

Like a Fish on a Stick: HIV-Positive Networks and the Cultural Politics of HIV/AIDS in Post-Socialist Lao PDR

Amanda Joy*

Chiang Mai University, Thailand, and Carleton University, Canada

**Corresponding author. E-mail: amanda.joy@carleton.ca*

ABSTRACT

This paper is an ethnographic account of people living with HIV/AIDS (PLHIV) involved in a network of support and advocacy groups in post-socialist Lao PDR. Through negotiations with state, NGO and other local and transnational actors, these PLHIV seek access to medical treatment and social programs, de-stigmatization of their HIV-positive status and recognition of their human rights. They adopt and adapt activist identities and strategies to their unique local context in order to negotiate Lao cultural and political structures, using a set of tactics that shift between everyday forms of resistance and active dissent. The role of culture is conceptualized as both constrictive and productive, providing schemas that can be called upon or transposed in order to achieve a goal, thereby providing opportunities for strategic action. This paper then draws conclusions about the potential for an expanded civil society in Lao PDR.

Keywords: HIV/AIDS, Lao PDR, HIV support groups, Civil society, Social movements, Southeast Asia, Post-socialist politics