system. In this way, they critique state-led impositions and put into practice some of the autonomous principles they envision to accompany Nicaragua's transition to democracy.

Questioning state power and justice in Corsica and beyond: from the Colonna case to an internationalized struggle

Julia Pitzalis (University of Konstanz)

In March 2022, Yvan Colonna, Corsican nationalist activist and convicted assassin of the prefect Claude Erignac was lethally assaulted by his cellmate. His death, later considered as a “state scandal”, led to multiple violent protests in Corsica in spring 2022. These mobilizations were considered one of the biggest gatherings of the “national movement” by the participants, bringing the largest number of people to the streets. This paper, based on an ethnography of the Corsican reaction and what followed, raises the question of how a legal case became the banner for a political cause, engaging with several points of tension regarding the juridical treatment of Corsican “political prisoners”. What was considered a failure of the carceral system to protect a particularly noteworthy prisoner was “another materialization” of an “unfair” application of the Rule of law for the activists. Yvan Colonna thus emerged as a martyr of the Corsican struggle, his fate seen as a confirmation of Corsican nationalism longstanding claims. The presentation will then open on the solidarity drawn in Corsican transnational connections through events such as the annual Ghjurnate Internaziunale di Corti. Revealing how Corsican nationalism articulates with broader movements, contesting both state power and the legal treatment of political activism.

Panel 2.2: Creative brokerage: the labour of shaping the state

Chairs: Gal Kramarski (University of Cambridge), Alejandro Porcel Arraut (University of Cambridge)

Discussant: Lieke van der Veer (Delft University of Technology)

The broker is a classic figure, central to anthropological literature on the state. From their positionality as actors who work across social boundaries, brokers have a crucial role in shaping the state in critical moments of social transformation. This panel suggests exploring creative brokerage as a form of state making. It explores the everyday work of brokers operating in times of social transformation. Through the lens of labour, this panel aims to reflect on the delicate practice of producing or shaping the state, that may involve personal as well as collective moral dilemmas, ideological clashes, emotional contradictions, and technical challenges which invite creative practices to confront them. We encourage ethnographically informed accounts which study everyday actions taken by brokers in different social

and political contexts, and the ways in which brokers shape/counter/produce state-led processes of social transformation. Brokers hold a crucial role in shifting and balancing state discourses and practices, particularly in periods of political, economic, ecological, or other forms of crisis or transformation. Bounded by the limitations of their job definition, brokers who work in and around the state, must navigate a multiplicity of social visions. Utilising the lens of labour and exploring the ways in which workers creatively make space for their own visions, we aim to point to the diversity of positions and motivations behind the practice of brokerage. Political, economic, technical, as well as emotional and affective elements make part of the daily experiences of brokers. In this panel we wish to explore ethnographically the everyday experience of brokers who facilitate state-led schemes aimed at processes of socio-economic transformation. Holding the capacity to act as translators who facilitate between the state and communities located at the margins of the state, brokers hold an important role in designing the ways in which policies and programmes are actualised. In this panel we wish to expand on the possibilities embedded in the practice of brokerage. Focusing on brokerage as a process of state-formation as well as of self-formation, we ask how brokers shape the state according to their own visions for their societies. Considering workers various confrontations, we hope to bring to the fore, ethnographically, the ways in which local practitioners working in and around the nation/colonial state, make sense of their unique positionality.

The labour of being one with the state: The ethics and affects of becoming a broker in the Mexico City Transport Department

Alejandro Porcel Arraut (University of Cambridge)

In this paper I follow a group of left-wing technocrats in their attempt to reform and rid the Mexico City Transport Department of corruption while getting better results for the city. I pay attention to their struggle to balance their commitment with transparency and the pragmatism needed to get things done. By virtue of being involved in both the design and implementation of policies, these 'reformers' often acted as translators between the idealism of the law and the reality of their implementation. It is from their position of in-betweenness that my interlocutors played a creative role in shaping the state and its policies. But becoming brokers created its own affective spaces and ethical dilemmas. Their role as translators was a source of agency and creativity (even joy), while also requiring them to compromise their reformist ideals. It demanded a process of boundary-making and self-reform to address the (in)coherence between their way of being and that of the state—as materialised by policy design and implementation. By focusing on my interlocutors' practices and affects this paper attempts to show the connection between state and self-making in the context of institutional reform. In this context, making the self and the state become two inseparable ethical and affective practices for brokers with policymaking agency.

Making space for Palestine: Palestinian brokers navigate Israel's development projects

Gal Kramarski (University of Cambridge)

How do Palestinian practitioners, hired by an Israeli development project, understand their political role? This paper explores the ways in which development brokers who facilitate state-led policies, generate politically meaningful actions in their daily work. It discusses ethnographically the daily experiences of Palestinian Jerusalemite young professionals who were hired by the Israeli state for implementing a five-year governmental project aimed at the socio-economic development of East Jerusalem. As brokers, these workers live with constant criticism of their choice to work for their Occupier. Such critiques confront them with moral dilemmas around their employment, and around their ability to positively impact on their people's future. Whether intentionally seeking to impact on processes of socio-political transformation, or not, these brokers occupy a rather important place in a transformative moment planned for their people. In their very presence in spaces which previously either rejected Palestinians or have been rejected by them, my interlocutors creatively make space for Palestine, in these development spheres created by their Occupier. From their unique positionality, they find creative ways to influence on the ways in which this development project shapes the state.

Community-based governance and institutional activism: Navigating frictions between professional loyalty and resident solidarity

Janne Heederik (University of Amsterdam)

In the context of an emerging new welfare state, municipalities are increasingly adopting participatory, community-based approaches to governance in an attempt to rebuild trust between citizens and the state and to make public institutions more responsive to local needs. Based on ethnographic fieldwork within a large Dutch municipality, I investigate the practical and ethical tensions faced by civil servants tasked with implementing these bottom-up approaches while still operating within hierarchical and risk-averse bureaucratic structures. Working closely with residents, these civil servants often act as intermediaries – translating institutional demands to citizens and articulating residents' concerns to the municipality. This paper explores how such practices create new spaces where civil servants begin to reimagine their roles – not only executing policy but also serving as engaged actors who can support residents' activism and collaboratively strategize toward tangible outcomes. While this shift can foster new forms of resident participation, it also produces friction – raising questions about the limits of activism from within the state, and the boundaries between professional loyalty and resident solidarity. I show that these new approaches to welfare governance generate shifting professional identities, compelling civil servants to rethink their position and the extent to which they can engage in 'institutional activism'.

Changing the system from within: How “outcast” professionals try to bring about the change they wish to see in the world

Wiebe Ruijtenberg (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam)

Anthropologists conducting fieldwork within public organizations often end up working bureaucrats and professionals who are motivated by a desire to improve the world, and for some, this also means trying to change the system from within. This trope of trying to change the system from within, is may easily be dismissed as naïve, or even performative, especially by activists and activist-scholars who are trying to change the system from the outside. Against the backdrop of such critical perspectives, this paper starts from the assumption that, while probably not bringing about the desired change, efforts to try to change the system from within must be productive in their own right. To explore their affects, I draw on fieldwork with an inter-organizational team of psycho-social care professionals in Dordrecht, the Netherlands, who saw themselves as outcasts in the world of care provision. From that vantage point, I show that, while producing reflecting and producing ideas about what futures are possible, and desirable, and about how to realize those possible and desirable futures, attempts to change the system from within also shape professional identities, mediates client-professional relations, and, ultimately, articulate the system, and the state at large.

Panel 2.3: Building infrastructures, making states

Chair: Dimitris Dalakoglou (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam)

Building transport infrastructures and the state in rural Papua New Guinea

Tuomas Tammisto (Tampere University)

Roads and transport infrastructure are crucial for states for several reasons. State power and its spatial reach are enacted through them. Through roads and other mundane aspects of governance, the state becomes manifest to citizens. Similarly, people often evaluate the state through its provision of infrastructures. Finally, the building of infrastructure is constitutive of the state, because the spatial organization of infrastructure often needs an administrative structure comparable to the state, as Keller Easterling notes. In this paper, I examine how and by whom are state structures formed through infrastructure provision in the rural Pomio District of Papua New Guinea, where the road infrastructure and state services are limited. I compare two forms of infrastructure provision: a state-led road building project, which seeks to connect roads built by logging and plantation companies to the provincial road network and locally formed port infrastructure for boats and small ships. By examining the two projects,

I map out the actors involved in building infrastructures from extractive companies to international consultants, local engineers and contractors to rural people. I ask what kind of a state and for whom is being built through them.

Violence, crumbling infrastructures, and the peace attempt in Colombia. An ethnography of the state-led program “Plan Todos Somos PAZcífico” (PTSP)

Felipe Fernandez (Universität Freiburg)

Drawing on extensive ethnographic material and several official sources, this paper addresses the Plan Todos Somos PAZcífico (PTSP, as per its Spanish acronym), a centrally designed and executed development project aimed at the urban centers of the Colombian Pacific region. Conceived as an effort to reduce the inequality gap between the country's regions, the project's main objective is to improve the inadequate water and sewage infrastructure in the cities of Buenaventura, Tumaco, and Guapi through maintenance, repair, and expansion. Funded by both the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank, the PTSP was framed as part of former president Juan Manuel Santos's (2010-2018) peace policy, which was understood as a societal and political transition from war to peace. However, the PTSP has failed to meet its stated goals due to institutional weaknesses, underfunding, and burdensome bureaucracy. Drawing on recent anthropological literature on infrastructure and the state, this paper argues that Santos's peace policy represented a form of developmental governance that aimed to reform state bureaucracies but, in doing so, reproduced old forms of (racial) segregation, precarious planning, and non-compliance.

Shifting materialities of the populist state

Sam Rumé (University of Barcelona)

This paper reflects on my ethnographic research on infrastructure projects in Ecuador and what I call material populism, by putting it in a global context. Populism is deeply ingrained in Ecuadorian politics, and public works constitute a key domain in which populism is practiced, consolidated, and negotiated. Construction projects are developed by leaders (local and national) who seek to demonstrate their individual strength and political will by offering objective progress to ‘the people.’ The true leader and ‘the people’ are thus materialized by means of physical infrastructures. But these infrastructures, in their multiplicity and incompleteness, render the populist constellation precarious, shifting. From this ethnographic work in Ecuador, I offer a reflection on populist states elsewhere. In the global north, the materialities of populism are often overlooked in favor of discursive analyses and attention to social media, for instance. However, I suggest that the idea of material populism is not only relevant in global south contexts where public works agendas are central. Formations of ‘the people,’ the leader, and the state (as appropriated either by the good leader or the evil elite) are also material, and materially contingent, in contexts where identity politics and social media are the focus of analysis.

Panel 2.4: Postcolonial orderings in Dutch social policy

Chairs: Anouk de Koning (University of Amsterdam) and Lieke Wissink (InHolland)

Discussant: Mette-Louise E. Johansen (Danish Centre for Social Science Research – VIVE)

Social policy in the Netherlands is generally phrased in neutral, generic terms. Welfare programs mean to serve all citizens and (legalized) residents. Yet, they simultaneously identify populations on the ‘receiving’ end following existing inequalities that historically formed along racialized hierarchies. Thus, although social policies and the welfare spaces they organize habitually use universalist, generic terms, they are often shadowed by subtexts of race. This contradiction becomes even more apparent in collaborative welfare governance models that promise horizontal and inclusive policymaking and require close working relations between state and semi-state actors and residents and community organizers. In

the Netherlands, race was long a “a grievance without a name” (Goldberg), but over the past decade, race, racism and whiteness have become the subject of heated debate. This has rendered race a speakable, if highly contested trope, including in social policy settings. Contributing to an emerging literature that explores the postcolonial nature of Dutch welfare governance, this panel looks into the ways in which welfare governance reflects, enacts and contests racial genealogies and institutional whiteness by asking: In what way do everyday social policy practices reproduce postcolonial orderings in the Netherlands? The papers in this panel ethnographically explore this question in various ‘welfare’ sites—‘grassroots’ community spaces, innovative youth work initiatives, youth welfare teams, and policy sites—in cities across the Netherlands.

Who gets to advocate for what? Non-white youth work founders and policy advocacy within the context of institutional whiteness and Dutch racism

Sharifah Redan (InHolland)

Recently, scholars have increasingly sought to understand how non-profit organisations engage in policy advocacy, focusing on whether, and through which strategies, these organisations attempt to influence public policy, and how the logics of new public management constrain their willingness to criticise the systems that fund them (Brussee et al., 2024a, 2024b; Suykens et al., 2025). While these studies offer valuable insights, they fail to answer two critical questions in the Dutch context: Who is permitted to advocate within a policy landscape shaped by institutional whiteness (Ahmed, 2007; Love & Stout, 2024)? And what happens to those subjects that are treated as unspeakable and polarising? Drawing on over a year of ethnographic fieldwork, this presentation explores how social stratification and institutional whiteness shape the policy advocacy efforts of the founders of two Dutch community-based youth work organisations and especially their efforts on the topic of racism, which is in Dutch context treated as unspeakable (Hondius, 2014; Wekker, 2016). I examine how the founders encounter boundaries in their efforts to advocate for systemic change. I highlight how they are othered, compelled to engage in strategic silences, and navigate an institutional landscape that smothers conversations on race and racism.

When the state knocks: Frontline professionals and intimate welfare in the Bijlmer

Vénicia Sananès (University of Amsterdam)

In 1975, Suriname’s independence triggered a wave of migration to the Netherlands. At the time, Amsterdam’s ethnic quotas barred newcomers from housing. In response, two high-rise buildings in the Bijlmer were squatted, turning the area into a postcolonial refuge and emblem of Black activism. Over the years, the towers became entangled in narratives of decline, marked by overcrowding, heroin pandemic, poverty, and long-term unemployment. More recently, many residents emerged as victims of the childcare benefits scandals. All these compounded challenges have resulted in a deep mistrust between the state and its citizens. The towers, among the last remnants of the old Bijlmer that has already been transformed through grand-scale urban renewal, are scheduled to be torn down. In April 2023, the municipality launched its latest intervention: a gleaming “empowerment center” at the base of Gravenstein, intended to reconnect state and citizen to provide better social assistance. But when most residents stayed away, the municipality dispatched a new outreach team—young professionals of color, mostly of Surinamese descent—tasked with climbing the towers and knocking on doors to assess the needs of residents, all slated for relocation. This paper follows these house visits to examine how the Dutch welfare state increasingly governs through touch: reaching into people’s lives not only administratively, but affectively, spatially, and bodily. I theorize these efforts as a form of intimate governance, in which the state seeks to appear close, caring, and responsive. Yet such proximity often fails to land as intended. For residents, the knock on the door often feels invasive or coercive; many doors remain closed. For frontline professionals, the encounters evoke discomfort, fear, even disgust—visceral emotions that expose the embodied strain of doing the state’s dirty work. So, what does it mean to try and repair something that feels irreparably broken? Who bears the burden of this repair work? And why does the state keep getting it wrong—door after unanswered door?

Haunted universals: Facing away from race in Amsterdam's Parent and Child Teams

Anouk de Koning (University of Amsterdam)

Many welfare programs are committed to a universal approach that serves all citizens in an equitable way according to their need. This means that ethnicity, a common lens to identify people and understand social problems in the Netherlands, remains remarkably muted in welfare programs like Amsterdam's Parent and Child Teams, a public service that provides youth help and parenting support. Drawing on over a year of ethnographic research with two Parent and Child teams, I demonstrate how their ostensibly universal approach is haunted by racialized hierarchies, concerns and dynamics. Rather than seeing this as another example of colour-blind racism, I understand professionals' ambivalent relationship to race as part of their broader struggle to be good professionals. I show that while gender- and class-related features are easily folded into helping relations, ethnoracial ones present professionals with ethical conundrums. What to make of cultural differences that may be relevant, yet risk reinforcing stereotypes? How to shape a public service that serves all equally while doing justice to the diversity of parenting styles and perspectives? I argue that professionals often choose to face away from race, lest they reproduce its generalizations and stigmas. But raced hierarchies and tensions do not disappear. Instead, the Teams' universal approach is haunted by raced anxieties and subtexts about "normal" and "other" citizens and forms of parenting.

Meeting between the lines? Governing through partnership and postcolonial orderings in bureaucratic welfare encounters in the Netherlands

Lieke Wissink (InHolland)

Social policy implementation schemes are saturated with calls for intensified 'partnership' between state- and welfare actors in the Netherlands. At the same time, the ongoing impact of colonial histories on welfare policies largely remains ignored, in the Dutch postcolonial context and beyond (e.g. Westra & Van Hooren 2024; De Koning et al 2024; Arts & van den Berg 2024, see also Abercrombie 1998). This article explores this partnership / (racial) inequalities nexus within Dutch welfare governance to reflect on state-citizen welfare relations in postcolonial states. It does so by ethnographically looking into bureaucratically mediated encounters, and the relations of (in)equality these unfold, between local state- and welfare actors. The article draws on month-long fieldwork centered around 'bureaucratic welfare encounters' that form (part of) local social policy infrastructures – like subsidy application processes, powerpoint presentation gatherings, or municipal consultation (inspraak) nights. In addition, key policy documents were analyzed and semi-structured interviews were held with social work beneficiaries, (grassroots) welfare workers, and municipal bureaucrats. Starting point of the fieldwork is the Amsterdam quarter Zuid-Oost that per resident receives most municipal social funding, is overrepresented in poverty statistics and home to a large community with migration ties to Dutch former colonies. Building forth on understandings of bureaucracy as a normative practice (Lea 2020) that is directive rather than neutral (Ahmed 2006: 118), the article shows that ethnographic research into bureaucratic performativity in the welfare realm provides crucial insight into the postcolonial impact on everyday welfare governance relations. In this case, attending to bureaucratic welfare encounters showed that calls for partnership got interrupted by experiences of institutional Whiteness in the Netherlands, yet without finding bureaucratic footing. Thus, and perhaps paradoxically so, bureaucratic welfare practices risk reproducing histories of (racial) inequality and power over marginalized groups through bureaucratic performances of partnership in the present.



Panel sessions 3

Panel 3.1: Deserving care

Chair: Elizabeth Challinor (CRIA-FCSH-UNL)

Loving like a state: How the law forms relationships in Austrian welfare bureaucracies

Andreas Streinzer (University of Vienna)

The paper asks how the state imagines sexual and romantic relationships and hence “forms” the possibilities under which certain claims can be made. The ethnographic examples I will use come from research on the negotiation of deservingness at the encounter between welfare bureaucrats and recipients. Due to the principle of subsidiarity in Austrian welfare law, it is “family”, resp. a specific kind of economic relationality that decides whether significant others have to jump in to aid people at risk of impoverishment, or the state. The negotiation of these forms of relatedness gives insight into the imaginations of “love” and romantic relationships of the state. Specifically, if researched from a “queer” perspective that includes research participants who do not live according to monogamous ideals, do not fall into the binary of homo- and heterosexuality, or simply live in shared arrangements as adults or in old age. All such “queer” relationships are “formed” into state-sanctioned bureaucratic registers, with sometimes dire consequences. The discussion features some new approaches from queer-Marxian economic anthropology, and discusses them with anthropologies of the state.

‘Welfare in Lisbon? That’s Us’ Ethnographic Perspectives on the Portuguese Welfare Crisis from a Rehabilitation Center for Blindness

Fabio Bertoni (Universidade de Lisboa)

Part of a broader research project on visual norms, visual disability, and urban space, this paper draws on ethnographic fieldwork and interviews with staff at one of the national main rehabilitation centers for people who have lost their sight. Originally part of the public system of social services, the center has—since the post-austerity period following Portugal’s agreement with the troika—been managed by a Catholic charitable organization. This institution has since taken over dozens of former state-run social service facilities across Lisbon, covering areas such as disability, poverty, elderly care, and addiction. Within this context, the paper reflects on how the ongoing crisis—specifically, the erosion of the welfare state and the shrinking public role in disability support—is narrated and experienced in everyday work practices and professional perspectives. It explores how these shifts are embedded in the institution’s operations through the centrality of neoliberal criteria of conditionality and discretion, from how individuals are selected for assistance to how the rehabilitation process is realized. In particular, it looks at how this crisis shapes the complex relationship between institutional work logics and the models and representations of disability—constantly navigating between a charitable-assistance approach and a bio-psycho-medical framework.

How do ideas get in the way of policy change? A comparative study of homelessness policy in Toronto and Montréal, Canada

Nienke Boesveldt (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam)

While structural factors such as the allocation of resources and responsibilities have traditionally been seen as the key determinants of policy change and stability, the ideas of the people responsible for managing these resources can be just as consequential, especially in value-laden policy areas such as

combatting homelessness. To study how ideas can influence policy-making, implementation and ultimately outcomes, I reviewed policy documents and interviewed 21 stakeholders and service users in Montréal and Toronto, comparing how local (municipal) and regional (provincial) policy actors implemented the national (federal) “housing first” policy—a marked departure from the previous “staircase model” in which homeless individuals moved towards permanent housing in steps including shelters, hostels and transitional housing. I found different ideas underpinning policy models, the framing of homelessness, and intervention priorities in the two cities. how ideas can influence policy-making, implementation and ultimately outcomes, with Montréal adopting a bottom-up approach characterized by less accountability and noncommittal language, and Toronto following a top-down strategy with clear targets rooted in rights-based principles.

The Egyptian State’s Construction of the Moral Female Body

Maryam Fouad (University of Manchester)

This research examines the confinement of Egyptian girls accused of inciting immorality, sexual perversion, and prostitution held in a government-run facility known as the underage shelter in Cairo, Egypt. The study aims to explore how confinement serves as a tool for the state to shape morality, contributing to our understanding of gender and moral construction by the state in a Global South. Thus, I ask: how are women’s bodies in Egyptian prison-like spaces morally constructed, enduring, and resisting state control? The girls’ stories trace their incarceration experiences and their positioning vis-à-vis their bodies, the state, and society. Based on participant observation and unstructured interviews within the confined space, this study argues that despite ongoing surveillance and discipline, girls find ways to challenge social constructions imposed by the state and society. Adding to the literature on the anthropology of the state, gender, confinement, affect and resistance, I argue that the girls’ re-appropriation of deviance and resistance to the imposed moral code, and with the increased blurriness of the boundary between violence and care, the line between state and society becomes indistinct. Highlighting the girls’ challenge of state control, a deeper understanding of the Egyptian state’s absence and failure becomes possible.

Panel 3.2: The patchwork state: Delegation, sponsorship, and DIY governance

Chair: Martijn Koster (Wageningen University & Research)

Contemporary anthropological understanding of the state has evolved significantly beyond Weber’s (1918) classical definition of centralized power and territorial authority. Modern states increasingly operate through complex networks of resource dependency, strategic partnerships, and calculated violence and/or negligence, morphing into different and ‘unusual’ formations of the state. In these new manifestations, states’ responsibilities are negotiated, claimed, and sometimes strategically disavowed, particularly in times of political revolutions and democratisation, war and civil conflict, natural disasters, economic recessions, or austerity. These responsibilities are ceded to frontline state workers, private businesses, and citizens in pursuit of public service delivery. Building on Stepputat and Nuijten’s (2018) work on state enigmas and Jaffe’s (2013) analysis of hybrid state formations, we aim to explore – through rich ethnographic and theoretical case studies – how contemporary states’ reliance on sponsorships such as philanthropic donations, private sector funding, and international aid creates complex patterns of responsibility attribution and service delivery. We understand the contemporary state not as a monolithic entity but as a composition of multiple actors – including traditional authorities, activists, private sector entities, and community leaders – whose practices continuously reconstruct state presence and authority. The panel identifies four emerging state typologies which extend Bouchard’s (2011) theoretical framework on state formation by highlighting the dynamic nature of contemporary state manifestations: The fickle state- which appropriates and disowns private sector resources as convenient; The meddling state that intervenes in successful private initiatives to reassert dominance; The blurry/fragmented state characterised by overlapping jurisdictions with other forms of authority/governance; And, The inert/ DIY state wherein non-state actors perform traditional state functions.

The 'sponsored state': claiming and disavowing state responsibilities in Thessaloniki's municipal social services

Martha Kapazoglou (University of Amsterdam)

In Thessaloniki's municipal social provision services, encounters between frontline workers and their clients revolve around state responsibilities and doubts over its ability to fulfill them. Clients, for example, often question the state's ability, complaining about the meager quality and quantity of the material resources distributed by social services. These encounters speak to the tense sociopolitical moment in Greece. Following the austerity crisis, the conservative, right-wing government has promised a more efficient and effective state, present in people's lives. At the same time, two decades of social spending cuts have resulted in resource scarcity, making the Greek state dependent on philanthropic donations, private sector sponsorships and EU subsidies. Focusing on encounters between municipal workers and their clients, this paper traces how the Greek state's responsibilities to care and provide are negotiated, claimed and enacted at its frontlines. I develop the concept "sponsored state" to make sense of frontline workers' shifting tactics in handling clients' complaints and demands. In some cases, workers often underperform the state, acknowledging its dependence, this way strategically disavowing the responsibility to care and laying blame with the state's sponsors. In other instances, they overperform the state, rebranding and reclaiming EU subsidies, philanthropic donations and private sponsorships as state.

The quilted state: Peri-urban lives in a tapestry of promises and absences, in a South African former-Bantustan

Sandra Zaroufis (University of Amsterdam)

This paper examines how smallholder women farmers in Mankweng, a peri-urban settlement in a former South African Bantustan, engage with a fragmented and uneven state. Based on ten months of ethnographic fieldwork and spatial analysis, it explores how these farmers navigate a "quilted state"—a patchwork of infrastructures, performances, and claims to citizenship. Although they access land through traditional authorities, they expect the democratic state to provide services like water and agricultural support, reflecting layered expectations and historical claims. Their engagements with the state are deeply affective, shaped by past dispossessions, promises of development, and hopes for recognition. Drawing on Sian Lazar's concept of citizenship as embodied practice, the paper highlights how these women 'do the state' in everyday acts – maintaining services, meeting with extension officers, and balancing bureaucratic and customary authority. Rather than seeing the peri-urban as a transitional zone, the paper aligns with Global South scholarship to frame it as a historically embedded site of rural-urban entanglements and governance. These women's practices reveal a state that is not absent, but made and unmade through repetition, negotiation, and improvisation. The 'quilted state' emerges as a useful lens for understanding post-apartheid governance and the textured realities of everyday life.

Vuk'uzenzele: Self-reliance and the unburdening of state in urban South Africa

Amanda Mokoena (University of Amsterdam)

Resilience thinking, globally promoted and locally adopted during South Africa's democratic transition, placed survival responsibilities on individuals while leaving systemic inequalities unchallenged. Interventions such as a former President Thabo Mbeki's 2002 African Renaissance volunteering initiative 'Arise and Act,' asked ordinary citizens to actively participate in realising a prosperous new South Africa for all. Cloaked in empowerment rhetoric, this initiative only deepened existing inequalities, while creating new ones. This paper examines how neoliberal frameworks of self-reliance in post-apartheid South Africa have transformed state responsibilities into individual burdens, specifically through the lens of water access in the Eastern Cape. Drawing on ethnographic research of various access routes to water, I demonstrate how the popular sentiment of Vuk'uzenzele ('get up and do it yourself') has been co-opted to advance market-based solutions to basic water infrastructure needs, thereby illustrating how neoliberal ideologies are legitimized through cultural concepts, and how neoliberal frameworks exploit local cultural values to reshape citizenship rights such as access to water. I

argue that state-sponsored self-help rhetoric serves to legitimize the government's retreat from essential service provision, leaving a vacuum to be filled by more-than-statal actors, often to the detriment of already minoritized citizens.

Panel 3.3: Retooling care and welfare

Chair: Nafis Hasan (University of Amsterdam)

Digital currencies, municipal welfare policies, and the pragmatics of basic income: A shift in social protection?

Fabienne Hansen (University of Freiburg)

The municipality of Niterói, Rio de Janeiro state, established the Moeda Social Arariboia in January 2022 as a permanent social policy following the tradition of Brazilian municipal policy experimentation. Since then, the Arariboia, the connected digital currency, has expanded into various areas of the city's social protection networks. The city officials claim that the municipal program is minced onto local practices and embedded into the city's everyday economics, creating new spaces of solidarity economy and combating poverty without the conditions of other programs, for example, the federal Bolsa Família. In discourse, the municipal program is often named in connection to a different type of social protection, the idea of Renda Básica, a basic income. Based on ethnographic fieldwork in Niterói in 2023 and 2024, this paper examines whether programs like the Moeda Social Arariboia represent a genuine shift in social protection or merely supplement existing welfare frameworks. In this context, the debates on Brazilian welfare are analysed within local practices of renegotiation, mutation, and policy shifts. Looking at growing municipal social protection initiatives, this paper asks whether these localised programs signal a move toward a basic income logic or if they stay within the Bolsa Família mindset.

Leveraging medical drones in the era of precision public health in Africa

Edwin Ambani Ameso (Universität Leipzig)

As healthcare systems experience an unprecedented transformative digital revolution, their entanglement with digital health solutions and technologies cannot be overstated. Embracing digitalisation is thought to enable healthcare systems, especially in the Global South, to overcome decades-long infrastructural challenges, improve healthcare access and quality, and drive sustainable development. In Africa, the digital health solutions and technologies have ushered in a digital scramble to redress the continent's burden of disease and mortality. The centrality of innovative healthcare delivery is thus anchored in digital health solutions and technologies such as drones. As nation-states experiment and invest in these digital health solutions and technologies health futures are rapidly becoming entangled with, and reconfiguring, health access as a public good. With emphasis on efficiency and targeting to optimize resource use, nation-states like Malawi and Ghana are increasingly anchoring these digital technologies towards a new paradigm of precision public healthcare. Drones as transformative strategies for timely access to critical care and novel healthscapes forming new sociotechnical imaginaries. Through drones, rhetoric on precision public health offers health actors technical solutions to complex problems and promises of data-driven futures free of uncertainty, suffering and inefficient use of resources is nurtured. In this paper, I suggest and develop the concept of 'precision public health'. Using ethnographic insights from our research on medical drones in Malawi and Ghana in addressing maternal mortality, lack of access to diagnostic care and vaccines to target populations in remote settings. We explore the rise of precision public health as they reconfigure health in Africa.

A stable ship in shifting waters: Exploring the (im)mutability of state capacities in Norwegian local government

Emma Lengle (University of Oslo)

Weeks after the 2023 Norwegian municipal elections, I entered the office of a city district director. Fresh on my mind was the 'blue wave' that had just swept over Norwegian politics, an unprecedented shift towards local conservative-led coalitions. My closest interlocutors, city policymakers who had spent years developing a strategy to combat social inequality in health, were rushing to get their strategy passed through the city council before the next political term began. With this sense of urgency and uncertainty in mind, I asked the director what the implications of the election would be for health and equity efforts in his city district. Amused by my question and the assumptions embedded within, he chuckled and likened the city government to a ship that knows and sails its course, rarely troubled by the coming and going of part-time local politicians. Taking this nautical metaphor as my point of departure, I will ask how the language of shifts and crises disguises state capacities to organize, stabilize, and reproduce social order. To do this, I will draw upon 15 months of fieldwork conducted within a Norwegian city government, spent studying the policies and personnel who 'put state capacities into motion' (Gilmore, 2022).

Shifting the state through algorithms and data: On lying and tinkering in Colombia's digital welfare infrastructure

Julia Malik (University of Klagenfurt)

Processes of automatization, algorithmization, and datafication in state welfare shape bureaucratic work, interactions between civil servants and other citizens, relations between different state institutions, and the allocation of state resources. Based on ethnographic research on a digital classification system which the Colombian state uses to manage social benefits, this paper explores how digital welfare infrastructure and practices of lying and tinkering mutually co-constitute one another. While the national agency tried to prevent so-called manipulation of the system, local civil servants were more ambivalent. They simultaneously negatively judged some people they suspected of lying, called for believing people, and used their discretion to engage in tinkering practices to help people obtain more favorable classification results. I understand practices of tinkering and lying as appropriations of the data system by actors who do not perceive it as able to produce proper knowledge about poverty. Going beyond normative conceptualizations of lying, I argue that lying is productive, generating diverse state practices, images, and relations. In turn, I see lying and tinkering as immanently generated by Colombia's digital welfare infrastructure. Interrogating lying and tinkering as integral parts of digital welfare infrastructure illuminates shifting state and welfare formations in the wake of digitalization.

Panel 3.4: Imaginative methodologies to study the (shifting) state (roundtable)

Chairs: Tessa Diphoorn (Utrecht University), Stephanie Ketterer (Wageningen University)

Anthropologists have been experimenting with imaginative, embodied, multisensorial, and collaborative methodologies to better capture everyday practices, experiences, and knowledges. This roundtable aims to discuss and explore the opportunities and challenges associated with deploying these imaginative methodologies when studying (shifting) state formations. Imaginative methodologies may open new horizons for holistic engagements with complex, at times rapidly shifting fields, and provide possibilities for more inclusive research in often marginalized, at times violent settings. Yet, they may also pose different kinds of risks to research participants (and anthropologists) and raise new ethical obstacles, especially in contexts of growing authoritarian regimes and intensified surveillance. We would like to invite participants to share their experiences with, and designs for, imaginative methodologies for anthropologies of the state, including bureaucracies, citizenship regimes, infrastructures, political technologies, political activism, and so forth. In addition to discussing these methodologies, we aim to explicitly discuss how and whether they contribute to our understanding of the state.

Sense of the State from a Different Perspective. Critical Ethnography on Regional Public Employees in Italy using an Imaginative Approach.

Elena Tagliani (University of Strasbourg)

Imaginative approach includes an adapted epistemic framework, dedicated tools for the fieldwork, the data collection and treatment, and the analysis. It engages manifold dimensions of imagination: in investigating subjectivities, in reflecting about the researcher's role in knowledge production, in treating and interpreting symbolic language and local systems of meaning, in structuring an adapted context and toolbox for the fieldwork. All of those aspects are present in my own research.

Tracing the State through the Body: Imaginative Methodologies and the Propiska Regime in Post-Soviet Spaces

Rano Turaeva (Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München)

This contribution reflects on the possibilities and limitations of imaginative and embodied methodologies in studying propiska regimes – systems of internal registration that continue to shape mobility, belonging, and bureaucratic control in post-Soviet states. These regimes are not merely administrative tools but are deeply entangled with everyday negotiations of state power, citizenship, and marginalization. Drawing on long-term ethnographic engagement and collaborative fieldwork, I explore how the embodied experiences of registration – through spatial restrictions, performative compliance, and encounters with local bureaucracies – reveal shifting modalities of governance and state-making. Methodologically, I consider how multisensorial and narrative approaches can illuminate the lived dimensions of the propiska system, particularly in contexts where the state is simultaneously intimate and opaque, and where official data is inaccessible or distorted. I also address the ethical and practical challenges of conducting such research in increasingly authoritarian environments, where surveillance and suspicion complicate both access and representation. By centering the body and everyday strategies of navigation, I reflect on how these approaches may not only reveal the workings of the state but also open up space for more inclusive, grounded, and critically reflexive anthropologies of governance.

The State in the Dark and the Ethnographically Invisible

Francisco Martínez (University of Murcia)

I would like to share some methodological concerns I had while doing fieldwork in eastern Estonia. In my research, I tried to study a series of under-the-radar activities that are most often unnoticed because they happen with the lights out, so they have been ethnographically invisible. Territories of secrecy present difficulties for observing what is in the dark partly because their use requires ordinary obfuscation and occasional lying. Anthropologists then need to deploy other ways of seeing when they step into a basement, dance a choreography of suspicion when entering into a bunker, fall into a mining hole, address the unobservable in a vacant apartment, smell the effluents of an oil shale processing plant, get lost in an abandoned library, or hear someone moving behind the half-open doors of a garage. In shadow spaces, we find social realities that are disturbingly difficult to observe, thereby proving opaque to the methodologies we have developed. This issue raises the question as to why anthropologists should operate only within the framework of participant observation instead of trying out different ways of intra-viewing the world, shadow spaces require other modes of seeing in, of knowing the world from within. Therefore, we need to engage in ethnography in some other manner or in an expanded way. Indeed, the absence of the conditions for visually coded observations and the opacity of my experience in the field demanded the continuation of ethnography by other means, even if this entailed lacking the standardization typically attributed to methods.

Studying the shifting state through natural resource extraction and road building

Tuomas Tammisto (Tampere University)

In my own work I have combined ethnographic research in multiple sites (road building sites, plantations, peasant communities) and interviews of state officials and road building consultants with archival research and mapping (mostly of roads and land use) in order to understand how infrastructures and de facto state practices (both official and unofficial) get built. These mundane, technical and even 'dull' sites may be fruitful, because they can be relatively easy to access and because they can be studied by using a variety of methods and from different angles. Of course, infrastructure building can be incredibly contentious and politically loaded in some settings, so I don't want to downplay that at all. But as it can be studied through multiple methods, even if in-person access is not possible, mapping and documents might bring one surprisingly far.

Enacted data in ethnographic police research. Role playing as an experimental method

Jan Beek (Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz), Thomas Bierschenk (Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz)

The core methods of classical ethnographic field research consist of (more or less structured) conversations and participant observations of social interactions by a single researcher. In our research project on 'Police Translations' (<https://www.ifeas.uni-mainz.de/forschung/polizei-translationen/>), we supplemented these methods with ethnographic team research and enacted data. The project investigated how police officers interact with actors they perceive as 'culturally foreign', or more precisely, how they make cultural difference relevant in these situations. Different degrees of German language proficiency were defined as an important marker of potentially perceived cultural foreignness. To this end, we adapted the role-plays which are a routine part of the training of police cadets – for example, simulations of traffic checks and domestic violence incidents. We had the respective 'police counterparts' in these situations played by amateur actors of different national origins (e.g. Russia, Nigeria, Greece), genders and age, whose task was to simulate limited German language skills. Approximately 30 interaction situations were observed by members of our research project and recorded on video. They were supplemented by follow-up interviews with the participants and first interpretations being discussed in our team. This led to (often surprising) results, ultimately challenging us to rethink some of the categories we had employed going into the experiment, and new categories emerging. Additionally, by staging these experiments, we created power dynamics different from those in conventional ethnographies. In our contribution, we will discuss the results of our experiences, reflecting on advantages, disadvantages and the epistemic implications of such methods.



Panel sessions 4

Panel 4.1: Houses, homes and politics: Approaching shifting state-resident relations from the urban margins (part 1)

Chairs: Sven da Silva (Wageningen University & Research), Martijn Koster (Wageningen University & Research)

Rising property prices, gentrification, land speculation, housing shortages, unemployment and poverty pose major challenges to cities worldwide. In most countries, neoliberal policies have led to a transfer of housing responsibilities from the state to the private sector, resulting in a decline in regulated and subsidized housing markets, which disproportionately affects low-income residents. Despite efforts to create more inclusive cities, and despite shelter being a basic human need, governments fail to provide

safe and affordable housing. Moreover, local authorities often resort to violent and authoritarian measures, including the demolition of homes and the eradication of settlements deemed illegal. This panel aims to analyze the changing relations between people and the state by highlighting the implications of – and responses to – housing crises and emergencies. Anthropology's long tradition of studying the home and the house can provide us with relevant insights to do so. It is now common sense that a house is not just a building; it is also a home. It represents and is the locus of people's lives, livelihoods, and future aspirations. At the same time, anthropologists recognize that homes are inherently political, as they are imbued with power relations and shaped by the presence or absence of the state. While in some cities residents organize to resist state programs and demand justice, in others they have abandoned all hope of government support and seek their own solutions, such as occupying land, building their own homes, or expanding existing homes. Most cases show a combination of both, as residents combine resistance with self-reliance; they operate within existing policy frameworks and in the shadow of the state, illustrating a complex interplay of negotiation and refusal. This panel invites papers on the relationships between residents and states around housing, particularly housing access, redistribution, maintenance, and repair. We aim to explore social, economic, political, and personal housing struggles, focusing on residents' experiences, imaginations, and creative responses to the state in precarious contexts. Key questions include: How do residents organize themselves in the face of inadequate housing? What role do they see for the state in meeting their needs? How do they experience the presence or absence of state support? How do their housing politics relate to the state? By studying perspectives from the margins, we set out to rethink our theoretical understanding of the state and explore its implications for urban governance and developing more equal and just cities.

Housing struggles in socialist Cuba: State imaginaries of street-level bureaucrats and marginalised residents in Havana

Sanne Derks (Wageningen University & Research)

In socialist Cuba housing is largely a state-dominated affair. The city of Havana in particular, with its dense population and old depilated buildings, faces a mix of problems in the realm of housing, as it is literally falling apart. The current economic crisis exacerbates these problems, as neither the state nor residents have resources to maintain their houses. This paper builds on my unique access to street-level bureaucrats of the urban planning department and the housing department, who interact with residents on a daily basis. They monitor the state of the buildings, the risk of collapse and evaluate if a building needs to be demolished and if people need to be relocated. This study aims to understand how and about what marginalized urban residents negotiate with street-level bureaucrats and vice versa, and what imaginaries of the state are (re)produced. It asks whether the severe and ongoing crisis incentivizes shifts in the relationships between bureaucrats and residents, and the imaginaries they produce of one another. By studying the imaginations of the state in the realm of housing struggles, this paper contributes to a better understanding of the relationship between marginalized urban residents and the state in contemporary socialist Cuba.

Spectres of the state: ghost tenancies and informal social citizenship in contemporary Italy

Bianca Griffani (Goldsmiths College, University of London)

This paper explores the phenomenon of 'ghost tenancies' – the practice of keeping deceased council tenants 'alive' in housing registries to allow kin and neighbors to maintain access to council flats – in the context of the managed decline of the public housing stock and of its managing institutions in Terni, Italy. Drawing from ethnographic fieldwork and organising work with a local militant tenants' union (ASIA-USB), this paper considers how the practice of 'ghost tenancies' emerges in response to state abandonment, and within the legacies of a system that used to rely greatly upon proximity and informality. While some of my interlocutors in ASIA-USB view 'ghost tenancies' as an anti-social practice reproducing the assetization of housing, others see them as a strategy to reclaim an alienated right. I follow this second group in conceptualising 'ghost tenancies' as a form of re-appropriated welfare, a deprivatised mode of provisioning that allows tenants and their kin to better face diminishing living

standards. In the practice of 'ghost tenancies', citizens renegotiate their relationship with a welfare state significantly transformed after three decades of fiscal austerity. Finally, I argue that analytical framings that dichotomise state welfare (in the Global North) and informal or mediated welfare (in the Global South) (Ketola and Norvensvad, 2022; Gough and Wood, 2006) fail to account for the key role that informality plays in the construction and enactment of nation-state-based social citizenship during periods of welfare state expansion in ethnographic contexts like Italy.

Patching up houses, dropping out socialism: Self-help housing repair, maintenance, and adaptation in Havana's urban peripheries

Piergiorgio Solombrino (Wageningen University & Research)

This paper aims to understand how the self-help practices of low-income residents in Havana to repair, maintain, and adapt their houses, (re)produce, shape and shift their relationship with the state. Since the 'special period' in the 1990s, housing repair has been a constant aspect of daily life in Cuba. However, while in the past the construction and renovation of dwellings was in the hands of the state, carried out by designers, construction workers and other artisans, the island's new economic model, which allows for the purchase, sale and import of building materials, resulted in an increasing predominance of self-help practices. Within the ongoing crisis, the state has reduced its margin of intervention. This results in increasing inequality between those who can afford sustainable repairs, e.g., thanks to remittances, and those who can only afford temporary, patchy solutions. In this paper, which draws on six months of ethnographic fieldwork in Havana, I will argue that patching up is not the exclusive domain of housing repair, but involves the entire social fabric, particularly to compensate for the cracked relationship between residents and the state.

Home at margins: Police Violence, Evictions, and the Resistance to Belonging in São Paulo's Cracolândia

Giordano Magri (Centre for Metropolitan Studies, Brazil), Flávio Eiró (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam)

Amid an ongoing urban cleansing process, referred to as hygienisation (Garmany; Richmond, 2019), four individuals fight to survive and remain in São Paulo's Cracolândia, one of the world's largest open-air drug scenes. A Paraguayan immigrant resists eviction to keep her snack bar; a former sex worker turned entrepreneur navigates civil society networks to secure housing; a Black political leader, repeatedly displaced and criminalized for her activism, challenges state violence to stay in the area; and a Black man experiencing homelessness struggles as NGOs supporting him face increasing restrictions on housing alternatives. Their stories reveal Cracolândia as more than a site of drug use – it is a contested home where efforts to 'end Cracolândia,' combined with the political invisibility of some marginalized groups, fuel urban displacement. Through judicial and administrative measures, the state enacts policies that evict those deemed undesirable while weakening resistance. This paper explores how residents experience and contest housing insecurity while navigating police violence and evictions. By centering home – rather than merely a house – as a political locus, we argue that urban cleansing in Cracolândia implements exclusionary policies that redefine who belongs in the city. These struggles show home as both a site of vulnerability and agency, where people resist displacement and fight to maintain their bonds to place, livelihood, and community.

Panel 4.2: Shifting states and their histories in institutional care (part 1)

Chairs: Kristine Krause (University of Amsterdam), Mariusz Sapiecha (University of Amsterdam)

The anthropology of the state has long argued that states do not exist as coherent units out there but are articulated in practices, spaces and effects. One of the key spaces in which states have effects on their citizens are care institutions. They respond to crucial needs of humans; for instance as places where sicknesses are treated and frail bodies are taken care of. They can also curate major transitions such as birth and death. Care institutions such as hospitals or nursing homes are places defined by particular and persistent forms of interaction. These forms – where and how things are done, when and by whom – have often coagulated over time. They are backed up by legitimations which are not easy to question, because they are part of other non-tangible societal institutions, such as gendered division of labour, kinship and family ideologies which are specific to historically grown care and health regimes. These regimes as part of state governance can bear traces of pasts such as colonial rule, political regimes shifts or specific biopolitical projects of care and control. Institutional care can also be provided by non-state actors on behalf of the state including non-profit, religious or charity organisations but also commercial or even corporatized actors. The reasons why these actors perform or have taken over these tasks, have again their own histories often related to shifts in ways of governance. This panel brings together papers that explore how shifting states and their histories come back resurface, or take unexpected forms within the spaces and practices of institutional care. The papers examine how historical legacies shape and haunt caregiving interactions, institutional routines, and the narratives and positionalities of those involved in these care settings. In asking how these pasts are articulated, linger on or are represented in care institutions this panel understands history not as something waiting to be discovered in the background, but as actively brought up, mobilized and presented in the field or articulated by the ethnographer. The past then becomes ‘history’ through practices of actors in the field or through the analytical work of the ethnographer who identifies history as an absent presence in the studied situation or practice. The paper in this panel interrogate the constitutive moments where history appears, or is brought up in institutional care settings, asking, which positionings, generational memories and narratives become articulated therein.

Shifting state affiliation and ethnic belonging in institutional care for Transylvanian Saxons in Germany

Veronika Prieler (University of Amsterdam)

Since the Second World War, over 600,000 members of German minorities in Romania have emigrated to Germany. Based on their status as ‘Aussiedler’, they quickly received (social) citizenship rights and support. While their case was commonly seen as an example of successful integration, there were voices pointing out that many older community members were lonely and had difficulties to adjust to the new environment. To support those people and to preserve the group’s culture and history, between 1953 and 1973, Transylvanian Saxons founded 5 care homes that addressed (predominantly) people born in Transylvania by offering care services plus specific cuisine, decorations, musical performances, the celebration of customs and feasts etc. The paper examines these care homes as places where care for seniors and care for history and cultural heritage take place and links it to (re-)formations of the German (welfare) state and Transylvanian Saxon community and identity. It analyses how collective origin and culture was and is made the point of reference for institutional care and how history is kept alive and lives on in these homes. How are (supposedly) shared experiences, traditions and pasts mobilized? What is remembered by whom and what is not addressed, perhaps even concealed?

The Borstal Home: Persistence and change in a juvenile prison in Accra, Ghana

Marlene Persch (University of Vienna)

Contrary to common understandings of prisons in terms of punishment, Ghanaian prison staff represent their work in a correctional facility for male juvenile inmates in terms of care. Care narratives of prison officers point towards care in the institution based on images of 'good childhood' that are both represented by staff as personal commitment and as part of the job requirement. Whereas care narratives provide (1) insights into images of professionalism of staff and their relation to 'the' state; they also (2) give an insight into the character of the institution. As 'Borstal Home', the facility was introduced as an educational institution during colonial times based on the British model and restructured into a 'Senior Correctional Center' in 2003 in accordance with the International Children's Rights (UNCRC). I argue that despite a restructuring in 2003, the educational character of the institution from colonial times persists. The presentation combines anthropological debates on care, relational approaches towards state and prison ethnographies. And it elaborates on how one could think of prisons as a care institution and part of a welfare state when introducing the perspective of prison staff.

Still in the Danwei: How Danwei Memory Anchors People with Dementia in an Urban Care Home in China

Yuan Yan (University of Amsterdam)

Home-making practices in care homes, such as the use of familiar objects and family photographs in a person's room, can help people with dementia experience a sense of belonging. These practices cannot, however, fully recreate a previous sense of home. In this article, based on ethnographic research at a care home in urban China, I first examine how residents felt they had lost their home when arriving in the care home, then explore alternative ways through which they felt a sense of belonging, based on their memories of Chinese danwei. China organized its cities through the danwei system from the late 1950s to the 1990s, a multifunctional institution that provided employment, housing and other services. I examine how the material environment, activities and relationships in the care home meant they felt they were living and working in danwei. Furthermore, I argue that danwei as a manifestation of the socialist guojia (Chinese state) created feelings of belonging for people with dementia. My analysis shows that beyond home-making practices, belonging for people with dementia in institutions can also be explored by giving people role positions and interactions which are valuable to them in their life.

The Hauntings of Colonial Medical Men on Bangladeshi Women's Bodies

Shahana Siddiqui (University van Amsterdam)

Based on a hospital ethnography this paper brings together the analysis of Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) as a masculine, power-ridden space with an interrogation of specific medical practices that are conducted in the hospitals forensic department. Forensic medicine textbooks based on colonial medical men's fantasies and myths of the 'Indian woman' continue as authoritative knowledge of which kind of women can or cannot be raped, and therefore, who is 'worthy' of care and sympathy. Victorian era based penal justice system dictate medico-legal jurisprudence which continue with the controversial colonial practice of the two-finger test, or virginity test, as one of the primary evidence collection processes in an alleged rape case. The ghosts of the colonial past haunt the corners of the hospital, they are alive in forensic medicine texts, and they whisper into the medical consciousness of doctors as they examine cases of alleged sexual assault. This paper therefore brings forth the 'herstory' of DMCH through the hospital ethnography, shedding a light on the colonial male ghosts that continue to haunt women in post-colonial Bangladesh, dictating the reproductive governance and organization of gendered medicine and female sexuality.

Panel 4.3: Underground states: Theorising power from below (part 1)

Chairs: Jesse Jonkman (Utrecht University), Karolien van Teijlingen (Radboud University Nijmegen)

Subterranean ecologies offer an illuminating window onto the aspirations and limitations of statecraft. Colonial and postcolonial states have been built, quite literally, by violently mapping and appropriating hydrocarbons and minerals (Braun 2000). The horizontal and vertical expansion of oil, gold, and other frontiers has fueled the symbolic and military might of state apparatuses the world over. State-making is resource-making, and vice versa. If anything, stories about nation-states' rich pasts and futures are invariably pregnant with stories about rich subsoils, as bureaucrats put much discursive and regulatory effort into making 'natural resources' out of geological formations (Kneas 2017; van Teijlingen 2023). Yet state power is realized not only by taking matter out of the ground, but also by putting things back in. National subsoils offer places of refuge and storage for the imperial debris and networked systems that keep statutory regimes running. Below-ground and out-of-sight, you can build bunkers to stay safe when enemy states are flexing muscles (Masco 2009), you can dump legally sanctioned waste, chemicals, and carbon dioxide (Buck 2021), you can attempt to render your avaricious oil pipelines less visible (Estes 2019). Still, undergrounds need not be places of dominant governmentality. As works of fiction (Whitehead 2016) and nonfiction (Macfarland 2019) so evocatively illustrate, 'underlands' are also generative of social and ecological resistance and alternative life projects. The subsurface may strike back, as earthquakes thwart managerial illusions of government control (Bakema et al. 2018), while aquifers stimulate more-than-human relations that push against liberal logics of anthropogenic domestication (Ballesterio 2016). Similarly, it is in the invisible 'entrails of the Earth' (Gordillo 2015) where humans (Lancione 2020) and nonhumans (Tsing 2015) create relations of care outside the purview of centralized bureaucracy, and where tunnels allow smugglers (Meuhlmann 2019), guerrillas (Gordillo 2015), speleologists (Pérez and Melo Zurita 2020), and miners (Jonkman 2024) to remain hidden from state powers. This double-session panel interrogates these and other interfaces between subsurface space and state-making. Panelists discuss how the affective and material affordances of undergrounds intervene in everyday statecraft, addressing the topics of human-volcano relations, earthquake governance, gold mining, hydroelectric infrastructure, decarbonization, and water politics. They ask: What roles do underground imaginaries play in undermining and enforcing state policies? How do the specific symbolic and physical attributes of subsurface space differentiate these dynamics? And how is the legibility of state law disrupted by the (il)legibility and (un)knowability of subterranean ecologies?

Geosocial Worlds: Human-Volcano Relations and Political Geologies of Tectonic Landscapes in Guatemala

Gijs Cremers (Utrecht University)

In this paper, I explore how geological processes, such as volcanic activity, play a role in everyday social and political formations. Building on recent work in political geology and geological anthropology, I aim to discuss geological forms of violence alongside imaginaries of the underground and earthly formations and, consequently, explore how thinking with geosocial relations might be helpful in examining the problems and possibilities of thinking with and localizing pasts and presents in material geological forms. By doing so, I suggest understanding landscapes and geological materialities vis-à-vis interpretations of the past that also shape present socio-political struggles. Through an ethnographic account of geosocial and human-volcano relations in Guatemala, I then illustrate how actors or entities, such as volcanic rocks, contribute to the formation and meaning of these landscapes beyond their material composition. To fully comprehend such landscapes, I propose considering how different materials are intrinsically and dynamically connected to socio-historical repositories, including geological dimension and how landscapes, particularly inner earth geologies, can be seen as active and agential participants in shaping human experiences, histories, and everyday realities.

Making Mining Licit: Gold, Commodification, and the Legal Politics of an Underground Economy

Jesse Jonkman (Utrecht University)

Ethnographies of resource-making have shown that the extraction of resource value from objects is premised on forgetting the emplaced lifeworlds of objects before they entered financial markets. Much of this literature looks at such supply-chain disentanglement from the viewpoint of corporate and formal regulatory practices. Lead firms, legal regimes, and downstream consumer economies do the forgetting; disadvantaged people in production sites are being forgotten. Here I broach the question of commodification somewhat differently, as I focus on a gold frontier where variously informalized peoples are playing their own part in the forgetting. In the Colombian Chocó, small-scale mining participants create amnesias about the sociopolitical life of illegalized gold by repurposing state symbols and structures. Through such appropriation, they performatively erase the illicit character of their economic dealings, and concurrently, render the mining and selling of gold perceptible as activities that are fundamentally quotidian and legal. I argue that when analyzing this metamorphosis of gold from an illicit into a licit resource, we need to account for not only the origin stories of miners and buyers, but also the precious metal's own properties of malleability and subterranean invisibility.

Becoming underground

Evelijn Martinus (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam)

The earth is no longer hollow. Though centuries of expansive industrialization have rendered the urban underground as a 'terra nullius' (Melo Zurita, 2020), simultaneously a growing awareness claims the urban underground is saturated. It is filled with infrastructure, chemicals, subtle and less subtle organisms. Increasingly moreover, the underground gets filled with promise: no longer just the site of technological conquest aimed for capitalist expansion, the underground now has become a battle ground for restoring and repairing a lost connection to a deeper sense of future (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2015) – and possibly a deeper relation to state. To further develop our thinking about underground state making, this paper turns to the entanglement of institutions, rules, regulations and the underground. The return of the Dutch state to the governance of the undep urban underground creates an intriguing scene for scholars keen to flash out the socio-political making of territory, beyond its typical 2D world of cartography (Marston & Himley, 2021). Housing, agriculture and water safety are among the prominent policy areas in which the state is asked to mend the reality of a land slowly sinking deeper into the Delta, and a body of citizens steadily growing. State making and the production of territory have been historically intimately interwoven practices (Scott, 1998). The relationship between the underground and the state as a starting point for research brings us to the interwovenness of socio-ecological structures and political institutions.

From Coalfields to Care: Women's Informal Labour and Energy Transition in Indonesia's Mining Landscapes

Cinintya Audori Fathin (University of Malaya, Universitas Gadjah Mada)

This research explores the intersections of state governance, energy transition, and women's informal labour in Indonesia's underground economies within mining landscapes, where what lies beneath continues to shape power and the survival of mining communities. While Indonesia has committed to phasing out coal as part of its just energy transition policy, state narratives largely frame the transition in technical and economic terms (Elliott & Setyowati, 2020; Wuppertal Institute et al., 2025), overlooking its uneven social consequences, particularly for women informal workers who must shoulder the responsibilities of both production and reproduction (Antasya & Kersana, 2023; Sawiji, 2024). This research examines how women engaged in informal labour around coal-mining sites navigate shifting livelihoods, balancing productive and reproductive roles under conditions of heightened precarity. These lived experiences reveal how the state overlooks gendered structural vulnerabilities that, in turn, foster forms of resilience shaping energy governance in mining communities. By foregrounding women's perspectives, this paper demonstrates how everyday practices of survival and care challenge dominant narratives of state-led transition and offer insights that could refine the shortcomings of energy transition policies too often shaped by extractive politics.

Panel 4.4: Legal fictions and relational judgments: Reading law, personhood, and legitimacy across contexts

Chairs: Luisa Schneider (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam), Sophie Andreetta (Université de Liège, FNRS)

Law often presents itself as neutral, procedural, and grounded in universal principles. Yet across diverse settings, legal decisions frequently hinge not only on codified rules or individual actions, but on socially embedded judgments about trustworthiness, relational legitimacy, and moral character. This panel explores the subtle ways in which legal actors – judges, caseworkers, asylum officers, police, and others – read relational cues to interpret law and assess personhood. We ask: How does legal interpretation vary across actors and contexts? How do social ties, or their absence, become evidence in themselves? And what kinds of legal fictions – about autonomy, responsibility, or belonging – structure these decisions? Rather than treating law as a fixed script, we foreground it as an interpretive field: animated by moral readings, social expectations, and the improvisational judgments of frontline actors. Papers explore how people are differently ‘lawed’ depending on whether they are seen as embedded in normative kinship structures, as visibly ‘claimed’ by others, or as socially unmoored. We also examine how individuals under scrutiny – including legal professionals themselves – mobilize their own readings of the law: recasting categories, invoking strategic relationships, or performing legibility to navigate risk and evade sanction. Crucially, this panel also investigates the shifting relationship between law and the state. While often assumed to operate in tandem, legal institutions and state authorities frequently eye each other with suspicion. Legal professionals may act as buffers or brakes on authoritarian drift – but they are also increasingly subject to scrutiny, pressure, and attack when political regimes harden, humanitarian protections erode, or technocratic systems are overburdened. As legal infrastructures are destabilized – across jurisdictions from the United States to Uganda, Hungary to India – the project of law becomes fraught not only for those judged by it, but for those tasked with upholding it. Bringing together ethnographies from courtrooms, welfare offices, immigration systems, and informal legal arenas, this panel interrogates how law becomes a relational project: not merely about rules, but about how social actors read one another – and what those readings enable or foreclose. We explore how recognition, punishment, and protection are unevenly distributed through relational life, and how legality itself is contested, strained, and repurposed under shifting conditions of state power.

Unclaimed, Unlawed: Carceral Kinship and the Politics of Legal Recognition in Sierra Leone

Luisa Schneider (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam)

In Sierra Leone, children are frequently detained not for criminal acts, but for the absence of legible kin. In these cases, it is not wrongdoing that activates the law, but the perceived lack of relational anchoring. This paper examines how courts and legal institutions treat ‘unclaimed’ minors – those without socially recognized guardians – as threats to moral and social order, and how their lack of kinship becomes evidence of risk. Drawing on long-term ethnographic research with detained youth, judges, and legal professionals, I explore how law operates as a relational reading practice, where protection, punishment, and personhood are determined through the presence – or absence – of normative ties. At the same time, legal actors themselves are navigating shifting conditions of state power. Judges and prosecutors operate in an environment shaped by international development agendas and national political aspirations, such as the First Lady’s high-profile campaign against sexual violence. Legal professionals increasingly process such cases not solely through legal standards, but through performances of alignment with power. Ambiguous cases become platforms for professional advancement, while defendants – often young men from marginalized communities – are rendered guilty through narrative framing, rather than fact. This paper foregrounds how legality emerges not from fixed codes, but from situated judgments shaped by political expediency, relational claims, and institutional vulnerability. Law is not merely applied, but socially read: by youth performing familial affiliation to avoid confinement; by judges navigating allegiance to shifting regimes; and by institutions under pressure to appear both protective and punitive. Through this lens, I trace how law becomes a mechanism for sorting not only guilt and innocence, but belonging, visibility, and worth.

A new Justice for a new country? Exceptional judiciaries, law, State, and politics

Pauline Jarroux (Université Libre de Bruxelles), Sophie Andreetta (Université de Liège, FNRS)

Building on ethnographic fieldwork in welfare courts, this presentation explores how judges decide between irregular migrants claiming social assistance and the public welfare administrations declining such claims. Investigating these cases will help analyse how members of the bench decide between competing interpretations of law, establish truthfulness, and ponder the social and political consequences of their decisions. In these contexts, irregular migrants, despite being the more disadvantaged party to the case, regularly win against the state. At the theoretical level, this article provides a counter point to two general trends in sociolegal, and in migration studies. First, it nuances the idea that judicial proceedings generally tend to further or reproduce inequalities – by showing how welfare courts can, under certain conditions, help ascertain migrants' rights against the state. Second, it highlights the importance of law and formal institutions in the governance of precarious migrants.

Relational policing: Kinship work and relatedness in a deprived neighbourhood in Denmark

Mette-Louise E. Johansen (Danish Centre for Social Science Research – VIVE)

Recently, a new political notion on 'criminal families' or 'clan-based crime' has emerged, attracting intense media attention and calling forth public outrage in various European countries. The notion refers to the criminal offending of family members at several generational levels of a kinship network, and is based on the mapping of family relations and an interconnection of filing systems between the municipal social services and the police. This creates a link between family members, their criminal records, and the costs of these family members' welfare provisions and incarceration over a given period of time. The paper examines the relational forms of neighborhood policing that lay the ground for these new forms of 'kinship profiling' in the Danish state. Based on ethnographic fieldwork with neighborhood police officers, and drawing on anthropological insights from new kinship studies, the paper accounts for two crucial dimensions of neighborhood policing: how the police work with kinship lineages and relationships and how they conduct this work through intimate, embodied and affective forms of relatedness with policed youths and their kin. The paper accounts for the way in which these relational practices form part of a current reconfiguration of state-family relationships at the margins of the Danish society.

Human Dignity in Trial Welfare Judges, Immigration Politics and Social Change

Sophie Andreetta (Université de Liège, FNRS)

The Court for the Repression of Economic Offences and Terrorism (CRIET), a special court with national jurisdiction, was created in 2018 in Benin. In ordinary conversations, the CRIET is known for its harshness. Institutional and political discourse make this intransigence one of its *raison d'être*, as a response to the emergence of 'new forms of offences'. Against a backdrop of growing insecurity, at a time when ordinary courts are perceived as slow and ineffective, the CRIET is presented as a transparent and 'efficient' institution, in line with the President's objectives for the modernisation and the development of the country. At the same time, the special court has faced strong criticisms for being politicised, and eventually appears as a symbol of the 'authoritarian turn' taken by Benin, now ranked as a 'moderate autocracy'. Between 2023 and 2024, we each spent 10 weeks at the Court. We met experienced magistrates and brilliant prosecutors, all insisting on their commitment to law and to the right way to 'do things legally', while defending the necessity for a harsh justice. Our presentation explores the paradoxes of this Court, which blurs the usual distinction between ordinary and exceptional justice. We consider how judges and prosecutors strike a balance between professional values and orders from above, litigants' rights and public order, procedural safeguards and exceptional threats. Considering the fluidity of political realities, and the relational nature of liberal and illiberal dynamics, we propose to investigate where the 'political' lies in the daily work of the magistrates.



Panel sessions 5

Panel 5.1: Houses, homes and politics: Approaching shifting state-resident relations from the urban margins (part 2)

Chairs: Sven da Silva (Wageningen University & Research), and Martijn Koster (Wageningen University & Research)

Room: E0.14

Medellín from ‘Miracle’ to Commotion: Shifting residents’ perceptions of the State along the Metro de la 80

Sven da Silva (Wageningen University & Research)

This paper ethnographically examines the housing demolitions, compensation, and resettlement processes associated with the Metro de la 80 mobility intervention in Medellín, Colombia. While the infrastructural project aligns with the narrative of the city’s ‘miraculous’ transformation from violence to inclusive development – promoting a civic #metroculture that fosters pride and a sense of belonging in the city – it has also faced considerable opposition from local residents who are facing the loss of their homes and feel betrayed by elected officials. The implementation of the low-floor tramway along the 13-kilometre route necessitates the (partial) demolition of small commercial centres and residential areas, displacing hundreds of families. In addition, affected homeowners have criticised state compensation offers as significantly below market value, complicating their ability to secure alternative housing within the same neighbourhoods. This paper investigates the varied experiences of residents (homeowners and renters) from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, focusing on the interface between residents, social movements and a range of government bureaucracies, often mediated by violent actors. Viewing the Metro as a state-building initiative, it explores the types of state envisioned by different actors, providing insights into broader reconfiguration patterns of state and capitalism, which expresses itself through territorial (re)ordering, violence, and exploitation.

Liminal home-making: self-built housing and shifting belonging in Medellín

Tom King (Wageningen University & Research)

In this paper, I explore the meaning of home for residents of a dynamic ‘invasionary’ self-made neighbourhood in the Colombian city of Medellín. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork with community members, I examine how their homemaking practices and fluid attempts to (re)construct house and home, reflect both the local ‘politics of belonging’ and resident strategies to navigate it through both transgression and conformation. Self-made housing has been extensively studied across Latin America’s low-income urban neighbourhoods. Most studies are embedded in evolving political contexts, where the entanglement between home and state continues to change. This is especially true of Medellín, where low-income communities have experienced significant municipal-led interventions over the last thirty years, and where the city now markets itself as a global flagship of innovative, progressive, and inclusive community renewal. Yet, local peripheral experiences of house, home, and belonging reveal what could be conceived as an ongoing liminal existence. One where, regardless of state infrastructure, and at times even formal property legalization, people continue to live in an in-between space – one in which their houses and homemaking practices reflect an insecure social and political status of simultaneously belonging and not belonging to various degrees.

Shifting housing, shifting states. Ethnography of urban privileges and making of the state in Cape Verde

Giacomo Pozzi (IULM University)

What does privilege mean today? How does the distribution of privileges, the guarantee of their protection or the logics in redefining them contribute to the transformations of contemporary governance and statecraft? The anthropological literature has concentrated its efforts on understanding how shifts in state powers manifest themselves mainly by observing situations of oppression. With great difficulty, and sporadically, it has been able to focus its ethnographic attention about privilege. Within the framework of the ethnographic case of Mindelo, an Atlantic city located in the island of São Vicente, Cabo Verde, and starting from the analysis of the different forms that housing privilege acquires in that specific urban context, the paper reflects on the dialectic existing between the necessity of transforming (or not) privileges to transform (or not) the state. The case of Mindelo seems particularly appropriate for this purpose, given the strong impact that phenomena such as financialization, accelerated incoming (tourism) and outgoing (emigration) mobility, increasing social polarization, and demographic and climatic changes are having on this archipelagic state. In the light of these global macro processes, the proposal ethnographically looks on changes in housing conditions to understand the redefinition of the role, power and making of the state.

Panel 5.2: Shifting states and their histories in institutional care (part 2)

Chairs: Kristine Krause (University of Amsterdam), Mariusz Sapiecha (University of Amsterdam)

Caring not to Forget: Colonialism, Memory and Loss in Dutch Eldercare

Olivia Killias (University of Zürich)

Catering to the needs of older adults broadly defined as 'Indisch', most of them born and raised in the colonial Dutch East Indies, so-called Indisch nursing homes in The Netherlands have a long and colonially inflected history. Grounded in ethnographic research in and beyond one specific Indisch nursing home in a middle-sized Dutch town, in this presentation, I propose to zoom in on 'the past' as source of sociality and division in daily encounters between residents spending the end of their lives under one roof. Zooming in on daily life in the institution, I explore how care practices foster remembrance, how residents with dementia change the terms of what remembrance might mean, and more generally, how remembrance in late life is tied up with collective negotiations over the colonial past and questions of belonging and recognition in the postcolonial present.

Long gone but still present: how history shapes care for German-speaking seniors in former Sudetenland

Matouš Jelínek (University of Amsterdam)

In the former Sudeten regions of the Czech Republic, a new phenomenon of care homes catering to German seniors has arisen. These regions seemingly provide a perfect location for opening a care home due to cheap labour, services and available real estate in close proximity to Germany. However, these advantages start to become problems once the homes are set up and running. Competing with significantly higher salaries on the German side of the border, care homes struggle to attract qualified and German-speaking employees, resulting in critiques about low quality of care. Located in underprivileged regions shaped by turbulent histories of multiple national and ethnic population resettlements, care homes also struggle with limited regional infrastructures, and various socially and historically conditioned tensions. Using Hirschhausen et al.'s (2019) concept of phantom borders, I argue that 'German' histories, specifically the expulsion of the German population after World War II, create phantom spaces where the absence of Germans shapes everyday life and thus, the local care

landscape. Exploring how the histories are present in the realities of care homes catering for German seniors, this paper aims to address broader relationships between histories, their social consequences, and care.

From community care to The Big Society? Revisiting the Bulgarian deinstitutionalisation debate

Stoyanka Eneva (Linköping University), Mariya Ivancheva (Strathclyde University), Nely Konstantinova (University of Leeds), Stoyo Tetevenski (Sofia University)

The present paper revisits the Bulgarian debate about abandoning big state care homes and delegating care to 'small house' units in 'the community'. We triangulate the data from a qualitative study with 40 care workers across Bulgaria, group discussions with stakeholders, and a historical overview of the post-1989 institutional reforms. We trace how an anti-statist discourse combined with changing context as part of the EU accession, has resulted in the state withdrawal from a decades-long programme of institutional care, a.k.a. deinstitutionalisation. Scholarly and policy debate, however, has identified that significant flaws in this programme implementation has resulted in an 'reinstitutionalisation' in the sector (Mladenov & Petri 2020). Alternatives discussed usually involve a 'community based' model of care. We revisit this debate, discussing the rescaling of state provision of care in a post-socialist society marked by a yet new 'trouble with community' (Amit & Rapport 2002). We caution against the possible emergence of a Big Society care labour regime (O'Neil & Ivancheva f.c.): one in which the state abandons its role in care provision, only to outsource it to an (often underqualified) precarious aging feminised force, responsibilised to fill in the local gaps of a growing global care deficit.

History, entrepreneurship and absent welfare state – what shapes care landscape in Poland

Mariusz Sapieha (University of Amsterdam)

This paper, based on multi-sited ethnographic fieldwork, explores the rapid rise of private care homes in Poland over the past fifteen years. It examines regional differences in the development of this market and analyses how historical residua continue to shape the landscape of private care homes in the country. Furthermore, the paper investigates why institutions in certain regions have strategically targeted German clientele to ensure adequate resident numbers, and the roles that both the German and Polish states play in facilitating care relocation from Germany to Poland. By exploring the historical impact of shifting state borders over eighty years ago, the paper illustrates how these past changes continue to influence migration patterns and infrastructures – based on both of which care homes are being founded. Ultimately, looking into trajectories of institutions and people running and owning them, the paper argues that the quality and cost of care offered in these private organisations emerge at the intersection of state's absent presence and entrepreneurial practices, highlighting the ongoing role of the state despite the lack of a sufficient welfare system for institutional care.

Panel 5.3: Underground states: Theorising power from below (part 2)

Chairs: Jesse Jonkman (Utrecht University), Karolien van Teijlingen (Radboud University Nijmegen)

Underground water and opposition to the Lyon – Turin Tunnel: An agentive alliance?

Juliana Colonna (INRAE), Sylvain Le Berre (INRAE), Céline Granjou (INRAE)

Diverse controversies have surrounded the construction of a new tunnel through the Alps since the launch of the Lyon – Turin project in the 1980s. However, opposition has broadened after concerns were raised about the tunnel's impact on underground water, possibly affecting surface water. While the

exploitation of the underground itself does not appear to attract significant public interest, underground water in the Alps prompted media attention and reinforced opposition. While the State portrays underground flows as discrete and knowable, opponents argue that the underground water is part of a complex system connected to the surface. We argue that the agency of both underground water and social movements may be understood as an agentive alliance. This alliance constructs a counter-narrative to the State's narrative about the tunnel. When the State puts forward a narrative of accelerated flows and mobility, technical-industrial mastery and performance, social movements depict a tunnel that destroys underground and surface water connections, emptying the mountains of their waters. We suggest that this alliance may strike back at the aspirations of the State more forcefully than other aspects. This opens a discussion on the relations between water as the 'cause' of mobilization and water as a 'motif' of materiality.

Decarbonisation by securitisation: Shifting regimes of governance and violence at the Ecuadorian mining frontier

Karolien van Teijlingen (Radboud University Nijmegen), Diana Vela-Almeida (Utrecht University)

Current policies and initiatives for the transition towards a decarbonized future largely lean on the replacement of fossil fuels by renewable energy sources and the rapid electrification of transport and industry. While these technologies may reduce some of the world economy's carbon emissions, they depend on a suite of minerals, such as lithium, cobalt, copper and rare earth elements. This unchained a rush to secure an uninterrupted supply of these 'critical minerals', which is pushing new commodity frontiers into resource-rich regions in the global South. Here, they redraw landscapes and life-worlds in ways that reproduce global and local colonial structures of (slow) violence, which call into question the 'just' nature of the current policies towards a decarbonized future. Drawing on literature on critical geography and green colonialism, this paper explores this rather dark side of decarbonization policies by studying the recent push for mining in Ecuador. Based on a cartographic exploration of the expansion of large-scale mineral mining and an analysis of the discourses and governance interactions that emerge at this frontier, we contend that the growing global demand for minerals fuels the securitization of resource governance at the detriment of more participatory forms of governance. Particularly the past few years, Ecuador has seen a notable shift towards deregularization of the mining sector combined with an increased deployment of public forces, especially the military, and criminalization of dissent to facilitate the entrance of mining companies into territories inhabited by (indigenous) peasants. We conclude that the rush on transition minerals and the related 'decarbonization by securitization' at the mining frontier are worrisome developments that show the shortcomings of current decarbonization policies and that hamper a truly just transition.

Sensing the state deep in the mountains: A sensorial ethnography in Las Hermosas canyon, Colombia

Santiago Vargas Hernández (Independent researcher)

Recent studies of the state have shown the heterogeneous, multifaceted, and situational qualities of states. The state's varied forms, dynamics and materializations configure complex environments and webs of relationships from which nonhuman beings can no longer be conceptually excluded. Here I show that a relational ethnography can address those encounters and find tools to better understand them. Bringing my research experience in the Colombian Andes as a starter to elicit further discussion, I propose to study the state through multisensorial methodologies. My research focuses on a situation in which rural dwellers convened and shaped the state in daily correspondence with local nonhuman ecologies and infrastructures. I specifically focus on the role that underground infrastructures and waterbodies played in this process, and how I as a researcher, and my research participants as local dwellers, related with them. I argue that there are two pitfalls that we should avoid in a more-than-human anthropology of the state: (1) the romanticization of nonhuman beings, entanglements, webs of interactions, and different ontologies; (2) the obfuscation of the political, material, economic, and practical processes that generate inequalities.

Day 3 – 24 October 2025



Panel sessions 6

Panel 6.1: Inside intimate welfare, outside citizenship? Migration, inequality, and relational governance in European welfare states (part 1)

Chairs: Linda Haapajärvi (Tampere University), Flávio Eiró (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam)

Discussant: Eline Westra (Leiden University)

European migration policies today have as much to do with intimate relations and emotions as they do with rights and resources. National governments across the continent increasingly channel migrants – and their offspring – towards welfare programmes and projects that pull them into deep relationality with welfare professionals, other migrants, and native citizens. Following recent research on the rise of intimate welfare rationales in Europe, we conceptualize this novel *modus operandi* as relational governance of migration, made of public authorities' efforts to solve social problems attributed to immigration – unemployment, poverty, insecurity – by transforming the quantity, quality and configuration of the ties that connect migrants and minorities to their neighbourhoods and cities, to national economies and politics. Intimate welfare programmes operate by opening migrants' private lives for public examination and by turning their intimate relations and emotions into vectors of individual empowerment and social cohesion. This panel argues that this shift cannot be understood from the perspective of restrictive migration discourses and policies only, but must be examined in light of neoliberal reforms of European welfare states, among which we count investment in intimate welfare. Such schemes have become a strategic site for policy experimentation and change in European welfare states aspiring for brighter futures, more cost-efficient and impact-oriented ones. And yet, their outcomes remain understudied. This panel contributes to the on-going debate on relational governance's ambiguous effects from the perspective of migrant and minority publics and processes of inequality generation. It asks: Why is it that migrants' absorption in intimate welfare so often coexists with their exclusion from full citizenship? The panel is grounded in original empirical research conducted in four European countries – France, Italy, the Netherlands, and Switzerland that converge on the emergence of relational rationales of governing migration in the 2000's, but differ in their migration histories and welfare state structures. The case they examine come from different policy sectors and target publics – ranging from refugee reception in private homes to employment policies developed by start-up companies and to neighbourhood reform initiatives set in multiracial urban areas. They therefore form a fertile set of cases for thinking of commonalities and differences in the emergence, dynamics, and results of relational governance of migration across Europe.

Can the banlieue speak? Gendered and racialised injunctions to social and civic integration in Republican France

Alice Daquin (University of Amsterdam)

In this presentation, I examine how speech is mobilized as a tool for both social and civic integration of immigrant women in the French banlieues. Drawing on one year of ethnographic fieldwork conducted in social housing in Marseille (2021–2022), this talk is based on interviews and observations of everyday interactions between women of immigrant backgrounds and local welfare actors. First, I show how collective speaking initiatives in social centers, as well as public speeches delivered in front of politicians, have become key mechanisms through which welfare professionals evaluate women's integration.

Speaking French is perceived not only as a mean to help women navigate administrative procedures more effectively, but also as a way to guide them out of a supposedly oppressive domestic sphere and into an emancipatory public one. I then explore how postcolonial anxieties surrounding communautarisme shape the ways professionals assess women's speech-related activities. While many women appropriate these injunctions to speak, I show that non-mixed gatherings and emotionally expressive public speaking performances are often viewed with suspicion and criticized as insufficiently emancipatory. Ultimately, within the framework of French republicanism and neoliberal empowerment, I argue that the intimate welfare relationships designed to make women speak contribute to the reproduction of gendered and racialized representations.

Practising Belonging, Reproducing Borders: The Ambiguous Role of Youth Workers with Post-Migrant Youth in Milan.

Giovanni Antonio Albertinale (Università degli Studi di Milano)

This article adopts a Bourdesian perspective to account for the structurally ambiguous position of youth workers interacting with post-migrant youth in Milan. These youth workers operate within services aimed at fostering youth participation and the development of social and emotional competencies, usually in marginalized urban contexts. In this sense, they have developed a solidaristic habitus – characterized by care and a commitment to social justice – that manifests as a disposition to relational belonging. However, their structurally ambiguous position emerges from the tension between such solidaristic habitus and their position in the national field: on the one hand, their disposition to relational belonging translates into practices of multicultural sympathy and a more reflexive recognition of cultural differences as legitimate expressions of individual singularity. On the other hand, their position in the field of the nation – being predominantly white, middle-class, and without a migration background – also implicates them in the reproduction of a 'practical nationality': a tacit understanding of the 'right' way to be Italian. This often leads to the problematization of cultural differences that do not align with national norms. Ultimately, such problematization can give rise to forms of culturalism and symbolic violence, wherein these differences are attributed to entire cultures which are subsequently devalued.

Working with the neighbourhood: Reconfiguring lines of inclusion and exclusion in urban governance

Yannick Drijfhout (University of Amsterdam)

Dutch social policy adopts logics of governing-through-community, which results in neighborhood-focused policies wherein residents come to represent differentially desired communities. In this article, I focus on two residents who occupy such representative positions. I show how these residents hold contrasting positions vis-à-vis policy actors and social professionals that seek to collaborate with them. I uncover how the ambivalent role of community, as an object of fear and desire, in Dutch social policy materializes into differential lines of inclusion and exclusion. Whilst policy actors and social professionals legitimize and valorize the white resident as a community representative, the resident whose communal allegiances evoke fear for 'closed-off communities' is continuously contested. By ethnographically examining the ambiguous underlying dynamics, this paper sheds light on how ambivalent policy desires for governing-through-community produce classed and racialized inequalities in the minutiae of social policy and neighborhood life.

Panel 6.2: Understanding the state through (non-state) tree activism (part 1)

Chairs: Hosna Shewly (University of Amsterdam; Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam), Ellen Bal (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam), Erella Grassiani (University of Amsterdam)

In an era of contested sovereignties, shifting governance, and intensified environmental crises, this panel interrogates tree activism as a site for understanding state formation, power, and legitimacy. Trees and forests are more than ecological entities – they are deeply entangled in state-making processes, from colonial forestry policies to contemporary green capitalism, development projects, militarized conservation efforts and land occupations. As states extend authority through afforestation schemes, carbon offset programs, repressive conservation laws and destruction of forest for nationalist or economic gain, tree activism emerges as a counterforce, revealing alternative claims to land, sovereignty, and environmental governance. This panel interrogates the ways in which tree activism – ranging from Indigenous land claims to urban rewilding movements – illuminates the reconfiguration of state power in the face of contemporary crises. It considers how state actors appropriate ecological governance to bolster authoritarianism, securitize landscapes, and commodify nature while exploring how non-state actors contest, subvert, or negotiate these efforts. Examining cases from Africa, Latin America, Asia, and beyond, we ask: How do tree-related conflicts reveal fractures in state authority? In what ways do trees and forests serve as mediums of dissent, memory, or alternative governance? And how does tree activism reimagine relations between state, citizen, and environment? By bridging political anthropology, environmental governance, and critical state theory, this panel contributes to a broader understanding of the state's evolving role amid deepening social and ecological uncertainties.

Budjur, ouchar, neem and Ibni Adam – An interspecies analysis of the politico-environmental landscapes of the Chadian Guéra region

Alexander Waiblinger (Leipzig University), Enrico Ille (Leipzig University)

Drawing from four months of fieldwork in Chad's central Guéra province (January-April 2025), this paper explores the role of three widespread plant species (*Azadirachta indica* A.Juss., *Balanites aegyptiaca* (L.) Delile, and *Calotropis procera* (Aiton) Dryand) in the region's socio-political and ecological landscape. In a setting where the livelihoods of many (semi-)rural people can be characterized by high degrees of fragility and vulnerability, the study examines how and why these species are (or are not) valued by humans. This concerns how they can be directly utilized (as resources for food, medicine or economic gain), but also how they fit into socio-ecological relations of Ibni Adam ('children of Adam'), such as the regional identification of people as Hadjerai. In this sense, variable human-plant relations are expressions of intricacies of interactions in the more-than-human environment. Consequently, they also reflect the variability of powers that seek to induce changes to such relations under volatile conditions. Although large parts of the Chadian Guéra region currently remain relatively stable amidst multiple political, ecological, and humanitarian crises in other parts of the country, we are showing how small disruptions – such as poor rainfall or cattle disease – can easily push people beyond their delicate subsistence balance. Such disruptions, together with long-term pressures such as change in the climate, demographic growth, and extensive resource utilization, often lead to an increased exploitation of directly accessible resources like (fuel)wood. Within such dynamics, the limited capacity and interest of the highly centralized, militarized and authoritarian Chadian central government in implementing ecological policies (or other welfare initiatives) become apparent. Instead, NGOs increasingly take on the environmental responsibilities of the state, revealing how environmental politics function – or fail to function – on the ground. By placing the three selected plant species in the centre of the analysis of human livelihoods, this paper illustrates how their socio-economic utility and embeddedness, or lack thereof, rather than formal state legislation, largely prevent their overexploitation. Ultimately, we argue that such mutual interspecies analysis highlights how (struggles over) landscapes can be shaped by small-scale socio-ecological interactions, e.g. between humans and plants, rather than large-scale political interventions that are currently (more or less successfully) implemented in many parts of the Sahel.

Mapping Adivasi Resistant Movements and the Shifting States Policy of the State: An Empirical Study from India

Kasi Eswarappa (Indira Gandhi National Tribal University)

India is the land of tribal or Adivasi communities, consisting of 8.6% of its population. Tribes have been closely related to the forests, and their life and livelihood depends on the availability of forest resources in India. Forest eco-systems are crucial for biodiversity, watershed protection and the livelihoods of the marginal and the vulnerable communities belong to the tribes of India. Tribes have a symbiotic relationship with the forests as they were co-existed with the forest and are integral to the survival and sustainability of the ecological system. The role of the state in the development process of these groups is very crucial in implementing its forest policies and which in a way helps the tribes and Adivasis to utilize for their betterment. Instead, the state with the concept of eminent domain is discriminating the tribes in their own vicinities which are causing lots of resistance in across the tribal regions of India. In the paper an attempt is made to bring those resistance movements along with the policies of PESA & FRA 2006 to benefit the tribal communities of India. The FRA 2006 Act aspires to undo years of injustice to these communities by recognizing and vesting the rights to use, manage and conserve forest resources and to legally hold forest lands that they have been residing and cultivating in for years. By using the concept of eminent domain framework, we tried to analyze the forest policies of the state and its impact and response of the tribal communities and how far these dilemmas have led to the crucial ramifications on the lives and livelihoods of these social groups inhabiting in the tribal hinterlands of India.

The Tree and the State: Spectacular Greening and Subversive Ecologies in Bangladesh

Hosna Shewly (University of Amsterdam, and Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam)

This paper explores the symbolic politics of environmental governance in Bangladesh through the lens of spectacular statecraft. In a context marked by deforestation, ecological degradation, and contested land regimes, the state performs environmental responsibility through orchestrated tree-planting campaigns, greening rituals, and climate rhetoric. These highly visible spectacles – circulated via ministerial photo-ops, NGO partnerships, and media coverage – construct a façade of ecological care while deflecting attention from extractive development, militarized conservation, and Indigenous dispossession. Drawing on theories of spectacle (Debord 1967) and the performative state (Mitchell 1991; Gupta 1995), the paper conceptualizes the tree as a symbolic artefact anchoring narratives of sustainability and moral governance. This green statecraft, entangled with authoritarian environmentalism, legitimizes state control and land appropriation under the guise of conservation. Yet such spectacles are contested. Indigenous activists, youth climate collectives, and civil society groups mobilize counter-narratives that expose the dispossessive logic of state-led greening. The Save the Sundarbans Movement exemplifies such resistance, confronting the ecological and social costs of projects like the Rampal coal power plant. By placing state spectacle in dialogue with grassroots activism, the paper advances critical debates on legitimacy, resistance, and environmental authority in postcolonial South Asia.

Contested Forests: State Authority and Local Resistance in Iran's Grazing Ban

Mona Jormand (Erasmus University Rotterdam), Mahsa Jormand (University of Ottawa)

Iran's 2002 forest grazing ban, imposed as an environmental protection measure, restructured the relationship between the state and Gilan's pastoral communities. While intended to curb deforestation, its top-down enforcement ignored local ecological knowledge and economic dependencies, leading to economic hardship, displacement, and covert resistance – such as nighttime grazing and falsified permits. This study, based on ethnographic fieldwork and policy analysis, examines how pastoralists navigate state power through everyday acts of environmental resistance. Some acquire adaptive strategies like agroforestry and eco-tourism, while others entirely subvert conservation laws. These micro-resistances, though fragmented, expose the limits of state control and shape alternative governance models rooted in hybrid ecological-economic systems. By framing forests as contested

political spaces, this paper argues that environmental policy often produces unintended consequences, fueling quiet yet persistent challenges to state legitimacy. Centering Gilan's pastoralists as reluctant environmental actors, this research contributes to debates on environmental governance, demonstrating how state policies, even when framed as apolitical conservation efforts, can generate complex socio-political transformations. Keywords: Up down environmental policy, everyday resistance, political ecology, Iran, forest governance.

Panel 6.3: Software and shifting formations of sovereignty: Scrutinising digital public infrastructures

Chairs: Bidisha Chaudhuri (University of Amsterdam), Nafis Hasan (University of Amsterdam), Tanja Hendriks (Leiden University)

Digital technologies have become integral tools for state governance. States use them for example to store and compile population data, record and monitor land ownership, target disaster relief interventions, and to roll out welfare projects for specific groups of beneficiaries. The digitalization of states has evolved along with the advancement of technologies and has recently experienced an infrastructural turn. Through this turn, the focus has shifted from using (digital) technologies for case-based solutions to instead create large scale software systems within which multiple solutions can be offered in a modular basis while being tied to the same software environment. These changes are loosely described under the term of Digital Public Infrastructures (DPIs). The development of these DPIs is however not per se state-led: some states desire to use DPIs to follow global trends of technological mediation, whereas others are pressured into adopting them by development or humanitarian actors, or philanthropy-tech entrepreneurs. Unpacking how DPIs are created, developed, exported and used across different country-contexts, this panel explores how state formations and sovereignty shift in the process and to what effects.

A right to climate finance: Imagining climate futures and the role of the state through digital public infrastructures and financial technology in global development discourse

Tim van de Meerendonk (Leiden University)

Development experts and scholars broadly agree that climate change disproportionately affects poor populations in the global South. In recent years, Inclusive Green Finance (IGF) has gained momentum as a way to equip climate-vulnerable individuals with the means to respond to this uncertainty via insurance, credit, and other financial products. However, a recent UN report states that '[...] more than four out of five of the world's unbanked adults, totaling more than 1 billion people, reside in the most climate-vulnerable economies.', leading to a central preoccupation of financial organizations and national governments to plug people into formal banking systems. Digital public infrastructure is key to this transformation. Proponents like United Nations Secretary-General's Special Advocate for Inclusive Finance, Queen Máxima of the Netherlands, assert that 'if we want inclusive fintech to help build climate resilience, the right [digital] infrastructure needs to be in place.'. Public financial infrastructure thus becomes an important medium through which climate adaptation is instantiated for those most at risk. Making people responsible for their own climate risks through Inclusive Green Finance and digital infrastructure, then, has the potential to reshape encounters that people have with the state. In this paper I explore what we can learn from these interactions where digital financial infrastructure is increasingly envisioned to be a central way in which people are expected to deal with the state in areas suffering the effects of climate change.

DPI for Digital Inclusion and Sovereignty: ‘Infrastructuring’ Software for Digital Africa

Bidisha Chaudhuri (University of Amsterdam), Nafis Hasan (University of Amsterdam), Tanja Hendriks (Leiden University)

Digital Public Infrastructures (DPI) built on the India Stack model of infrastructural layers of identity, payment and data exchange has become a popular model of software export from India to many countries in Africa. DPIs draw critical attention for two of its specific claims: first, instead of the old-world model of one-size-fit-all technology transfers, it claims to be standard-setting for an efficient and inclusive governance platform; second, it claims to be an answer to Big Tech onslaught of data colonialism by allowing the state to take control of its software infrastructure. In this paper, we address both these claims by exploring the standard-setting process of the software platforms and their infrastructuring into a specific country-context in Africa. We ask, who set the standards for these infrastructures, who funds them, who gets to design and implement them and finally, who own them and who control them. In answering these questions, we will draw on interview data from our ongoing fieldwork across India, Mozambique and Malawi including technologists, bureaucrats, policymakers, philanthropists, aid-workers, representatives from international and local civil society organizations and researchers. The aim of this paper is to understand the socio-material bases on which claims around DPIs are formulated.

‘Old wine in a new bottle’: realigning public-private concerns in Digital Public Infrastructuring

Alena Thiel (IT University of Copenhagen, Technologies in Practice)

This article maps the evolution of Digital Public Infrastructures (DPI) in two global south contexts, India and Ghana. Mobilizing these two cases, we observe how the model of digital public infrastructure promotes a shift away from technology transfer towards domestic innovation (e.g. in identification and addressing systems), and their projected impact on health, telecommunication, and entrepreneurship. We advance that narrative representations of DPI as home-grown and inclusive conceal the global entanglement of DPIs, and sustain a false dichotomy of public and private concerns which in reality do not feature as ‘uncontroversial’ givens (cf. Suchman 2023). To unpack this observation, we propose a view rooted in Wahlberg’s (2022) ‘assemblage ethnography’ to analyze the ‘economy of worth’ around Digital Public Goods and their work of realigning competing yet blurred values (public/private, domestic/foreign) of digital public infrastructuring.

The paradox of digital sovereignty: unpacking discourses on ‘digital sovereignty’ and the ‘public’ in Digital Public Infrastructure development in the EU and the ‘Global South’

Janine Patricia Santos (University College London)

Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) has become a ‘buzzword’ in developing global digital strategies (UNDP 2025). In the EU, this strategic obsession with DPIs is closely tied to claims to ‘digital sovereignty’ (Adler-Nissen & Eggeling 2024), as digital infrastructures have taken on a geopolitical turn given the EU’s increasing dependency on US and China-backed Big Tech. DPIs are seen as latent solutions to the EU’s so-called crisis as a ‘digital colony’ (Bria 2025) – wherein open source platforms, interoperable decentralised networks (such as the ‘fediverse’), and the ‘Eurostack’ are seen as viable alternatives to regain control over people’s data, digital rights and digital infrastructures. In contrast to this rather Eurocentric understanding of DPIs, digital infrastructure development in the Global South remains largely dependent on private-public partnerships. DPI initiatives are often state-led while being heavily reliant on private and/or foreign investment, blurring the lines between the ‘public’ and the ‘private’ in digital infrastructure development. At the same time, citizens make and remake infrastructures through their vernacular engagements with new technologies (Santos 2023), confronting the challenges of accessing digital infrastructures and making them more pronounced in their

materiality. This paper unpacks the discourses surrounding DPIs and 'digital sovereignty' through a comparative analysis of DPI strategies in the EU and other countries in the Global South, such as Togo, India and the Philippines. It seeks to facilitate discussions on how DPIs are complex systems embedded in the material conditions within which they are developed, and problematize the concepts of 'sovereignty', 'dependency', '(neo)colonialism', and the 'public' within the constitution of 'digital infrastructures' itself.

Panel 6.4: State affects

Chair: Nienke Boesveldt (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam)

The production and documentation of the writing practices at Portugal's airport border: Emotions, Affects, and Bureaucratic Management of Foreign Travelers

Mafalda Carapeto (University of Lisbon)

Are emotions and affects an integral component of the bureaucratic work performed by immigration officers? How do they shape and substantiate the decision-making processes when these officers engage with foreign nationals? This paper aims to explore the experiences of travelers intercepted at the first line of control at one of Portugal's airport borders, where I conducted uninterrupted ethnographic fieldwork from June 2021 to April 2022 with inspectors from the Portuguese Immigration and Borders Service, across various groups, shifts, and functions. Particular attention will be given to the different levels of interaction among the various actors involved in the decision-making process, including the inspectors, travelers, hosts, airline companies, and others. Simultaneously, this study seeks to reflect on the administrative, moral, and emotional management mechanisms that inform the daily production of paper trails (Horton & Heyman, 2020) related to documentation and bureaucratic digital records. Specifically, it addresses the interception form, the occurrence report, and the drafting of information in back-office procedures. These documents are essential for understanding how state bureaucracies are enacted in practice. The objective is to critically examine the emotional and affective dynamics at play, as well as the effects and powers mobilized through the practices of writing and documentation.

Paper Citizens: Bureaucratic Documentation and the Politics of Belonging in Greece

Katerina Rozakou (Panteion University of Social and Political Sciences)

This paper explores the new Greek naturalization system and discusses the growing emphasis on standardized assessments and documentary evidence. The new naturalization system aligns with prevailing trends in Western naturalization systems, particularly the growing reliance on documents and the skillification of citizenship. Applicants are reduced to a set of measurable, depersonalized data. Integration is increasingly reduced to a series of documented tekmeria (evidence), produced through state bureaucratic systems of hyper-inscription and hyper-documentation. Applicants' personal motivations and desires for citizenship remain unknown, effectively erasing the affective dimensions of citizenship and transforming the relationship between the prospective citizen and the state into an impersonal interaction. These reforms mirror the shift towards greater dependence on documentation, measurement, and quantification, which predominate in the broader neoliberal reorganization of the Greek state, alongside a dominant official rhetoric of transparency, accountability, standardization, and objectivity. In this paper, I draw upon research with citizenship directorate employees and citizenship applicants to discuss what types of citizens the new system accommodates and who is considered desirable and accepted into the body politic. Documents are not simply passive records but active instruments of state control, used to shape the boundaries of belonging. Ultimately, the paper examines how these practices reflect broader shifts in conceptions of belonging and citizenship.

The cruel optimism of the Norwegian welfare state

Synnøve Bendixsen (University of Bergen), Ann Cathrin Corrales-Øverlid
(University of Bergen)

This presentation discusses how the Norwegian welfare state and labor market regulations contribute to creating precarious working conditions and lives. The welfare state promises that everyone can live a good life if they contribute to the welfare state through work and taxes. Simultaneously, inclusion in the welfare state is based on meeting certain criteria (such as legal residence) and performing work recognized by the state as employment. This creates particular challenges for migrants, including EU migrants and refugees. We call this dynamic the cruel optimism of the welfare state. The Norwegian labor market has been known as safe and regulated. Yet, in recent years the way work and the labor market are organized have changed. We suggest that the welfare state produces and maintains precarious working conditions, despite politicians' argument of doing the opposite. Drawing on fieldwork in three sectors, gig-economy, construction and cleaning, we discuss the increase of insecure jobs and increasingly precarious working conditions where migrants are particularly vulnerable. We argue that precarious working conditions are partly shaped by political measures and implementation, such as labor activation policies, workfare policy, the integration regime, and welfare state bordering, with consequences for people's lives and trust in the welfare state.

Commodification of Patriotism: State-run Grant Competitions for Youth in Contemporary Russia

Ekaterina Donskikh (University of Oslo)

The conventional understanding of autocratisation often centres on macro-level political structures and elite decision-making. Yet the endurance of authoritarian power also depends on everyday practices, values, and social interactions among citizens. To move beyond these limitations in studying autocratisation, I delve into the social world of the Russian youth. Focusing on the grant infrastructure administered by the Federal Agency for Youth Affairs, this study examines how young people who participate in state-run grants competitions contribute to the sustainment of authoritarianism and militarism in Russia. Drawing on digital interviews with grant applicants and analysis of the online grant platform, I argue that the legitimization of war is not necessarily ideological but is instead structured through market-like relations embedded in the state-run grant system. When applying for a state grant, young people enter into contractual relations with the state: they receive funding in exchange for promoting patriotic agendas set by the grant calls. Simultaneously, the 'banal' and 'civic' character of grant-giving process makes youth participation depoliticised, framing it as an entrepreneurial and moral act of care towards fellow citizens rather than as political engagement. As such, the banalisation of militarism diffuses state power into everyday life and demonstrates how marketised practices of youth participation help to legitimise, extend, and stabilise the prevailing wartime order in Russia by turning patriotism into a commodity.



Panel sessions 7

Panel 7.1: Inside intimate welfare, outside citizenship? Migration, inequality, and relational governance in European welfare states (part 2)

Chairs: Linda Haapajärvi (Tampere University), Flávio Eiró (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam)

Discussant: Eline Westra (Leiden University)

Refugees' integration through 'soft skills'. The ambiguities of a start-up's relations-focused techniques of labour market integration

Ulysse Bical (SciencesPo Paris)

This article addresses recent changes in French integration policy for newly arrived immigrants. In 2018, the French Interministerial Committee for Integration prioritised refugees as a target group for integration policy, emphasising employment measures as the primary means of advancing their integration. The Committee also increased the delegation of policy production to non-state actors, encouraging 'innovative solutions.' My research is based on an ethnographic investigation of Inlusio, a start-up that has rapidly become a key player in French integration policies by securing significant funding from both public and private institutions. In practice, Inlusio offers refugees not only French-language classes but also skills training that distinguishes between 'hard' and 'soft' skills. While 'hard' skills focus on technical competencies related to specific jobs, 'soft' skills emphasise interpersonal abilities. I will focus on the 'soft skills' training sessions, where immigrants are instructed on how to conform to a set of behavioural norms deemed essential for their access to and success in the labour market. The perceived cultural distance from the new work environment is framed as a consequence of migration and seen as the primary reason for refugees' struggles in the job market. The training in soft skills places the responsibility onto them to overcome these challenges by conforming to gendered and racialised norms associated with lower positions in the professional hierarchy. Refugees' reactions to these sessions are notably mixed, ranging from enthusiasm to complete disinterest.

Between Solidarity and the State: Relational governance and the institutionalisation of refugee private hosting initiatives in France and Switzerland

Camilla Alberti, Louise Hombert & Marion Fresia (University of Neuchâtel)

Since 2015, amid Europe's 'refugee reception crisis,' individual and collective initiatives offering accommodation and support to refugees have gained increased significance. While not unprecedented, these 'intimate' engagements have become progressively institutionalized. Initially informal, these initiatives – often led by civil society organizations (CSOs) and increasingly supported or mandated by the state – are now viewed by public authorities as a way to foster refugee integration while alleviating pressure on public reception systems (Luccioni, 2024; UNHCR, 2024). Focusing on 4 associations implementing private accommodations programs in France – this paper explores what we call associative intermediation-the everyday work performed by associations to facilitate, structure, and sustain citizen hosting. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork, the article analyzes how associations enact a form of relational governance, organizing personalized forms of care and integration outside the rigidity of traditional bureaucratic frameworks. Far from being neutral intermediaries, associations emerge as active agents who navigate and negotiate institutional norms, manage social boundaries, and mediate affective and political tensions. This intermediation produces ambivalent effects on the hosting

relationship: while it fosters alternative, humanized forms of hospitality and integration, it also contributes to the reproduction of state border regime and social expectations around what it means to 'welcome' and 'integrate' properly.

Ambivalent relations: Immigrant welfare workers in France's state-outsourced field of asylum

Tessa Bonduelle (University of Amsterdam)

This paper explores outsourced welfare from the understudied perspective of immigrant welfare workers. As French not-for-profit organisations compete to become 'operators' of state welfare projects, they find themselves beholden to the state logics of short-term 'emergency' programming and efficiency. Accordingly, operators use short-term labour contracts to manage uncertain human resource needs. They also come to see immigrants as particularly suitable for welfare work in the field of asylum: their linguistic competencies promise to make relations with beneficiaries more 'fluid.' Based on 12 months of participant observation and interviews in an emergency shelter for asylum seekers and refugees on the outskirts of Paris, I ask what hiring immigrant workers in state-outsourced welfare produces, and what it can tell us about relational governance and the inclusionary promises of welfare. First, I show how operators' attempts to shape relations within emergency shelters by hiring immigrants – many with degrees from French universities – brings these welfare workers into exacerbated forms of precarity. On top of economic uncertainty, the practice of hiring short-term produces legal precarity for workers whose immigration status depends on job contracts. Highly-qualified immigrant workers thus perform the unvalued labour of supporting asylum seekers and refugees, even as they themselves navigate the French migration regime. Second, I examine the ambivalent relations that subsequently unfold. In their work with asylum seekers and refugees, immigrant workers must negotiate real and perceived proximity, including shared experiences of 'foreignness.' Relations thus become deeply affectively charged, prompting some to use distancing tactics to distinguish their social positions.

Panel 7.2: The state and the city

Chair: Alice Daquin (University of Amsterdam)

Making Room for the Future. Demolition of Soviet Housing and State Legibility in Kohtla-Järve, Estonia

Francisco Martínez (University of Murcia)

This paper discusses how the demolition of Soviet housing has been undertaken by different stakeholders in Kohtla-Järve, a town developed in relation to intensive mining during the Soviet period. The regeneration-by-demolition pilot is presented as a matter of public concern by the Estonian state, thus politically loaded by reordering local infrastructure and ideas according to the normative central gaze (Scott 1998). The project was meant to act as a normative intervention that would influence how people organize their daily life while rehearsing policy models to be applied elsewhere. The demolition-based regeneration entailed a move away from something half-known toward something else that remains unclear – since market forces are supposed to finish the work initiated by institutions in the testing project. Alas, the hope for bottom-up involvement of residents was not always met and they felt as being part of a social laboratory. Likewise, the intervention has been rendered as apolitical by municipal officials, while refusing the attributed categorization of 'shrinking.' The reception of this pilot by different agents has thus been complex, showing an acute difference in the understanding of local needs and the purposes of the enacted demolition policy experiment between national policymakers, experts, local officials, and residents.

Shifting Ideology: When Social Inclusion Gives in to Livability in Urban Renewal Policies

Catherine Polishchuk (University of Vienna)

The Austrian capital Vienna is internationally known for its livability. This is reflected in the municipality holding the number one position in several global rankings (e.g. Quality of Living City Ranking). An important element that factors into this international reputation are the city's urban renewal policies of which upgrading housing units is an essential ingredient. These policies discursively build on the legacy of 'Red Vienna' of the 1920s and raise the standard of living. However, in conjunction with ever increasing inter-urban competition, improved standards of living become ever more exclusive – despite being presented as 'for all'. Paradoxically, inclusionary political slogans such as 'affordable housing for all', stemming from another political era, today serve to depoliticize the issue at stake and cover up inequalities rather than to combat them. While the standard of living continues to rise, access to the new standard is re-written along socioeconomic lines. My contribution demonstrates a re-bourgeoisement of the political process (Keil 2009) by scrutinizing state institutional practices aimed at social inclusion in housing policies. Based on my ethnographic engagement with a public agency central to the alleged Viennese approach of urban renewal, I scrutinize shifts in the ideological clockwork of institutional agency.

Maintaining the future of 'Nusantara': Fragile Planning and State's Gesture in the Development of Indonesia's New Capital City

Mangala Ismanto (University of Amsterdam)

A plethora of uncertainty accompanies the development process of the future of Indonesia's capital city, Nusantara. Some factors will influence the city's development and contribute to fragile planning, including political and economic conditions or the project cycle. As the city's project currently exists in a development phase or 'in-betweenness' temporality (Carse & Kneas, 2019), it is difficult to predict its end, as it remains an open future. Yet, it would be premature to conclude that this capital city will become a failed, abandoned, or unfinished project, considering the state's ongoing efforts to revive its potential. In this sense, the state aims to demonstrate a 'gesture' to prevent the loss of future possibilities and signal its continuity (Weszkalnys, 2016). Thus, this paper will examine how the state attempts to reassure the public that the project will continue despite its challenges and uncertainties. The state showcases its vision for the city, highlights achievements, and assures political support by engaging in social practices, such as exhibitions, performances, and narratives, to maintain the development of the future capital city.

Shifting Gazes of the Security State: Street Cameras Navigating Migrant-Background Antwerp Youth, and Vice-Versa

Samuel van der Straeten (University of Cambridge)

In Antwerp, as in other cities, public spaces are crucial leisure spots for many youths. Especially among lower-income and migrant-background youths living in tiny homes with large families and excluded from mainstream leisure activities, a neighborhood square is often conceived as their 'backyard.' Yet, in the context of urban regeneration, youths 'hanging out' in public spaces is increasingly regarded as a security problem. Governmental bodies address this 'problem' through various repressive measures. Doing so, they increasingly 'shift' toward the use of street cameras. Antwerp in particular has Belgium's most extensive camera network, concentrated around 'high-risk neighborhoods.' This paper investigates migrant-background youths' experiences of and engagements with street cameras in one such neighborhood, Borgerhout. While some Borgerhout residents feel secure or unaffected by surveillance cameras, for these youth, the cameras generate a profound sense of insecurity: they are 'angry eyes,' specifically targeting them. Building on group conversations and interviews conducted while walking through Borgerhout's camera-surveilled streets and squares, it exposes how cameras and their 'gaze' interpellate migrant-background youths in a racialized-cum-stigmatized position. Further, it explores

how cameras, consequently, influence the way these youths move through, hang out in, and counter-surveil their neighborhood, as well as relate themselves to 'the state.'

Panel 7.3: Visible and invisible threats and expectations and the state in the Guianas

Chairs: Leonidas Oikonomakis (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam), Eva Koemar (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam), Marjo de Theije (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam)

This panel proposes to explore the visible and invisible threats and expectations connected to resource extractivism in the Guianas (mainly Guyana and Suriname), where recent oil discoveries add to histories of bauxite – and gold mining. Offshore on the muddy coast of Suriname and Guyana, one of the world's most significant oil and gas discoveries has been witnessed lately: some 18 billion barrels. The findings generated high hopes by political actors and the general population alike in both countries and dreams of economic progress and access to wealth, even before a drop of oil was extracted. The extraction started in Guyana in 2019 and is projected to initiate in Suriname in 2028. At the same time, the muddy coasts of Guyana and Suriname are already below sea level, and according to some models, they may find their capital cities under water in the coming decade due to the expected sea level rise that is directly related to the increased CO₂ emissions of the Anthropocene. Within this context, several visible and invisible threats can be identified: geopolitical, ecological, social inequality, and economic. The state's role in managing these threats and expectations is multifaceted and critical. The state must manage the boom-and-bust cycles associated with resource extraction. Both Guyana and Suriname governments are tasked with balancing the economic benefits of resource extraction with the environmental and social costs. This involves creating and enforcing regulations that ensure sustainable practices, negotiating with multinational corporations to secure fair deals for their countries, and addressing the concerns of local communities that are often most affected by extractivism. The relationship between extractivism and the state in the Guianas is complex and fraught with challenges. The state plays a crucial role in managing the visible and invisible threats associated with resource extraction, and its actions will determine the future trajectory of Guyana and Suriname. This panel proposes to delve deeper into these issues and explore how governments navigate this intricate landscape to achieve sustainable and equitable development. Will the revenues from resource extraction promote long-term development and not be squandered on short-term gains?

Gold and oil abundance and the state. The case of Suriname.

Marjo de Theije (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam)

Suriname's economy is based on abundant natural resources, with mining accounting for nearly half of public sector revenue. Gold is the first most exported product, representing over three-quarters of total exports. Of all gold produced, about one-third comes from small-scale mining. While this sector is vital to the national economy, it remains largely informal for many, partly state apparatus related reasons. In the next few years, an oil boom will take place. How will the state deal with this natural resource?

Acting as if the sea levels would never rise: oil, carbon markets, climate crisis and the State in Guyana.

Leonidas Oikonomakis (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam)

The myth of El Dorado depicted the Guianas as places of unimaginative wealth, connecting that wealth with gold in the minds of 16th century Spaniards and Portuguese, and 17th century English, Dutch, and French explorers and conquistadors. Five centuries later, El Dorado would become black and would smell like oil: more than 11 billion barrels of crude oil have been discovered offshore post-colonial Guyana making it one of the rising stars in the petro-States race. Guyana is at the same time one of the first candidates to find its capital, Georgetown, and much of its coast underwater within the next 10 years (the most alarming predictions speak of the next 5 years). Of course, sea-level rise is related to CO₂ emissions that are produced by burning fossil fuels and the 11 billion barrels Guyana has started extracting will speed up its own sinking underwater. On top of that, the country's President is boasting

for net-zero CO2 emissions and is actively encouraging the sale of Guyanese credits in the global carbon market. How is the State dealing with the environmental threat of sea-level rise though? Is it even on the policy table? And how are the citizens of Guyana dealing with the fact that they may have to become some of the world's first climate refugees very very soon?

Promises Without Time – The Crisis of Long-Term Governance in a Petro-State To-Be

Eva Koemar (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam)

In 2020, the discovery of significant offshore oil reserves off the Surinamese coast was heralded by the newly installed Santokhi administration as a national turning point – the promised exit from a deepening economic crisis. Yet among Paramaribo-based entrepreneurs, optimism is notably muted. What emerges instead is a pervasive skepticism: not of the resource itself, but of the state's capacity and willingness to manage it in the interest of long-term national development. In Suriname, as in many post-colonial societies, the notion of long-term planning often collapses under the weight of immediate urgencies, personal networks of influence, and low institutional trust. Against this backdrop, oil is not just a resource, but also a lens to examine the relationship between trust and long-term vision in governance. This paper interrogates how trust (or its absence) mediates the relationship between state actors, private enterprise, and the imagined future. It argues that Suriname's resource politics are best understood through a critical anthropology of state temporality, in which time, trust, and power are contested and entangled terrains.

Panel 7.4: Local government in Indonesia

Chair: Freek Colombijn (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam)

Since the Decentralisation Law of 1903, local governments in both the (colonial) past and present have assumed a growing role in Indonesia. Both appointed civil servants and elected governors and mayors tend to present themselves as the heart of local governance. In this panel, we will explore the pretences of the state and check them against the lived experience of citizens. How can possible discrepancies between state and citizens' perceptions of the state role be explained? What strategic interests may the state have to either inflate or, conversely, downplay its role? If and when the state does not live up to what is usually expected from a state, what other actors step into the void? The paper welcomes both theoretical contributions and more empirical studies, and case studies could focus on such diverse topics as waste management, development of tourism, flood control, policing and surveillance, health care, education, and so forth.

Assessing Public Participation Model: RPTRA Development Process in Jakarta, Indonesia

Daisy Indira Yasmine (Universitas Indonesia; Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam), Riena J. Surayuda (Oxfam in Indonesia)

Public participation is regarded as a crucial indicator in democratic systems. At the local government level, it has also become one of the requirements for planning and implementing public policy. This paper examines the implementation of a social learning process model in public participation. The actors, their relationships, and multistakeholder involvement are important factors in this context. Previous studies have addressed the mainstreaming issue regarding the importance of public participation in the decision-making process, which includes various actors. However, there have not been many studies that treat public participation as a process in which different actors interact and negotiate with one another. It is important not only to consider the degree of participation but also to manage the relationships between actors. This article is based on the case study of the Jakarta RPTRA (Ruang Publik Terpadu Ramah Anak) policy, which has been in place since 2015. The method used is a qualitative approach: participatory action research. Our findings show that certain points need to be

taken into consideration to make public participation a source of community empowerment, such as the ritualization of public participation, vested interests among actors, and conflict escalation in the local community.

Economic Struggle along The River in Surabaya

Linggar Rama Dian Putra, Universitas Airlangga (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam)

This study aims to elaborate the intertwined the local government effort in Surabaya to make use the river that simultaneously strengthens its governance. The Surabaya municipal government, especially during the reign of the last two mayors, was one of the most powerful actors with ideas about the way to exploit the river economically. For the municipal government, the economic potential of the river lies in the development of tourism. The idea to develop tourism on and along the Kalimas was inspired by similar riverine tourism in some global cities such as London, Paris, and Singapore. The realization of tourism occurs in line with the development of good governance and the strong bureaucratic machine of the municipal government of Surabaya. The strong bureaucratic machine influences the realization of the river tourism program through the distribution of tasks to the related municipal agencies. Having bureaucratic support, the municipal government runs the river tourism by engaging external parties, including Surabaya-based navy, companies, and small-scale enterprises. For the municipal government, the Kalimas River is not only a source of income but also the catalyst of small-scale 'legal' business.

State views on municipal waste collection in Surabaya, Indonesia

Freek Colombijn (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam)

Municipal governments usually claim that the collection and disposal of household waste is their responsibility. When and where waste is not collected, for instance because of system failures or a strike at the cleansing department, citizens look at the municipal government to solve the issue and can blame the government for not doing it. This paper is a case study of household waste collection in Surabaya, a city that enjoys a reputation, both in Indonesia and among international experts, of being administered in exemplary manner. Civil servants claim an important role for the municipal administration in waste collection, supplemented with a public-private partnership of the landfill management. In contrast to the civil servants' claim, empirical study on the ground shows that the role of the state is limited, and an informal waste recycle chain is important. The paper compares state views with actual waste flows and tries to give an answer why the municipality gives such an inflated view of both its own role and of the alleged success of the public-private partnership.

Contested Decentralisation: Elite Politics and Governance in Indonesia's Remote Periphery

Leolita Masnun (National Research and Innovation Agency, Indonesia)

This paper examines how decentralization reforms in post-Suharto Indonesia have reshaped governance in Maluku Barat Daya (MBD), a remote island district in eastern Indonesia. While national policymakers framed decentralization as a tool for democratization and equitable development, the reality in MBD reveals a more complex dynamic of elite competition and administrative fragmentation. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork from 2018 to 2019, I analyze how the process of pemekaran wilayah (administrative splitting) has become a key arena for contentious politics in this region. The study demonstrates how local elites have strategically manipulated decentralization policies to create new districts, not to improve public services as intended but to concentrate political power and economic resources.

Where the State Comes and Goes: Contingent Statehood and Urban Marginality in Coastal Jakarta

Wenjing Qiu (Leiden University)

Employing the Timothy Mitchell's construct 'state effect' (2006:169-186) and the relational approach of 'stategraphy' (Thelen, Vetter, and von Benda-Beckmann, 2018), this research aims to examine the problematic practices of the state and community perceptions of the state effect in Indonesian cities at a micro level. Enlightened by 2023–2025 fieldwork in and around a coastal settlement in North Jakarta, this paper focuses on how community residents view the 'contingent statehood' (Vetter, 2018:20-37). The state marginalizes kampung residents in the coastal settlement yet meanwhile shows intimacy with selected neighborhood dwellers in this settlement by deliberately presenting the policing forces and oligarch's patronage. This erodes the local common will to form a cohesive mass organization to fight against the upcoming mega-project – reclamation project – in front of the shoreline of this settlement. This paper argues that community's perception of the statehood is shaped by the simultaneous presence and absence of powerful elites. As the powerful elites neglects marginalized local residents, the state comes to appear as distinct from society. The contingent statehood and contested state practices in this regard further marginalizes the whole of coastal residents in the settlement, reflecting the wider marginalization in the city- and nation-wide.



Panel sessions 8

Panel 8.1: The shifting dynamics of borders and state power (part 1)

Chair: Maja Hertoghs (University of Amsterdam)

Food as/at the Border: Shifting Domains & Practices of State Sovereignty in UK Asylum Hotels

Charlotte Sanders (University of London)

As key sites for the performance of state sovereignty, borders are pertinent vantage points from and through which to consider the changing nature of state power, formation, and governance. In the UK as elsewhere policy and practice has rendered the border increasingly diffuse, drawing in and re-shaping various domains of social life, geographies, and relations. Furthermore, the growing practice of outsourcing border work to private companies has engendered novel forms of governance between public and private, with consequences for state accountability and novel frontiers for capital accumulation. In recent years the UK government has introduced and increasingly relied upon hotels as spaces for accommodating asylum-seekers, with an estimated 50,000 asylum-seekers in hotel accommodation at an annual cost of £3.1bn. Hotels and their services are provided by private companies. This paper, which draws upon two years of ethnographic research with asylum-seekers across UK hotels and cities, zooms in on residents' experiences with food provisioning, as asylum-seekers cite food and hotel catering to be the most prevalent sources of struggle, despair, and decline in their physical and mental health. What do catered hotels and the harm they enact on asylum-seeker bodies teach us about shifting geographies, practices and domains of state border power, and what are the possibilities for resistance as public and private become ever-more entangled?

From sheltering to confining: migrant children and the State paradox

Raquel Salinas Peixoto (University of Amsterdam)

This paper proposal draws from qualitative and quantitative data on the migratory confinement practices of migrant children in two border areas, focusing on the role of the State in enabling these practices, legally or extra-legally. The two areas studied are geographically apart: one in the Mediterranean (Ceuta, the Spanish enclave in Morocco) and the other on the Mexico-Guatemala pacific route. It could be argued that one of these areas is highly regulated by the State – comprising the European Union and the Schengen territory borders. In contrast, the other area is neglected, with comparatively low levels of State regulation and presence. The paper aims to assess the existing legal frameworks applied to these border areas and compare them with fieldwork data, which observes violent immobility through deportation and detention. It analyses the different *modus operandi* of state officials (border police, child protection officers) considering these differences. Despite the major normative differences between these two areas, the immobility of children and their punitive detention prevails in both. The paper will assess how the State paradoxically holds custody of migrant children, particularly when unaccompanied or separated, while simultaneously taking advantage of their custody to directly or indirectly enforce migratory control.

Looking at state power from a regime of bordering perspective: The interplay between acts of mobility and citizenship along the Greek-Turkish border

Zeynep Kasli (Erasmus University Rotterdam)

The central role of mobility in state making has been the focus of many studies on state power, migration and state-society relations. However often authorized and unauthorized mobilities, their control and/or contestations around them are examined separately and rarely been subject of a common in-depth inquiry. Based on historically-informed ethnographic research on the Greek-Turkish borderland, this paper argues that a fine-grained understanding of state power requires a rather comprehensive approach that radically takes the acts of all cross-border mobilities across a given border as its starting point. A process and practice-oriented, historical, cross-border and multiscale approach to mobilities allow us to observe how both authorized and unauthorized mobilities that contemporaneously take place and shape together the way the state power is perceived, enacted or defied on the ground. This holistic perspective to border and boundary work, which I call regime of bordering perspective, looks at state as an effect of transnational geosocial as well as geopolitical and geoeconomic processes on the ground, and this way allows us to capture and account for the accumulated effects of cross-border mobility practices as they take place in multiple interrelated fields of power.

Panel 8.2: State agents

Chair: Lieke Wissink (InHolland)

Shifting States from Within: Street-Level Bureaucrats and the Reconfiguration of Public Power

Elena Tagliani (University of Strasbourg)

The proposal is based on my doctoral research in political anthropology, focusing on street-level bureaucrats in the region where I work, with an insider perspective. My research provides an original insight into public servants' crucial role in shaping statehood, emphasizing how they implement political decisions in a non-mechanical way. By using discretion in implementation of policy measures, they try to pursue public interest despite to New public management constraints (budget cuts and deterioration of public service. Doing so, they also influence citizens' perception of public authority. Moreover, since their job includes tasks of policy evaluation, they conceptualize statehood from an expert perspective, which also contributes to rethinking the notion of public power. Far from being inefficient and lazy, these public employees face everyday problems and seek solutions especially when local policies are inadequate or failing. This research aligns with the theme of the conference ('Shifting States') because

street-level bureaucrats, from their position as policy experts, have their own idea of state power, often not aligned with the values of institutional discourse. Understanding how civil servants conceptualize statehood can help to rethink the state in a pluralistic perspective that goes beyond political science models.

The environment, pollution, and the body: shifting roles of state officials in articulating environmental critiques

Shachi Mokashi (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam)

In 2023, the Rotterdam district court passed an interim judgement on a case filed by local municipalities against the chemical company DuPont/Chemours in the Netherlands. One of the direct outcomes of this legal process is the ongoing environmental remediation project to clean PFAS (per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances) contamination from the ground in various locations in the south of the Netherlands. Drawing from ongoing ethnographic fieldwork on and around this environmental clean-up project, this paper illustrates the shifting roles that state officials take in local environmental movements against industrial pollution. How do state officials and local residents articulate competing and contradictory environmental critiques of industrial pollution? In this paper, I argue that various roles taken up by state officials on a municipal level work to strategically define, and at times, blur the boundaries between the 'environment', 'public health', and the 'body'. Moreover, using this ethnographic material, I argue that anthropological research on the changing roles of the state(s) must pay attention to the empirical and analytical problem of scale.

Social workers with sex workers contending within and against shifting state formations

Anke van den Dries (University of Amsterdam; Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences)

In the context of shifting welfare landscapes, framing of who is a deserving citizen and has right to social services has become increasingly racialized and moralized. There has been a neglect of 'the social of social work'. In the Netherlands, decentralization and budget cuts pulled social work into state systems. While social justice and human rights perspectives are regaining traction in social work discourse, they often remain implicit in frontline practice. This paper draws on ethnographic research with Dutch social workers supporting men, women and trans people in the sex industry, communities often positioned at the margins of citizenship and moral legitimacy. Building on practitioner experience, and through participant observation and interviews, I explore how social workers assist sex workers in reclaiming rights like access to social benefits, housing or protection by law enforcement. Furthermore, social workers are found – beyond their formal job assignment focused on individual casework – to invest in politicizing interventions for systemic change, for example through participation in governmental sounding boards, prefigurative politics and public campaigning. Herein they face the challenge that human rights are mobilized not only to address violations sex workers face but also by anti-sex work movements to justify repression of sex workers.

Staffing the State: Bureaucratic Politics in Pakistan's Hybrid Regime

Sameen A. Mohsin Ali (University of Birmingham)

Bureaucratic staffing is key to managing state performance and service delivery (Hassan 2021; Brierley 2020; Grindle 2012). We know less about why and how politicians and bureaucrats in tutelary hybrid regimes seek to regulate bureaucratic appointments. This paper sets out the theoretical foundations of a larger book project on bureaucratic politics in Pakistan's hybrid regime, drawing on data from interviews, semi-participant observation, and newspaper archives. How do politicians and bureaucrats improve their access to state resources and direct public goods to favoured constituencies? And what are the regime implications of their actions? Control over politicised bureaucratic appointments allows politicians and bureaucrats to counter regime uncertainty by first, regulating access

to, and distribution of, state resources and patronage, and second, by directing bureaucratic performance and service delivery in particular directions. These appointment practices are a tool for elites to manage hybrid regime uncertainty, but they entrench arbitrary patterns of governance within the state, within political parties, and amongst the bureaucracy such that democratic transitions stall and hybrid regimes persist. Therefore, studying bureaucratic politics in hybrid regimes carries significance for understanding regime dynamics and persistence, especially in an era of democratic backsliding around the globe.

Panel 8.3: 25 Years after *Reformasi*: Indonesia's shifting state between democracy and authoritarianism (part 1)

Chairs: Laurens Bakker (University of Amsterdam), Yaton Sastramidjaja (University of Amsterdam), Ward Berenschot (KITLV/University of Amsterdam)

The Indonesian state underwent a change of identity in 1998. After over three decades of authoritarian rule under President Suharto the nation was torn apart by mass protests, local small-scale wars and other social unrest. The economy was in crisis and police and the military factionally divided. Various observers expected the nation to fall apart in civil war, instead it underwent one of the most successful democratic transitions of the past century including increased transparency in governmental processes, emphasis of the rule of law and a decentralisation of administrative powers to local levels of government. Today, some 25 years onwards, we are seeing a recentralisation of state powers, increased repression of discussion and protest and a slow but insistent neutralization of governmental bodies monitoring the legality of governmental actions. Are Indonesians tired of democracy, longing for a return of strong, authoritarian leadership? Is the Indonesian state being (re)captured by elite oligarchs favouring their own aggrandisement? In this panel we explore the current state of Indonesia. Rule of law and good governance have not come into being as perceived 25 years ago, and a shift back to authoritarianism might not be an unrealistic scenario. Through the various contributions we explore the dynamics of state formation and citizens' attitudes towards their state and government. We seek to understand how the state is enacted and what (dis)trust, hope and fears shape Indonesia's societal cohesion.

Negotiating Citizenship Through Water and Living Space

Widya Tuslian (Leiden University)

Following Reformasi, Indonesia has undergone major transformations in how the state operates and engages with its citizens: changes that are especially visible in urban life. In Jakarta, struggles over access to water and secure living space reveal much about the uneven ways the state is present in the lives of its citizens. This presentation draws on research in coastal urban poor communities to examine how these basic needs serve as metaphors for broader struggles over inclusion, legitimacy, and everyday citizenship. Focusing on how residents navigate claims to water and living space, I explore how the urban poor engage with the state, not only through formal legal mechanisms but also through grassroots strategies, politics, and everyday negotiations. These struggles highlight a deeper tension between formal rights and lived realities, and how access to essential resources becomes a site of both vulnerability and resistance. This talk reflects on how legal frameworks, governance practices, and community action come together to shape what it means to belong in the city, and to the state, in contemporary Indonesia.

The Informality Trap: Governance in Indonesia after Reformasi

Ward Berenschot (KITLV and University of Amsterdam)

After the fall of Suharto in 1998, the hope was that the advent of democratic electoral competition would gradually lead to better governance in Indonesia. But now, almost thirty years after the fall of Suharto, such governance reforms are not only no longer enacted, but these reforms are also actually actively reversed and undermined. Observers have attributed these reversals mostly to executive aggrandizement, Indonesia's political economy or principal-agent problems. In this essay I will lean on

recent literature to propose a fourth explanation, a massive collective action problem facing governance in Indonesia. As both citizens and power holders might prefer a rule-bound state and a strong rule of law, they would jeopardize their welfare, security and career if they would ignore the obligations embedded in personal relationships. This is the 'informality trap' in which Indonesia finds themselves: as informalized nature of state institutions incentivizes citizens to rely on personal exchange relations to deal with the state, this behaviour further reinforces the informalized nature of state institutions.

Authority as certainty: leadership and the uneasiness of democracy

Laurens Bakker (University of Amsterdam)

As Indonesia enthusiastically embraced democratic elections and government reforms following the end of the New Order, elements of older political and societal power structures were incorporated in its new political framework. Informality, personal standing and the societal clout to influence policy outside of the legal process remained strong and have decidedly returned to political prominence during the past two years of president Jokowi's rule. His successor, president Prabowo, is known for patronage and strongmanship and will likely continue this rise of personal rule. Are we witnessing a return to authoritarianism based on personalities, as some observers fear, or is this 'business as usual' after a flirt with democracy? In this paper I will discuss the combination of these two seemingly opposing styles of leadership as they come to the fore in politics and society.

Chinese Indonesians as citizens of the state

Tirza van Bruggen (Roskilde University)

Indonesian citizens of Chinese descent have had a position as 'second-rate citizens' during the New Order. Government and other jobs were closed to them and an ongoing othering going back to the colonial era that saw them as foreign agents rather than fellow citizens. This position was consciously maintained by the political elite, for whom the Chinese Indonesian community could be scapegoat in times of political tensions. With the onset of reformasi various discriminatory and marginalizing laws were revoked, and Chinese Indonesians officially gained the status of full citizens. Unofficially this change was more complex: changing a societal image that had been in place for decades and was ingrained in the story of the Indonesian state. This presentation concerns the changing position of Chinese Indonesian citizens in the Indonesian state since the beginning of reform.



Panel sessions 9

Panel 9.1: The shifting dynamics of borders and state power (part 2)

Chair: Katerina Rozakou (Panteion University of Social and Political Sciences)

When the state passes the buck: residence seeking in Portugal within a context of shifting legalities

Elizabeth Challinor (CRIA-FCSH-UNL)

Recent shifts in immigration governance have affected citizens from Portugal's former colonies, undermining their trust in the state's ability to be a dependable factor in their life plans. A mobility agreement between member states of the community of Portuguese speaking countries (CPLP) signed in 2021 led to the creation in 2023 of CPLP residence permits. Information disseminated by the Portuguese state to immigrant associations that they would be valid for circulation in the Schengen area motivated legal residence seekers from CPLP member states to apply. These permits, issued online in A4 paper

format in 72 hours, cut short the drawn-out waiting periods for the processing of expressions of interest (EI) for residence cards through work. However, since the permit did not comply with the uniform standards stipulated by European Union regulations, its acceptance in the EU could not be guaranteed and some employers in Portugal also refused to recognize it. The anger at broken promises of mobility and the anxiety caused by having to choose between permits within an unclear, unstable legal context, is examined in this paper in terms of the impact of shifting immigration governance on peoples' perceptions of the trustworthiness of all the institutional actors involved.

Bureaucrafting the Social: affective and legal bureaucratic care for 'abandoned wives' in Tajikistan

Malika Bahovadinova (University of Amsterdam)

A new social group of 'abandoned wives of migrant workers' appeared in Tajikistan's migration bureaucracy in the 2000s. The figure represents a single mother whose husband left her while in migration to Russia. The term attends to the dependence of Tajikistan's economy on the migration of predominantly men to work in Russia's construction and service industries. Migration from Tajikistan to Russia, over the last decades, became the main livelihood opportunity for many families. While migration bureaucracy promoted the discourse of migration and development, also focusing on the problem of illegality in migration, local officials started to introduce a figure of an abandoned wife, a woman who became a single mother as a result of large-scale migration to Russia. Based on a decade-long ethnographic research with migration officials in Tajikistan, the paper will analyze what affective and ethical labours were required to produce a new social category for a shrinking welfare state. Working with state and non-state officials in migration bureaucracy, the paper will explore what kind of state is envisioned in addressing the 'side effects' of mobility to Russia. The appearance of an 'abandoned wife' in this bureaucracy was deeply intertwined with officials' own experiences in migration and their knowledge of the reduced state capacity.

Humanitarian state as an indeterminate state formation: Transformations of the humanitarian space in Turkey regarding Syrian refugees

Hande Sözer (TED University)

The term 'humanitarian space,' as the operational environment of humanitarianism, is used by humanitarian actors to indicate the disassociation of humanitarianism from politics (Hillhorst and Jansen, 2010). Yet, the critical literature suggests that humanitarianism is deeply embedded in the political field: humanitarian emergencies have political reasons, and humanitarian acts occur in politically marked contexts. Further, by the 2000s, humanitarian space became an outrightly political space with the state's assumption of the self-proclaimed role of 'the humanitarian state.' This paper argues that the idea of 'humanitarian state' indicates a shift in the state formation. The literature sees states' interest in humanitarianism either as determinate attempts for spreading own ideologies in the humanitarian space (Chimni 2000) or anxious responses to the shift from 'the state sovereignty' to 'popular sovereignty' (Barnett 2001) while I see it as a rather indeterminate, reiterative process by examining the Turkish state's engagement with the humanitarian space regarding Syrian refugees in Turkey in 2012–2025. Yet, such processes have patterned the humanitarian space. I argue that the state engagement did not result in the shrinking of the humanitarian space (unlike Boztaş argues in 2019) but the transformation of the humanitarian space has been causing its expansion, fragmentation, reconfiguration, capture, suspension.

Panel 9.2: Shifting modes of governance

Chair: Tanja Hendriks (Leiden University)

All the paths to statehood lie to the East? The political hidden cost of power-sharing in the Democratic Republic of Congo

Alice Grégoire (Ghent University; Panthéon-Sorbonne University), Koen Vlassenroot (Ghent University)

Despite four rounds of elections and a peaceful change in power in the Democratic Republic of Congo, the escalation of the war in the east of the country once again threatens the regime. As initiatives for peace negotiation are multiplying, the paper takes a critical look at the legacy of the 2003 power-sharing agreement in state formation by innovatively documenting the trajectory of all the individuals who have since served in government in a database, in addition to observations and interviews. We argue that inclusive agreements, instead of ending the war, have inadvertently intertwined war politics with electoral politics in a system where inclusion itself has become a strategic resource. Polarization within such a system hinges mainly on the distinction between players who are included and those who are not, and tends to align with a cleavage between those who inherited either an armed or an unarmed political struggle. Logics of inclusion are both the condition for the formation of a state administrating a territory, and a limit to the consolidation of the state as an administrated territory. Ultimately, the formation of the State is aporhetically to the detriment of the integrity of the State's territory.

Producing (state) legitimacy: Population transfers in Syria and Afghanistan amid regime change

Jill Alpes (CESSMA-Paris; Lebanese American University), Nassim Majidi (Tufts University)

This paper examines governmental logics of two cases of engineered displacement in Syria and Afghanistan during and after regime change. The paper contributes to the anthropology of the state by examining mobility control as state-making (Torpey 1998) in two conflict settings. In both Syria and Afghanistan, former non-state armed groups took over the state-apparatus after an internationalized multiparty intra-state wars, 'characterized by a high number of non-state armed groups' and a 'variety of external state and non-state actors directly or indirectly supporting different conflict parties' (Pfeifer and Schwab 2023, 433). Against this backdrop, the paper asks how mobility control at times of regime change plays into the negotiation of boundaries between state and non-state actors. Avoiding a developmental analysis of Syria and Afghanistan as not living up to the Westphalian model of the nation state, the article understands state-making as competition management (Mukhopadhyay 2024) and explores differences and similarities between various actors on a continuum of empirical indicators for stateness (Pfeifer and Schwab 2023). Based on its two cases, the paper proposes four empirical indicators for mobility control as state-making: information and transportation infrastructure, territorial and security infrastructure, identification and identity controls, as well as registration and welfare.

Negative sovereignty and dissociative governance: the Alliance of Sahel States through the shifting architecture of power in Mali

Julien Gavelle (CASOA/AIR)

Since its creation in 2023, the Alliance of Sahel States (AES) has often been viewed as a geopolitical backlash against ECOWAS and Western actors. Yet this reading misses a deeper transformation: AES is not merely a coalition of juntas, but a laboratory of post-neocolonial state recomposition. Focusing on Mali, we introduce the concepts of negative sovereignty and dissociative governance to describe a mode of rule based on strategic withdrawal – disengagement from regional frameworks and electoral institutions – combined with selective recentralisation and symbolic engineering. Appointed delegations replace elected officials, patronage is redistributed within a narrower and surveilled cycle, and coercion targets rural dissent. This logic does not signal absence but generates volatile configurations of presence

and silence: fiscal capture, opaque appointments, and localized legitimacy gaps. Russia's narrative infrastructures reinforce a semi-sovereign cognitive space where legitimacy is scripted more than governed. The result is not collapse nor full consolidation, but a transitional field of fragmentation and overreach – opening space for competing authorities, including jihadist actors, emergent ethno-political discourses, and reconfigured oppositions, composing a counter political economy that challenges an increasingly hybrid authoritarian state.

Panel 9.3: 25 Years after *Reformasi*: Indonesia's shifting state between democracy and authoritarianism (part 2)

Chairs: Laurens Bakker (University of Amsterdam), Yaton Sastramidjaja (University of Amsterdam), Ward Berenschot (KITLV/University of Amsterdam)

Lawmaking in Indonesia after Reformasi

Adriaan Bedner (Leiden University)

During the New Order the government enacted legislation without much public participation or influence from Parliament. This radically changed after 1998, when reformers tried to make lawmaking more participatory and Parliament acquired a much more influential role. In 2010 a new Law on Lawmaking provided for a careful drafting procedure with considerable room for societal and parliamentary input. Generally speaking, this Law led to considerable improvements in lawmaking practices. However, in recent years the decline of democracy has led to the return of more authoritarian forms of lawmaking, despite public resistance and occasional Constitutional Court interventions. The best-known example of such lawmaking is the Job Creation Act of 2020, which led to widespread demonstrations, but other laws have been enacted in similar violation of the rules. This presentation will look at such changes in lawmaking practices and their consequences.

Political Brokerage of Islamic Spiritual Gurus: The Habib in Indonesia's Politics

Geradi Yudhistira (University of Amsterdam)

Since the establishment of democratic electoral competition in the last 30 years, the Ba-'Alawi – a clan believed descendants of the Prophet Muhammad, commonly known as the Habib group, has gained significant influence in politics. Since the late 1990s, many Habib figures have used their lineage as the prophet's descendants to establish highly significant influence as spiritual gurus among Indonesian Muslims. Politicians forge informal ties with Habib to secure grassroots support, a practice rooted in weak democratic institutions. This paper examines the political role of Habib as informal political actors who leverage their societal influence and spiritual authority. Habib often serves as intermediaries, trading political support in exchange for material resources or other privileges from candidates. They fulfil three key roles in supporting the candidates: (a) As spiritual advisors, (b) as vote-getter and (c) as providers of moral credentials to politicians. By forging these informal political ties, Habib figures tend to advance their own personal interest, bolstering their prestige, economic gains and political influence, while paying little heed to ideological consistency.

Acts of Refusal as Affective Subversion at Indonesia's Authoritarian Turn

Yaton Sastramidjaja (University of Amsterdam)

Indonesia's 2024 election year marked the triumphant consolidation of power of an oligarchic elite that is poised to pursue its interests by hijacking democratic institutions and mobilizing vast resources into manufacturing consent. While activists sound the alarm over a 'worst-case scenario' for Indonesia's fragile democracy and stage new waves of protest against a 'return to authoritarianism', the Indonesian public seems content with Indonesia's current leadership, judging from 80 per cent approval ratings indicated in polls. However, neither the protests nor the polls adequately reflect evolving public

sentiments – or rather, affective responses – to the hegemony that is being rolled out by the state. Between spectacular protest and the semblance of acquiescence, ‘the public’ is inventing novel forms of subversion that move between Scott’s ‘infrapolitics of everyday resistance’ and contemporary netizen action, by mobilizing public affect and translating it into collective acts of refusal. This paper analyses such novel forms of affective subversion by examining a recent trend in Indonesia’s capital, where commuters on Jakarta’s traffic-jam clogged roads are refusing to make way for the free passage of politicians escorted by siren-wailing police – a trend hailed in prolific online commentary as ‘the people’ refusing to be bypassed, exploited, fooled, etc. by ‘the corrupt state’. This seemingly trivial trend represents an unprecedented act of refusal of a public long resigned to the power of the state, indicating not so much subversion of the state, but of established state-citizen relations and hence accepted notions of both ‘public’ and ‘state’.

Panel 9.4: Tactics and strategies of refusal in welfare

Chair: Wiebe Ruijtenberg (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam)

Institutionalising diversity: practices and dilemmas in a conjuncture where DEI is under far-right attack

Lieke van der Veer (Delft University of Technology)

DEI (Diversity, Inclusion and Equality) policies are under attack not only in North America but also in Western Europe. Long-term fieldwork in city administrations in the Netherlands zooms in on bureaucratic life under a right-wing administration in an extreme-right conjuncture where policy practitioners tasked with making DEI-policies use forms of artistry to keep hold of social justice. To make sense of specific forms of ‘artistry’ and ‘craftsmanship’ within bureaucracies, in this article I build on and develop the mechanism of ‘institutionalizing diversity’ that Sara Ahmed describes in her work *On Being Included* (2012). Ahmed notes that, by institutionalizing diversity, diversity often becomes devoid of meaning and stops to produce the effects it purports to have. But Ahmed’s study was written in a time where DEI-policies had a happy connotation that has largely been lost by now. The current backlash against DEI asks for a more specific contextual meaning of DEI-policy-making and demands new analytic tools. By taking a processual approach to the institutionalization of diversity, this article zooms in on policy advisors’ changing policy practices and pertinent policy dilemmas. It argues that these practices and dilemmas are entangled with DEI’s paradoxical potential to create and silence concerns.

Shifting states and the politics of responsibility: Urban governance and the ethics of community care in Portugal

Gianpiero Iacovelli (University Institute of Lisbon)

Amid the austerity measures imposed by the Portuguese state in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis, the municipality of Lisbon intensified efforts aimed at improving the socio-material conditions of the city’s most impoverished neighbourhoods through the active engagement of the citizenry. Several authors argued that such policies fit within a neoliberal agenda of building consensus in potentially ‘tumultuous’ territories while depoliticising social conflict, transferring responsibility from institutions to individuals. However, such neoliberal projects of self-making are intertwined with collective struggles and localised social relations, within which individuals actively contest, negotiate, and redistribute responsibility in ways that challenge hegemonic imaginaries and question the boundaries of the state itself. Drawing on ethnographic research conducted in one of the so-called ‘priority intervention neighbourhoods’ of the city, I describe how participatory policies intersect with historical processes of marginalisation and contestation. Specifically, I focus on the representatives of neighbourhood associations, observing the encounters between institutional interests and local moral worlds in order to examine how specific praxes, representations, and relationships are mobilised by residents to protect themselves from what they perceive as ‘excesses of responsibility’ while seeking to align with an ethic of care for the community.

'Homelessness is not a disease... Fuck you with your recovery!' Identity work among recurrently homeless men facing institutional power

Mette Palm (Amsterdam UMC), Roy Gigengack (Utrecht University), Nienke Boesveldt (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam)

Society often judges people not just by their current roles but by their past, with homelessness being one of the most stigmatized identities. Public perceptions – often shared by caregivers – tend to view homelessness as a personal failure, linking it to addiction or mental illness, despite scholarly critiques that point to systemic issues like neoliberal capitalism. As a result, formerly homeless individuals must engage in daily identity work to counter stigma during their transition into society. This paper explores how four recurrently homeless men in the Netherlands navigate identity reconstruction through narrative inquiry. From a broader longitudinal study of 31 participants, their stories exemplify the 'mortification of the self.' Over five years and 20 interviews, we examine how they manage identity through selective associations and verbal self-construction, drawing on concepts of identity, meaning, performance, and stigma. Findings show that while seeking help can damage self-image due to degrading interactions with professionals, participants did not reject care. Instead, they resisted stigma through identity work, challenging being seen as 'human waste.' Their narratives reflect strategies of resistance to institutional symbolic violence, emphasizing the importance of stigma management and discursive empowerment during the transition out of homelessness.

Strategies of refusal: 'Catching your breath' in the recovery house

Charlotte van der Veen (University of Amsterdam)

In this presentation, I explore the evolving role of the recovery house, a service in the south of the Netherlands, within the shifting Dutch welfare and care landscape. The recovery house is part of 'In Charge,' an organization entirely run by experts by experience. It's a place where guests can stay for a limited amount of time, to 'catch their breath,' as the organization puts it. In this presentation, I look at the recovery house as a project of refusal: it refuses to be swept up in bureaucracy, refuses to medicalize or pathologize, refuses professional hierarchies, refuses to operate from distrust. However, especially as the recovery house becomes increasingly enveloped in care and welfare landscapes, dominant institutional logics seep in. I examine how experts by experience work to create an alternative to institutionalized welfare and care services, and explore the complexities involved in enacting strategies of refusal.