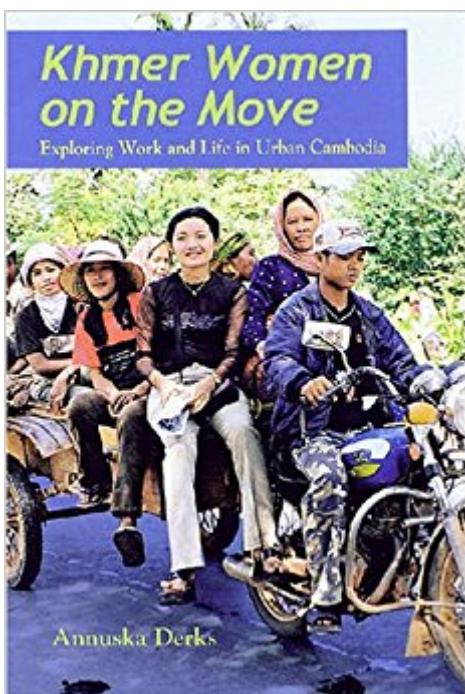


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# **Khmer Women On The Move: Exploring Work And Life In Urban Cambodia (Southeast Asia: Politics, Meaning, And Memory)**



## Synopsis

"This is a fascinating ethnography about young Khmer women moving to the city to work in the garment factories, in prostitution, and as street sellers. The author makes good use of new theoretical approaches in anthropology that focus on negotiation and creativity in situations of rapid change. The result is not only a welcome new book on post-war Cambodia but an important addition to the literature on women, migration, and labor in Southeast Asia and the world." — Judy Ledgerwood, Northern Illinois University

*Khmer Women on the Move* offers a fascinating ethnography of young Cambodian women who move from the countryside to work in Cambodia's capital city, Phnom Penh. Female migration and urban employment are rising, triggered by Cambodia's transition from a closed socialist system to an open market economy. This book challenges the dominant views of these young rural women that they are controlled by global economic forces and national development policies or trapped by restrictive customs and Cambodia's tragic history. The author shows instead how these women shape and influence the processes of change taking place in present-day Cambodia. Based on field research among women working in the garment industry, prostitution, and street trading, the book explores the complex interplay between their experiences and actions, gender roles, and the broader historical context. The focus on women involved in different kinds of work allows new insight into women's mobility, highlighting similarities and differences in working conditions and experiences. Young women's ability to utilize networks of increasing size and complexity allows them to move into and between geographic and social spaces that extend far beyond the village context. Women's mobility is further expressed in the flexible patterns of behavior that young rural women display when trying to fulfill their own "modern" aspirations along with their family obligations and cultural ideals.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

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Annuska Derkx is currently a coordinator and researcher in a comparative research project on debt, mobility, and dependency in Southeast Asia with the University of Berne and the Graduate Institute of Development Studies, Geneva.

This book when I got it here it was \$20 and on campus it was \$65. I saved a lot!

Again, had to buy for class. Personally I did not care for style of writing. Also, the way she portrays the Cambodian women is not positive. You will have to read it to make your own decision.

Less than 1,000 years ago, the Khmer civilization raised some of the world's most astounding temples to their Hindu gods...and as we still see today, images of ancient women dominate these temples. In *A Record of Cambodia: The Land and Its People* 13th century Chinese traveler Zhou Daguan confirmed that women virtually controlled Cambodian commerce. The fact is that women have always played important roles in Southeast Asian societies, yet their roles are frequently misinterpreted or even escape the notice of historians. Annuska Derks does a fascinating job reporting on the transition of women's roles in the complex landscape of modern Cambodia. "Khmer Women on the Move" is quite readable. While academic books of this caliber can be obtuse, the author's excellent scholarship doesn't get in the way. One aspect that I found especially engaging is the way the author includes many Khmer language terms in her text -- this not only adds authenticity and precision, it also gives readers an enjoyable lesson in useful Khmer vocabulary! The author made her study quite personal by profiling a number of women, their families and the conflicts they experienced in the dichotomy of modern Cambodia. There, women face cultural crossroads that present challenging dilemmas: Rural vs. Urban; Traditional vs. Modern; Moral vs. Immoral. The author carefully, clearly examines these conflicts (and others) through the personal experiences of Khmer women who are determining their individual futures. In reading the Acknowledgements, one discovers, perhaps not surprisingly, that the author consulted with three of the world's foremost Cambodian scholars in preparing this work: Judy Ledgerwood *At the Edge of the Forest: Essays on Cambodia, History, and Narrative in Honor of David Chandler (Studies on Southeast Asia)*; Penny Edwards *Cambodge: The Cultivation of a Nation, 1860-1945 (Southeast Asia: Politics, Meaning, and Memory)* and Trudy Jacobsen *Lost Goddesses: Denial of Female Power in Cambodian History*, whose works I hold in high regard and also recommend. "Khmer Women on the Move" is a readable, interesting, personal account of Cambodian women seizing the opportunity to decide their futures, and the future of their country. But I recommend this book to a much broader group of readers. Anyone interested in learning more about the social fabric of this fascinating land will enjoy it.

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