

# Ethnic Hierarchies and Gender in Dissent and Empowerment: Migrant Labor in Malaysia and Vietnam

**Dr. Angie Ngọc Trần**

Migrant workers from Vietnam going to work overseas are not just the Kinh (the majority), but also from the other 53 ethnic groups in Vietnam. I focus on five ethnic groups: the Kinh, the Hoa (ethnic Chinese), the Khmer, the Chăm Muslims and the H'rê, who engage in different migration patterns and forms of resistance and empowerment. The transnational labor brokerage state system (LBS) has affected female and male migrants differently, from the dehumanizing recruitment phase to the *precarity* and *coping mechanisms* while working in Malaysia. Class analysis alone does not explain the different cultural, language, and religious practices among these five groups. These practices offer strategies, especially to the ethnic minorities, who act individually or in solidarity with others, in response to the transnational LBS system, or bypassing it altogether. I focus on ethnic hierarchies, based on economic factors (land, finance, education), and cultural resources (transnational networks, language, religion). These ethnic hierarchies inform and mediate how migrants engage in different *spaces of dissent*. *Physical* third space is occupied not according to the duality of legal-illegal categories in the name of the law, but in the tacit acceptance of the community in which the migrants live and work. *Metaphorical* third space is about discourse of dissent, uttered by non-state competing authorities, to challenge the state's authority through ironic and subversive mimics. Overall, I highlight different gender responses in these spaces of dissent and empowerment. My findings are based on eight years of research and fieldwork interviews in Vietnam and Malaysia (2008-2015), a significant period of change in labor export policies.

December 3, 2018

3:30 – 5:00 pm

INTS 1111



Angie Ngọc Trần is a Professor of Political Economy at California State University, Monterey Bay (CSUMB). She is an activist scholar, working on labor movements and resistance in Vietnam, and transnational labor migration. Her current book project is on the full cycle of south-south transnational migration patterns, focusing on Vietnamese migrants of different ethnic groups, working in Malaysia and returning to Vietnam, bringing ethnicity, class, gender, religion, and forms of empowerment and resistance into her analysis. Her 2013 book, *Ties That Bind: Cultural Identity, Class and Law in Flexible Labor Resistance in Vietnam* (Cornell University Press), analyzes over 100 years of labor movements and resistance in Vietnam, using race, class and gender analyses. Her other research interests and publications include critical perspectives on Corporate Social Responsibility in textile/garment/footwear and agro-processing sectors in Vietnam, impacts of multi-stakeholder negotiations on labor relations in Vietnam, and implications of trade-labor linkages for Vietnamese labor unions and workers through regional trade agreements. Access to these works is at: <https://works.bepress.com/angie-tran/>