

Permanent or circular migration and notions of ‘success’: A critical ethnography about recent Vietnamese migrants’ local and transnational occupations, belongings and mobilities in Vancouver and Paris

Anne-Cécile Delaisse, University of British Columbia

Abstract

Western countries’ selective and/or restrictive migration policies are rooted in postcolonial dynamics, where they assume a superiority and their desirability as a destination. This perspective emphasizes the importance of the path to permanent settlement and to having an ‘allegiance’ with the receiving country. However, there remains a need to account for the reality of migrants’ transnational belongings and mobilities. Recent migration flows from Vietnam to Canada and France constitute an interesting case study. On the one hand, unlike well-studied former generations of (forced) Vietnamese migrants, recent (voluntary) Vietnamese migrants, such as international students, might envision migration as a temporary experience allowing for the acquisition of capital (e.g., human, financial) that will be valued in the booming Vietnamese economy. On the other hand, France and Canada are among the six countries with the highest Vietnamese populations, but their approaches to immigration and models of integration differ greatly. While the Vietnamese diaspora is understudied in both countries, there is a need for comparative studies examining migrant populations from the same country of origin in different receiving countries to highlight how different national contexts and attitudes towards immigration shape migrants’ experiences.

A critical ethnography is ongoing in Vancouver, Canada and Paris, France, exploring recent Vietnamese migrants’ local and transnational daily occupations, sense of belonging and mobilities. Methods include online interviews completed with 20 Vietnamese international students (10 in each city); as well as observations in community organizations, in-depth interviews, go-along interviews, and occupational mapping with 30 recent Vietnamese migrants (15 in each city). Our analysis is informed by the mobilities paradigm and theories of transnationalism and transculturality. The presentation will address the following research question: How do recent Vietnamese migrants develop a sense of belonging and envision their mobilities in the context of Vietnam’s socio-economic ‘development’ and their respective receiving countries? Findings address participants’ belongings and desire for permanent settlement or return to Vietnam in relation to Canada’s policies and discourses emphasizing permanent immigration, France’s anti-immigration sentiments and Vietnam’s booming

economy. Some participants, like those who first came to France or Canada as international students, can envision going back to Vietnam where they perceive equal or superior opportunities as well as higher living standards given their socio-economic status. Whereas for other participants who came to Canada as permanent residents, their migration represents a rupture with their lives in Vietnam and an investment; therefore, despite experiencing downward mobility, they do not intend to go back to Vietnam. Overall, the results challenge the commonly held idea that permanent settlement and belonging in the receiving country is positive while temporary migration and return migration would be a failure to the migration and integration processes.

Biography

Anne-Cécile Delaisse is a PhD candidate in the department of Occupational Science and Occupational Therapy at the University of British Columbia. Her research focuses on people's occupations (i.e., daily activities) in the context of migration, using qualitative methodologies and taking a critical lens. Her Master's thesis examined French-speaking immigrants' participation in Francophone community sites in Metro Vancouver, drawing from an 'occupational' interpretation of Lefebvre's theory of the production of space. Her PhD dissertation project is a critical ethnography about recent Vietnamese migrants' mobilities, daily activities and belongings in Vancouver and Paris. Her theoretical framework is informed by the mobilities paradigm and theories of transnationalism and transculturality.