

SEBE Department Seminar

14. March 2019

Time: 14.00 – 15.00

Room: 1a & 1b

Networks of resilience: legal precarity and transborder citizenship among the Karen from Myanmar

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After a BA from Vilnius University in political science, Indrė Balčaitė completed an MA in political theory at the University of Nottingham (UK). In 2016, she was awarded a PhD from SOAS University of London (former School of Oriental and African Studies) for an ethnographic study in migration and transnationalism of the Karen ethnic minority in Thailand and Myanmar. In 2015-2017 she taught and continued her research as a postdoctoral research fellow at Central European University, Budapest. Prior to her PhD, Indrė worked in public administration and policy analysis. She is currently an independent researcher based in London.

Following Audrey Macklin's (2007) critical legal anthropology, the seminar will probe the relationship between legal precarity and transborder citizenship in the case of the Karen from Myanmar (Burma). Collected during ethnographic fieldwork between 2012 and 2016,

interconnected individual life stories evolving across the Myanmar-Thailand border demonstrate that legal precarity is not simply an antithesis to citizenship. The legal precarity of the Karen in Thailand (even *de facto* statelessness) and citizenship (even on both sides of the border) are legally impossible to reconcile but quite popular in the Myanmar-Thailand borderland. Although the legal situation of the three Karen groups in Thailand differs but a grassroots approach reveals that the Thai Karen, Karen refugees and economic migrants from Myanmar overlap and intertwine. The Karen social networks help them to achieve a degree of resilience and to improve their legal status over time, even by attaining citizenship despite its strict legal regulation.