

# **Human Sciences Encounters in Phnom-Penh: Past Presentations: Transacted Kinship Vietnamese Children Sold for Adoption in Cambodia**

**This presentation addresses the sale of Vietnamese children in Cambodia. My goal is to explore this issue embedded in stereotypes, and to move beyond the anti-trafficking discourse. To do so, I privilege the actor's viewpoint (emic perspective), colonial literary and legal sources. Data for this paper was gathered in 2009-10 through fieldwork conducted in Châu Đốc (on the Vietnamese border) and among the Vietnamese communities in Phnom Penh (Cambodia). It is presented with a discussion of a number of methodological barriers encountered in the field.**

**Firstly, the discussion with a mother who sold her daughter explores the motivations, conditions and prices of Vietnamese children sold in the Cambodian market. These sales can be validated by a deed that includes the price and the name of both the seller and the buyer. Similar contracts found in reports and press clips from the colonial period prove that the same practice is carried out despite the temporal spacing: the "sale of a child for adoption" (*bán làm con nuôi*). It therefore demonstrates historical continuity in terms of human sale.**

**Secondly, I will describe how emic representations help to justify acts that are absolutely condemned by the State, but that are justified by some destitute social groups due to their particular context: a desperate mother who does not want her child, and decides to get rid of him to retrieve some money. The famous novel *When the light is out* by Ngô Tất Tố (1939) depicting the story of a destitute mother who eventually sells her daughter to pay off tax debts and to free her husband, illustrates how desperation can excuse immorality and social condemnation.**

**Finally, Vietnamese informants tend to suggest that girls are more expensive than boys because parents not only take into account the wellbeing of the child with his adoptive family, but also consider the return on investment. Indeed, destitute daughters can work in prostitution; therefore they can remit higher sums of money to their parents than boys. A calculation takes place thus suggesting that for poor families involved in child sale, raising a girl means investing into the future.**

**This talk summarizes a chapter from the forthcoming Alliance Anti-Traffic' Research Report: Nicolas Lainez (June 2011), *Transacted Children and Virginity: Ethnography of Ethnic Vietnamese in Phnom Penh*, Ho Chi Minh City, Alliance Anti-Traffic Vietnam.**