

# THE LIE OF THE LAND

Gender, Farm Work, and Land  
in a Rural Vietnamese Village

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### ABSTRACT

This anthropological study investigates ways in which perceptions of gender intersect with the everyday dealings of land and farming practices in a village in the northern part of Vietnam. The point of departure for this study is a desire to take a closer look at how processes of gendering actually take place and become meaningful on a day-to-day basis. Therefore, this study focuses mainly on situated, land-related practices in which the actions of embodied actors establish – desired as well as undesired – gender features and characteristics. One of the reasons why farmland was chosen as the main location was the ubiquity and ‘naturalness’ of farming – in this case wet-rice cultivation – in this rural village, and the matter-of-factly manners in which the gendered labour division was presented by the villagers. The actions of male and female farmers appeared to be immanent in their bodies and the ways in which they interacted with land. By studying how the integration of practices and places contributed to a ‘naturalisation’ of the gendering process, this study aims to investigate how gender interrelates with people’s possibilities to act and gain access to particular places.

Two approaches to gender analysis have been used in this study. One takes its inspiration from phenomenology and the perspective of the ‘lived-body-in-place’ and the other is a more structural approach. This allows for a merging of two equally informative but quite different approaches. The phenomenologically inspired approach recognises embodied ways to handle and act in a particular place and in an environment with certain historical as well as practical conditions. In combining a ‘body-in-place’ perspective with a consideration of structural conditions, this study seeks to comprehend the naturalisation of certain gender traits and relations and, at the same time, provide space for practices of agency and self-fashioning. An active use of existing understandings of gender can be found in a structural gender perspective, which highlights the more general and shared conditions that govern possibilities and constraints for action in certain contexts. With this double approach to gender, the gendering processes wherein structures and habits are incorporated into actually *lived* life by the location based practices of women and men can be further investigated.

This thesis is based on twelve months anthropological fieldwork carried out in a village in Phu Tho province in the northern part of Vietnam.

**Keywords:** Anthropology, Vietnam, gender, agriculture, farming, wet-rice cultivation, farm work, division of labour, land, land access, place.