

MIGRANT LABOR AND SEXUAL POLITICS IN VIETNAM

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Rigidity in political construction of sexuality in Vietnam

- Past: Socialist being
 - ideologically loyal/converted,
 - nationalist
 - professional
- Present: Market reform => social reform, with more individual freedom; yet the hard core remains, but lack enforcing mechanism (state, community, family, school, workplace etc.)
- The return to traditional virtues but with modern traits (only for women)

Political economy of migration

- Migration as labor and social responses to ever-shifting (perceived) advantages and disadvantages geographically
- Historically, large migration movements in Vietnam were associated with wars and turmoil
- Socially, migrants are not well regarded; they are “outsiders”; lowest rank in community

Political economy of migration (cont.)

- Policy:
 - Legitimacy of planned migration as development
 - Negativity towards unauthorized mobility as anti-development
 - Policy practices reflect command state-society relationship
- Spontaneous migrants as target of state discriminatory policies and practices
- Migrants as state “enemy” as they challenge state macro development policies and plan

INDIRECT AND DIRECT SEXUAL POLITICS

Internal migrants and sexual politics

- Policy and measures to prevent unauthorized migration
 - Household registration based social policies
 - Permanent household registration as access to civil rights and entitlements of social services
 - Campaigns to repatriate migrants

Internal migrants and sexual politics (cont.)

- State media label migrants as:
 - burden on city social services and infrastructure
 - city public disorder
 - Social evils
 - criminals
 - drug users
 - commercial sex workers
 - clients of CSWs
 - Source of HIV transmission
 - Trafficked and traffickers

Internal migrants and sexual politics (cont.)

- Sexuality is among the keys of state control and discrimination against migrants
 - health care service
 - health insurance
 - marriage license
 - birth certificate
 - education in public system
- Sex work and sex workers are illegal, “social evils”, targeted for arrest, education programs, and repatriation

Internal migrants and sexual politics (cont.)

- Moral discourse on sex work and sex workers:
 - “bad” sex vs “good” sex
 - “bad” women vs “good” women
 - “immoral” conduct
 - materialism vs tradition
 - “poisonous” culture
 - Western cultural influence

Internal migrants and sexual politics (cont.)

- The message: tradition is good, modernity is culturally harmful
- Gender bias: tolerance for men purchasing sex
- Blame on wives and new construction of “middle class” femininity (Nguyen Vo Thu Huong)

Internal migrants and sexual politics (cont.)

- HIV links to “social evils” of sex work and drug use
- Migrants is therefore a source of HIV transmission to host and left-behind communities
- Migrants and their sexuality are:
 - destructive factors socially and morally
 - politically harmful to the construction of a coherent society and should be addressed

Transnational migrant labor and sexual politics

- Labor export as development
 - Source of state revenue
 - Employment
 - Economic and social remittances
 - Poverty reduction and development
- Migrants as pure *homo economicus*;
- Policy and programs designed to maximize economic gain at the expense of migrants (income, health, safety, impact on left behind)

Transnational migrants through marriage and sexual politics

- Rapid increase in transnational migration of women through marriage to richer East and Southeast Asian nations
- State media labeling:
 - materialist
 - immoral
 - selfish
 - betraying Vietnamese female virtues
 - shame of the Fatherland
 - threat to nationalism
- Stigma and discrimination against returnees, particularly trafficked females

TENSIONS

Migrants and family

- Increase the cost of migration
- Limit positive impact of migration on well-beings of migrants and left behind
- Low trust between migrants and family members
- Family cohesion erosion

Migrants and host community

- Isolation and conflict between migrants and local residents
- Local view of migrants as “social evils”
- Denial/abstention of migrants from local activities and decision making
- Hidden population from state/local economic, social and public health programs

Migrants and state

- Challenge of state's policy “growth with equity”
- Rising urban poverty and social problems
- Limit reproductive rights, sexual rights and human rights

Thank you