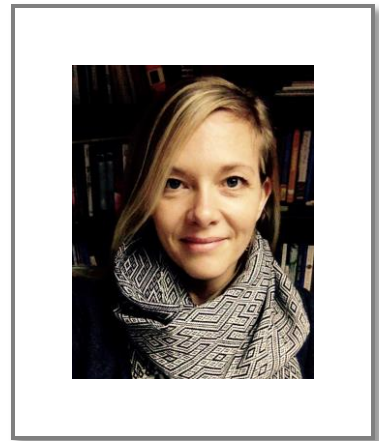


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The Problem of/with Statelessness: Expanding Citizenship & Reproducing Exclusion in Northern Thailand

Berkey Hall 457
Friday, February 3, 12:00-1:30pm

In 2015, at the height of the global refugee crisis, the UNHCR announced an ambitious plan to eradicate statelessness worldwide by advancing a legalistic agenda to shore up nationality laws and promote birth registration. In Thailand, where highland people in the northern borderlands have endured statelessness and its effects for 50 years, this legalistic approach has guided both state and non-governmental interventions for a decade. Despite these sincere efforts, however, statelessness remains a significant problem for roughly a quarter of highland people. The question thus arises: why does statelessness persist? Drawing on extensive survey and ethnographic research in northern Thailand, I argue that legalistic agendas are unable to account for significant political, bureaucratic, and even geographical barriers to recognition of citizenship that persist for non-citizens. As a result, UNHCR runs the risk of reproducing statelessness and its effects on excluded groups by validating the very system that justifies their persistent exclusion. This research calls for expanding sociological conceptions of citizenship to include inequalities in practices of, and access to, state recognition of status so that these inequalities may be identified and addressed more effectively in practice.

Dr. Flaim (PhD., Development Sociology, Cornell University) is new faculty in James Madison College of Public Affairs. Dr. Flaim has served as a Human Rights Fellow and postdoctoral associate in research methodologies at Duke University, and has led national-level research for the UN on matters of statelessness and human trafficking in South and Southeast Asia.