

The School of Political Studies  
presents a public lecture

Becoming a Migrant: Migration in the Asia-Pacific Region

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1 p.m. – 2.30 p.m.  
MacDonald Hall (MCD) 120

Presentation in English, discussion bilingual.

Since the early to mid 1990s, several million peasants from developing countries of Southeast Asia have migrated to the tiger economies of East Asia by becoming 'migrant workers' or 'foreign brides'. Based on five years of on-going fieldwork in migrants' communities of origin in rural Vietnam and stays in Taiwan, South Korea, and Japan, this presentation will argue that understanding migration in the Asian region requires a closer examination of how candidates to international migration 'become migrants'. By focussing on what unfolds between 'desire and departure', this analysis reveals how the pre-departure period plays a significant role in the subsequent experiences of migrants. One conclusion of the analysis is that the categorization of migrants as either 'workers' or 'wives' obscures the complex trajectories and motives involved in the process of 'becoming a migrant'. This presentation thus puts migrants' perspectives and experiences center stage and sheds light on the significance of various factors that lead migrants to exit Vietnam and enter a destination country with a certain status or type of visa. Migrants' narratives powerfully show how migration policies, the recruitment and selection process, networks, and the cost of migration together create both opportunities and constraints that give more options to some and fewer to others. The stories of these global peasants illustrate the tension between migrants' agency and the structural constraints in international migration flows within Asia.

Professor Bélanger studies social processes related to demographic change in Asia, such as the female deficit and increasing international migration flows. Her current major project, funded by SSHRC and IDRC, focuses on migration from Southeast Asia to East Asia and studies the impact of these migrations on sending and receiving communities. The project involves an international team of researchers and graduate students and aims at promoting migrants' rights in the region. She is the co-editor of the recently published volume *Reconfiguring*

*Families in Contemporary Vietnam* (Stanford University Press, 2009). Some of her research on migration has been published or is forthcoming in *Citizenship Studies*, *Ethnic and Racial Studies* and *Current Sociology*.