

Abstracts for Panel: Security and Gender in Southeast Asia Today

Conveners: Alexandra Kent, Helle Rydström

1.

School Bullying and Corporeal Insecurity in Vietnam

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This paper considers the links between school bullying, corporeality and students' perceptions of insecurity in contemporary Vietnamese lower secondary schools. The paper draws on extensive ethnographic fieldwork conducted in two lower secondary schools in the northern port city of Haiphong during 2007 and 2008, which involved the utilisation of participant observations, interviews, and questionnaires. While numerous bullying researchers have considered where bullying most often occurs, few have delved into why bullying occurs in particular places, how the bullying is adjusted to fit the restrictions and regulations imposed within those places, or the ways in which geographies of bullying are gendered. In this paper, I consider not only why students perceive particular places to be unsafe, but also the different forms that bullying takes across social and spatial boundaries, and how the spatiality of school bullying is inextricably linked to educational practices and to understandings of male and female corporeality in Vietnamese society. In doing so, I seek to illustrate the ways in which wider societal gendered norms and understandings of 'hot' and 'cool' bodies are implicated in the bullying that some students experience, and why some students experience greater corporeal insecurity in school than others.

While some researchers have suggested that bullying occurs in those places that are not adequately 'defined' by adults and that greater adult surveillance would thus prevent bullying from occurring, this paper shifts the focus to question the increasing focus on educational attainment. While increased literacy and educational attainment is lauded and put forward as a means to achieve increased human security, little consideration has been given to what effect the associated increasing pressure to perform scholastically and the increasing linking of home and school life has on the everyday perceived individual security of school students in contemporary Vietnam. As this paper illustrates, these effects differ significantly in terms of gender and thus have direct implications for gendered security at the wider societal level.

2.

Security and gender in Southeast Asia today

Women's security and NGOs: dealing with domestic violence in Indonesia

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While doing field research for the DFG-Project 'Gender in contemporary Indonesia' (from October 2009 until March 2010) I discovered that a range of non governmental organisations (NGOs) concerned with women issues focus on domestic violence or that it is at least one important focus among others which is dealt with in an organisation.

Being a taboo in many societies, the point of view that domestic violence does not exist in Indonesia is prevalent not only among conservative Muslims who claim that marriage is holy and therefore cannot be a place of abuse. Although on state level there is little awareness to

target the problem and to grant victims assistance. According to the ignorers of domestic violence, no support or facilities for victims is needed nor a law defining what is domestic violence and how it should be dealt with including sanction mechanisms because marital violence simply does not exist.

What is domestic violence? The definition of domestic violence in this presentation defines not only mere physical violence like battering, pushing and beating as domestic violence but although marital rape and psychological abuse although often affecting the children as well. In most cases domestic violence comprises a mix of the former factors as the abuser creates dependence and uses violence and psychological intimidation to control his victim(s).

Is there a difference for victims of domestic violence in Indonesia in contrast to e.g. European or 'Western' societies? As the reason for domestic violence might be similar in Asian and European countries (and is in most cases a consequence of the abuser's attitude) there are special factors which contribute to the persistence and non-compensation for its survivors in Indonesia:

- Awareness about the topic is low among state officials and in society in general either as the discourse about 'harmony' is considered as a very important value in Indonesian culture and therefore disharmony should not appear.
- The belief that a woman has to be married in order to be an acknowledged member in society contributes to the fact that women tend to stay longer in a harmful marriage.
- Whereas women in European countries have a health insurance this is in most cases not the fact for Indonesian women. The women (and children) suffer double: not only do they face physical injuries they although have to pay for the medical treatment themselves. In most cases they cannot afford that treatment and therefore the possibility of being caught up in a debt-trap is higher.
- Many women are more likely to stay in their violent marriage and hesitate to leave their violent husband as there is no social insurance net and she will suffer economic marginality. In most cases claims for payment of the husband to support the wife and/or the children after a divorce have little chances to materialise as the mechanism to sanction the lack of payment is almost non-existent.

Having ratified the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1984 the Indonesian state has agreed to guarantee women's equality but its implementation in law and in reality is still weak. Women Organisations are the ones who try to push forward awareness and concrete actions to realise the goals. NGOs like Rifka Annisa, Kalyanamitra or Mitra Perempuan are dealing with women issues try to create awareness about the topic in public and provide shelter and care as well as judicial and psychological assistance. They although try to find funding to finance seminars in order to increase awareness among state officials like the police or judges. In many cases they are funded by international organisations like UNIFEM or other international NGOs.

A domestic violence law was implemented in the last months of the Megawati government in 2004 before the debate about the pornography law arose under the government of President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono but the actions and consequences remain limited.

In the paper it will be further examined how international regulations contribute to recent developments in Indonesia. The international, national and local level discourse will be examined as well as the practice how implementation functions or doesn't function and why.

3.

Abusing Social Security in Colonial Vietnam

Helle Rydstrom

Associate Professor/Docent

This paper considers individual and social security in colonial Vietnam. By drawing on anthropological data collected in a rural commune in northern Vietnam, the paper examines how testimonies about the terror of the French colonial forces provide a certain kind of data as individual accounts, or rather “truths”, informed by a particular collective socio-historical context. The paper investigates how distinctions between different kinds of violence may help us to understand particular violent confrontations, for example, between a colonial power and local inhabitants. By identifying the processes of perceptual and bodily metamorphoses inherently involved in the encounter between perpetrator and victim, the paper would investigate how human beings, when subjected to violence, are translated into nothing but targets of flesh onto which imaginations about gender, sexuality, race, and class can be projected and terror enacted. The paper closes by pondering questions regarding the representation of violent abuses of individual and social security.

4.

**Women and Security: Problematizing Gun proliferation and Violence
A Philippine Case study**

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The uneven position of men and women is due to the gendered social and political system in the Philippines (Roces, 1998). This segregation based on gender is referred to as heteronormativity, the theory used in the research as the organizing frame in discussing and problematizing women and security. Gun proliferation and violence are used as the actual condition/ context to illustrate the gendered frame of security.

There is high perception of social and physical insecurity among civilians due to the inadequacy of state efforts to enforce security, peace and order, and also because of the perception of a weak and predatory state. Civilians thus resort to arms/ gun possession, an instrument replete with socially constructed value. The dependence on arms, however, negatively impact on the perception of physical security among women. Moreover, the invisibility of women in decision making and policy formulation on security matters, both in the local and national scene, further exacerbates her feeling of insecurity. Qualitative and quantitative data in the study revealed that women are more fearful of getting victimized by gun-violence - regardless of their geographical location, class, and age.

Such reality creates a situation where the response of some women (when threatened), tends to be polarized on two extremes. While most respondents mediate their security / safety situations (i.e. threat of, or actual condition of gun violence) by working with authorities, a significant number of respondents mediate their situation with two extreme responses: the passive victim (they pray, or they keep quiet), or become the aggressor (they eliminate the source of threat by harming or killing them). The findings of the study help further nuance the varying responses of women as regards security and safety dilemmas.

5.

Freedom, Fear and Being Female in Cambodia today: refuge at the Buddhist *wat*.

Alexandra Kent, Associate Professor of Social Anthropology, The Nordic Institute of Asian Studies, Copenhagen.

The decades of war and the violence and cultural devastation of the Khmer Rouge regime (1975-1979) are still a vivid memory in Cambodia and security problems continue to plague the country. Economic liberalization, democratization and the influx of aid since the early 1990s has wrought great social change, deepening the gap between rich and poor and increasing the vulnerability of the latter. These dramatic changes are accompanied by intense anxiety about the moral dissolution of Cambodian society. Intimidation of women is one of the ways in which this moral panic finds expression.

This paper contends that the violent intimidation of women seen today in Cambodia should be understood as part of the general climate of violence and mistrust that so often lingers in the wake of global intervention into a debilitated country. The problem, it is argued, is not “Cambodian values and attitudes” but the way in which these may find expression under current politico-economic circumstances. While outsiders may assume that solutions lie in the application of global solutions, with accommodation to local values and attitudes. Cambodians themselves may instead try to build solutions by seeking refuge from global influences and reconstituting themselves in terms of core Cambodian values. In presenting examples of women who seek freedom from fear at the Buddhist *wat*, this paper will discuss what may be learnt about freedom from fear from the way in which those who suffer it themselves seek resolution.

6.

Youth, risk and sexuality in Ho Chi Minh City and New Delhi: an ethnographic case study of the importance of place for young people’s dating practices.

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An increase of premarital sex has, for some time, been noticed in both Ho Chi Minh City and in New Delhi. This is often perceived as something negative coming from the ‘outside’ as a consequence of globalization and neo-liberal economy, which both India and Vietnam have embraced in recent years. Our study, based on fieldwork conducted among university students in Ho Chi Minh City and New Delhi, aims at investigating the intersections between young people’s (heterosexual) sexual practices, perceptions of risk and urban space.

As young and unmarried persons in big cities, the participants in this study had to tread carefully in order to navigate safely between the ‘new’ and ‘modern’ attitudes and the ‘old’ and ‘traditional’ values represented by e.g. their parents’ generation and, commonly, the state. The moral stakes were high and ‘mistakes’ could mean great risks for the future. The majority of the students wanted greater freedom and openness in sexuality and dating, but they knew that transgressions of moral boundaries could come at a high price.

Our study starts from the premise that adolescence is a precarious time, a period of 'liminality', in the sense that actions and decisions which young people take, will influence and shape adult life. The ground for education, career, and family is laid and in a global and 'modern' world, each young person faces great responsibility for the course that life will take. Moreover, in a market-oriented and global society, young people tend to spend more time on education and on building a career, while marriage and family are postponed. This creates a longer gap between puberty and marriage, a time when marriage might not be a desirable option, but when many young men and women get involved in dating and in sexual relationships. Given the simultaneous presence of 'traditional' and 'modern' attitudes, young people in Ho Chi Minh City and New Delhi adopt various strategies in order to minimize the risks of losing respectability.

A strategy common to Ho Chi Minh City and New Delhi is to control the places where dates take place. By having the dates in places which correspond to a risk-level which the students thought was manageable, they could 'place' themselves safely on a moral map. Public places provided the most accepted space for young people's dating activities. The "public eye" constituted a kind of moral guarantee for the virtue of a dating couple; at the same time, however, young people tried to find privacy in public places, as public display of affection is still discouraged both in India and Vietnam. Finding the right balance between intimacy and visibility was especially important for young women, as their virtue and respectability are constantly at risk: establishing clear limits and boundaries to their dating activities was therefore essential, both for their moral and physical safety. Dates held in secluded places empty of other persons had strong connotations of sexuality. This kind of privacy put a young woman's reputation and virtue at great risk, while the young men felt much freer to move around in different places and at different times. It can be said that by the choice of places for dating, young people in Ho Chi Minh City and in New Delhi tried to challenge and change the norms which regulated dating and sexuality, while at the same time trying to balance the risks involved in pushing the limits. By experimenting with "public" and "private" aspects of urban places, the youth of this study tried to negotiate a place for their still basically unacknowledged intimacy and sexuality.

7.

Gender based domestic violence in Viet Nam

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This document reviews gender based domestic violence researches in Viet Nam since the early 1990s in following aspects: The prevalence and trend of domestic violence in Viet Nam; recognition of violence; factors influencing domestic violence; and consequences of domestic violence. It is indicated that domestic violence occurs in all regions in Viet Nam and in all types of families. Some reasons for domestic violence include: many authorities at different levels still view domestic violence as an internal problem of the family; limited awareness of people about gender equality in the family; weak capacity of legal officers and reconciliation groups to deal with domestic violence; etc. Domestic violence causes serious physical and mental consequences for women and children. Further, it can negatively affect the family by

causing family dissolution and indirectly increasing the risk of poverty. Based on the findings of the study, the authors propose a number of recommendations to policy makers to combat the domestic violence against women in Viet Nam.

8.

Divorce and Social Risk in Rural Vietnam

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Abstract

While divorce historically has been culturally discouraged and even a limited practice in Vietnamese society, after the renovation policy was launched in 1986, the divorce rate has been rapidly increasing. This paper considers the social security of women after a divorce. A divorce typically leads to a dramatic decline in the standard of living for a woman not least because she would usually have custody of the couple's children. The ending of marriage, this paper would argue, disrupts relationships in almost all sectors of a woman's life. There would be changes regarding social support/relationships, finances, child care, housework, work demands, residence, and changes as regards social resources all of which mean great transformations. This paper examines trends and correlates concerning divorce in rural Vietnam, and in doing so it identifies social and cultural factors influencing the divorce decision. The paper draws on divorce profiles registered in one rural district court over a period of 10 years (i.e. 2000-2009), and even on case studies of divorced persons from the same district..

The paper highlights that there are different variables which correlate to divorce, for instance, age at marriage, marriage duration, number of children, living arrangements after marriage, type of marriage, place of residence, employment, birth cohort, and the sex of a couple's children. . Plenty of cultural factors, the paper also shows, are even involved in respect to a divorce including living arrangements, mother and daughter in-law relationship, extra-marital relations, childlessness, beliefs in destiny, and so on.