

# Coming of age in Cambodia

*Young migrants in their transition to adulthood*



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One year ago I could not imagine that I would be at this point where I would proudly present my master thesis. The opportunity of doing my fieldwork in Cambodia was life changing as I was introduced to a totally new environment and culture. I had to find my own way in an unknown country while doing my research. I would have not been able to do this without certain people that I would like to thank.

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អរគុណច្រើន

Thank you very much,

Nikkie The

## Executive summary

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Currently, many young Cambodians are moving from the rural areas to the capital city Phnom Penh in search of employment. While their stay in Phnom Penh might be of temporary duration, exposure to an urban culture can still influence their behaviours. Originating from villages where often more traditional values prevail, migrants will have to find out to what extent they cling unto their rural culture or adapt to the urban environment. As they live away from their families, choices have to be made that do not only affect their own lives but their families as well. This study is focused on these young migrants by investigating what the impact of their migration is on their transition to adulthood. During a four month fieldwork data was collected through interviewing migrants in Phnom Penh and rural youth in Battambang province. Research findings show that an important characteristic of adulthood in Cambodia is taking care of the parents. By working in the city, migrants are able to send remittances to their families and thus take care of them. However, by sending remittances many are not able to have personal savings. This forces them to ask their family for help in times of need. By remitting, migrants fulfil the expectations of their parents which allows migrants to rely on their families who serve as a safety net. This safety net is strengthened when migrants uphold rural values such as rules of modesty while living in Phnom Penh. But urban lifestyles might inspire migrants as well as they long for the latest fashion and gadgets. Forming an identity means for every migrant finding out to what extent they can adapt to an urban environment while at the same time being accepted back home. Experiences vary among female and male migrants as male migrants often enjoy greater freedom but lack a clear guide of what is expected from them. Coming of age in Cambodia is experienced in different ways as youth migrate to Phnom Penh.

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## List of abbreviations

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CRUMP	Cambodian Rural Urban Migration Project
RGC	Royal Government of Cambodia
PADV	Partnership Against Domestic Violence

# 1. Introduction

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Phnom Penh, the city of opportunities. Many youth from the rural areas of Cambodia will agree with this statement. When growing up, they try to find ways to support themselves and their families. Remaining at the countryside is for most of these young people not attractive as it means harsh working conditions while the return might be little, especially when the harvest is disappointing. A household can decide to send a family member to the city to look for a job to make sure that the family does not only rely on the weather for survival but also has an extra source of income. The decision to migrate is thus not only made by an individual who searches for better opportunities elsewhere but can be seen as a risk spreading strategy of the household as well (Lall et al., 2006). Migrating from rural areas to the city is currently booming in Cambodia. In the period from 2008 till 2013 the population in urban areas in Cambodia grew with an annual average of 3.7%, this in comparison to the 1.3% in the rural areas. Population growth can be explained in terms of fertility or migration but since the fertility rates in the urban areas in Cambodia are the lowest in the country, most of the increase in population can be described to migration (RGC, 2014; Sovannara, 2007).

## 1.1 Research objectives

Rural to urban migration is reality in Cambodia and therefore asks for attention. However, so far research on migration in Cambodia has been limited. This is partly a result of the Khmer Rouge regime whereby many academics died and most of the educational infrastructure was destroyed (Ministry of Planning, 2012). Therefore, this research will try to fill the knowledge gap that currently exists on young migrants in Phnom Penh. This research is based specifically on youth because currently most of Cambodia's population is youth as a result of the high fertility rate after the Khmer Rouge period (Ministry of Planning, 2012). The overrepresentation of youth in the population stimulates migration even more as there is not enough work for them to be found in their rural villages.

Once living in the city, young migrants are exposed to a new environment. This new urban life might have an influence on how these young migrants shape their lives and how they develop their identities. It is especially during adolescence that people develop their identities (Kroger, 1996). Migration during this phase of life can thus have an impact on how people identify themselves now that they get in touch with different values and norms that



might question their own behaviour. This research also contributes to the call for gender perspectives in migration studies as different experiences can be distinguished for male and female migrants (Silvey & Elmhirst, 2003; Derks, 2008; Bylander, 2014). Once migrants live in the city independently from their parents, some would argue that through this experience of migrating and starting a new life, they have become mature as they find ways of survival on their own. Monsutti (2007) for example shows with his study that migration can be seen as a rite of passage through which migrants become adults. This research contributes to the debate of whether this is the case for young Cambodian migrants. Therefore, the main research question that this thesis tries to answer is:

*What is the impact of migration on young internal migrants in their transition to adulthood in Phnom Penh, Cambodia?*

This research question is divided into the following sub questions:

1. *How do rural youth grow up?*
2. *To what extent can migrants be considered adults?*
3. *How does migration shape the identity formation of migrants?*
4. *To what extent do migrants get influenced by the city regarding gender?*

The objective of this research then, is to understand the impact that migration has on young migrants in their transition to adulthood. This research also provides more knowledge on migration in Cambodia, this knowledge can be taken into account for policy on the development of Cambodia since it is a phenomenon that happens on a large scale, involving the whole country. This study attempts to give a better insight on youth migration in the case of Cambodia and the effects migration might have on the lives of youth as they grow up in the city.

## **1.2 Host organisation**

The fieldwork was conducted under supervision of Indochina Research. Indochina Research is a research agency in the Indochina region with more than 20 years of experience. They conduct research on customer's request. This varies from data collection up to full research projects, depending on the client's needs. The agency has a wide range of experiences in the field of the commercial sector but also more social research has been done, concerning issues like health and education. Currently Indochina Research is conducting a research on Cambodian youth. The so called G:LAB project tries to map the behaviours of young

Cambodians in order to predict future trends. This research then, could be used to add knowledge on Cambodian youth with a particular focus on youth that migrated to the city.

### 1.3 Thesis structure

The following chapters will situate this study more into the academic debate with chapter two building the theoretical framework and chapter three placing this study in the Cambodian context. Chapter four will focus on the methodology that was used for this study, how the data was collected and which limitations were experienced while doing the research. Chapters five until seven will present the research findings. Chapter five is focused on the first sub question and explains adulthood through the eyes of rural youth. Followed by chapter six which discusses whether migration leads to adulthood. Chapter seven depicts how migrants develop their identities. These three chapters draw attention to gender and distinguish different trends for female and male migrants. In chapter eight the results are discussed and placed within the academic debate. Also recommendations are made for future research. In chapter nine the conclusion of this thesis is given whereby the main research question is answered.

## 2. Theoretical framework

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Much literature can be found on migration since it is a phenomenon that is not restricted to time but it happened long before and will, most likely, continue to happen in future. People move to new horizons in hope for opportunities that will better their livelihoods. It should be realised that migration is not only a decision made by the individual but also serves as a household strategy. The household plays a role in determining which member should migrate to generate an extra income and to spread risks in incoming generating activities. Lall et al. (2006) argue that most of the migrants are young because migrating on a young age leads to a bigger possibility of a positive return on migration since young people still have a longer life expectancy. Also, sending a family member to migrate at a young age can be a result of social norms whereby young people search for a better life (Lall et al., 2006). Migrating on a young age leads to interesting questions such as whether the migration might have an impact on their transition to adulthood. Nonetheless, not much literature has been focused on this and opportunities of further research can be identified.

### 2.1 Migration as rite of passage?

Studies that do give attention to transition to adulthood in the light of migration tend to focus on whether migration can be seen as a rite of passage to adulthood. Monsutti (2007) supports this by showing with his study on young male Afghans that migration is not only a risk spreading strategy of a household but it is also a way for young men to become adults. It can be seen as “a rite of passage to adulthood through which a man proves his masculinity” (Monsutti, 2007, p. 182). These young men become adults through three stages whereby they leave the house and are separated from their previous status, their stay away from their family and their new position when they return. Barratt et al. (2012) are in line with Monsutti’s thinking by stating that migration accelerates migrants to mature as they become now independent and responsible in earning an income. It should be taken into account however, that the notion of independence linked to adulthood is context specific and more applicable for Western societies. According to Zhong and Arnett (2014), adulthood in the context of Chinese migrant women is marked by the characteristics as taking care of parents, a long-term career and family roles and responsibilities rather than being independent.

Amin et al. (1998) show that the migration of young women who migrated to Dhaka, Bangladesh to work in garment factories is a way for them to experience adolescence. Migration in their case is not a rite of passage to adulthood but creates an extra phase between childhood and adulthood. Before, adolescence was hardly recognized because young women moved directly from childhood into adulthood by marrying on a young age. Two possible ways for women to experience adolescence are joining education or working outside the home (Amin et al., 1998). Once working outside their homes, Amin et al. (1998) argue that these young women can gain self-confidence by working with factory machines and becoming familiar with modernity. They come in touch with new lifestyles and social networks. Earning money by themselves might give them independence and autonomy, however this might end as soon as they leave the phase of adolescence and enter adulthood through marriage. Even if they will be financially dependent on a husband once married, the fact that they have experienced a period of independence can have an influence on their autonomy as wives and in decision making. While working at garment factories, women interact with people and involve themselves in a new social network. On the work floor women gain skills in negotiating with men about their contracts and wages, this might as well have an influence on the relationships with their future husbands (Amin et al., 1998). It can thus be argued that migration is not always a rite of passage, rather it prolongs the transition to adulthood. This is in line with Horvath (2008) who shows that migration among young people should be seen as an opportunity to reach better economical conditions. Rural youth do not migrate to become adults but migrating to another place allows them to deal with uncertainties of a prolonged transition to adulthood. Experiences learned during this prolonged transition to adulthood might eventually have an influence on their adulthood as was shown by Amin et al. (1998).

## 2.2 Prolonged transition to adulthood

The argument made by Amin et al. (1998) that if migrants would not migrate, they would move from childhood into adulthood but through migration they are able to experience adolescence can be placed in line with Arnett's (2000) argument on emerging adulthood. However, Arnett (2000) sees emerging adulthood as different from adolescence. He defines adolescence as a stage whereby people are aged between 10-18, they "live with their parents, are experiencing the physical changes of puberty, are attending secondary school, and are part of a school-based peer culture" (Arnett, 2000, p. 476). This definition of adolescence then does not apply for garment workers in Bangladesh. More applicable would be emerging

adulthood which is a phase whereby the characteristics of adulthood such as marriage and parenting are postponed but the phase of adolescence has passed already. Emerging adulthood tends to be found mostly in industrialized countries since people here require high levels of education in order to get employed. People attend schools until their mid- twenties and prefer to gain some work experience before getting married or becoming a parent. This gives them time to find their partner and they can experience more relationships and job opportunities before settling down with their spouse (Arnett, 2000). In the case of developing countries, emerging adulthood might also apply but is more likely to appear in urban areas since the age of marriage and parenthood tends to be higher for urban people compared to rural people. When looking at the case of the Bangladeshi garment workers with Arnett's phases in mind, it can be argued that they also postpone their adulthood by working for themselves and their families back home before marriage. But the phase of adolescence has already been passed or even skipped if they were not able to attend secondary school. It is thus a matter of choosing the right definitions in the case of migrants but it becomes clear through these studies that migration leads to an extra phase in life that would otherwise not be experienced. This phase then can be characterized by autonomy, self exploration, relationships and job experiences (Amin et al., 1998; Arnett, 2000). Eventually a migrant will become an adult, once returning or marrying at the new place of residence. However it can be questioned whether it is the migration that makes a migrant an adult or that it is migration that gives a migrant more space and creates in essence a new phase in which they emerge adulthood but have not arrived yet.

## 2.3 Forming an identity

### 2.3.1 Rural and urban identities

Throughout life people try to balance what is considered as self and other, this identity formation process tends to be more active during adolescence. During childhood, one's identity is mainly based on important others like parents. Whereas during adolescence identity formation is self derived whereby others change from sources of identification to agents who help "to recognize the 'real me'" (Kroger, 1996, p. 6). Part of identity formation during adolescence is a cultural identity whereby ideology, love and work are central. When forming a cultural identity, a person adopts certain beliefs and practices and makes these his own. Depending on the context, family can play a great role in forming one's cultural identity as independence can in other contexts (Jensen & Arnett, 2012). Jensen and Arnett (2012) argue that the globalization has an influence on the formation of cultural identities for adolescents.

In this globalized world, adolescents and emerging adults are exposed to a new culture. It is during these phases of life where they still adopt beliefs and practices in forming their cultural identity and this might be influenced by a culture promoted through globalization. Exposure to western media influences the self image of young people as they try to conform their identity to the depicted models in the media. This might lead to what Jensen and Arnett (2012, p.483) call *cultural identity confusion* which results from globalization. Although Jensen and Arnett mainly focus on the impact of a globalised world on identity formation, it can also be applied to the case of young migrants as they relocate to urban spaces whereby the influence of the global culture is more visible than in their places of origin. As a result, their identity might change from being an rural person to an urbanite. This change in identity however, is not as clear as the spatial change that takes place. Studies show that the identity of migrants is rather complex and cannot easily be viewed as a simple transformation from being rural to being urban (Nguyen et al., 2012; Derks, 2008; Barratt et al., 2012; Erman, 1998). Migrants often try to find a balance between their identity from their rural places and the new lives in the city that influences their former identity. They have to find an identity that allows them to include their rural origins while being an urban resident (Barratt et al., 2012; Erman, 1998). Thus, migration from a rural to an urban area does not mean that these two different areas are different entities as such. Influences from the city can be found in villages, with the media playing a big role in exposing villagers to urban lifestyles (Derks, 2008; Erman, 1998; Nguyen et al., 2012). As many migrants move to the city, they come with their own values and norms that also have an influence on what characterizes the city. Since migrants can represent a big proportion of the total urban population, it could be argued that their values and norms are also part of the city and consequently influence the identity of what an urbanite would be like (Erman, 1998).

Parsons, Lawreniuk and Pilgrim (2014) show that in Cambodia, migrants still remain in contact with their places of origin and that the networks migrants have in the city mainly consist of people from the same origin. Also, the norms and hierarchies from rural life continue to determine the lives of migrants. Parsons et al. (2014) explain this as a form of insurance against risks, the networks they maintain can be seen as effective channels, necessary in obtaining a job. Migration then, can be seen as a risk spreading strategy of the household, as discussed before, but for the migrants themselves holding on to their origins is also a risk reducing strategy. To explain how migrants become independent from the native social context would then be in terms of space but taking into account the importance of

maintaining connections with the rural as mentioned by Parsons et al. (2014). Bork-Hüffer et al. (2014) argue that these translocal relations that migrants have, stretching beyond cities, contribute to the emergence of transient urban spaces. Rural and urban areas are connected through these translocal relations, this contributes as well to the argument that those areas should not be seen as separate entities. The connectedness of migrants with their rural homes is interesting when looking at their transition to adulthood as they live in the city. Furthermore, the agency of migrants should be considered. Migrants might not only be influenced by the city, they are the ones shaping urban spaces. Urban spaces then, are a display of ongoing power relations and the agency of people (Bork-Hüffer et al., 2014). When linking this to the identity debate it could be argued that the identity formation of migrant's takes place at transient urban spaces that are created by migrants themselves and their environment. It is thus an ongoing exchange of translocal relations that will influence the identity formation of migrants.

### *2.3.2 Imposed identity*

Forming an identity is not only intentionally done by migrants themselves, their surroundings also play a great role in this. Erman (1998) shows that the extent to which migrants feel urban is partly determined by urban elites. Compared to these elites, migrants can feel inferior and uncertain about living in the city to an extent that they still identify themselves as rural when comparing themselves to urban elites. Because migrants do not comply with the standards of these urban elites, they are forced to identify with another group. Being identified as urban elite comes with a certain power that excludes others and as a result imposes an identity on an outsider as being non-elite. When migrants are socially and economically insecure in the city, finding their identity in their rural origin serves as protection in their new environment. This insecurity together with lack of resources that keeps them away from the opportunities and services in the city, reinforces their rural identity (Erman, 1998). Powerful groups in the city can differentiate themselves through *othering* whereby they define who belongs to their identity and who is the inferior other. As a result, subordinates will have to form their identity according to the expectations of the powerful since they will be stigmatized as the other and therefore lack the legitimacy to become one of the powerful (Jensen, 2011).

## 2.4 Including gender in migration studies

### 2.4.1 Female migrants

Migration can have a different impact on women and men and gender should therefore be considered in studies on migration. In the case of Thai migrants, Curran and Saguy (2013) show that it was more accepted for Thai men to migrate because it fits the traditional gender roles whereby men are free to go where they want contrary to women who are tied to the domestic domain. When women are motivated to migrate to look for jobs in urban areas, they encounter new identities that introduce issues like autonomy, sexuality and consumerism to these women. This forces women to rethink their rural identities and adapt to their new environment (Curran and Saguy, 2013). Not only does this occur when women migrate to the city, once migrants come back to visit their rural homes, they expose other women to their new urban identities which are accompanied by goods and luxuries from the city. This inspires rural women to migrate to the city as they long for these goods. Once in the city, women accept harsh working conditions to be able to afford these longed for consumer goods and newly achieved status but also to send remittances as their families expect them to do so. Women can find themselves torn in between different networks with their rural origin on one side and their new rural friends on the other whereby they have to make decisions that might be conflicting each other. Derks (2008) shows how Khmer women fulfil their duties by sending remittances but the ways through which they were able to raise these remittances might be questionable in the light of traditional values of a good woman. Because of the pressure female migrants experience from their family, some might feel forced to involve themselves in jobs such as sex workers. This undermines their status of a good woman while the main reason for involving themselves with such work was the expectations they had to meet of being a daughter who supports her parents. The agency of female migrants should not be neglected. There might be structures such as expectations from their families and a culture that defines modesty but every female migrant will find her own way in dealing with these structures. The choice of how to deal with the existing structures depends on the individual migrant. Becoming a sex worker then, also involves this agency and is not always forced on female migrants but could also be a deliberate choice as this job might lead to a higher income compared to other jobs.

The social networks that migrants are part of have different effects for women and for men. Silvey and Elmhirst (2003) argue that social capital can serve as a safety net for female



migrants who face uncertainties. They can ask this network for support in times of need. The downside of this social capital is the obligations it brings, as was also shown above. As much as their networks serve as safety nets, so does it for male relatives who are on the receiving end of the remittances. The distribution of the resources in networks in this case are of a disadvantage for women (Silvey & Elmhirst, 2003). The stronger the ties are with their rural origin, the more pressure female migrants experienced in conforming to rules of modesty. Because women still rely on their families, the families have a bigger say on how they should behave according to traditional values. Networks made in their new environment that could possibly lead to empowerment are not strong enough to overcome the pressure from the rural networks (Silvey & Elmhirst, 2003).

#### 2.4.2 *Chbap srey*

Since this study is focused on Cambodia, attention needs to be given to the local codes of conduct that prevail. *Chbap srey* is one of the rules of modesty that will be referred to for Cambodian women. *Chbap srey* is part of a series that explains the moral code for women in the form of a poem whereby a mother advises her daughter how to behave properly. It describes the duties of a woman, how she should behave towards her husband and family and the consequences if she fails to follow these rules. It is based on Buddhist principles, passed on for generations and part of the curriculum in Cambodian public schools (Derks, 2008; Ballard et al., 2007; Smith-Hefner, 1998). Besides *chbap srey* there is as well *chbap proh* which are rules for boys. These rules focus on strength, knowledge and discipline. However, *chbap srey* tends to be more important than *chbap proh*. According to Smith-Hefner (1998), a reason for this could be that masculinity in Cambodia requires less restrictions than femininity. The following textbox shows a part of *chbap srey*<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: <http://carpediemilia.over-blog.com/article-21656482.html>  
 Edited by Dr Mai, translation by PADV Cambodia (Partnership Against Domestic Violence)

*Chbap Srey*

*My dearest daughter, no matter how poor you are, follow the woman's rules  
Don't be so mean to the neighbour and relative  
Good position and happiness come from women  
Being a woman, no matter what you say, don't be talking not serious, not gentle  
Taking a seat in the wrong place is not suitable for a woman  
If you don't feel afraid of your husband's feeling and let the other man look down on your husband  
We call you a woman who is lack of good characteristic*

*You should try to do the work like weaving or knitting  
Don't delay the work  
Before you weave the silk you have to make things ready and then do it  
Don't go for a walk at other people's house  
Try to work hard and protect yourself since you are a virgin  
Because when you have a husband you are busy with your children who are crying, you have never time to do things  
Don't keep things complicated otherwise you will lose it*

*One flame is to keep the gratitude toward your parents  
You have to walk on the way that was paved by your parents and serve your parents well  
Try to protect it, give it food as desired  
If you are hungry don't keep food to yourself give your parents delicious food regularly  
Your words must be polite and any duty must be done regularly and very well*

*2.4.3 Male migrants*

Not only does migration affect women, Bylander (2014) shows how the ideal of migration affects Cambodian men who do not want to migrate to Thailand. As much as Bylander's study involves international migration, it is also applicable for internal migration in Cambodia since migration, be it internal or international, has now become a norm among young people. This so called *culture of migration* transforms traditional ideas of marriage and status and becomes in line with migrating for a certain period of time as part of life. Migration as ideal does not only affect migrants and their families but also non migrants (Ali, 2007). A local culture can thus absorb migration and change its traditions so that it fits with migration movements. In the case of Cambodia, Bylander (2014) argues that migrating is seen as a form of masculinity whereby men are able to seek employment outside the domestic sphere. Contrary to women who are expected to stay home before they get married. This can cause

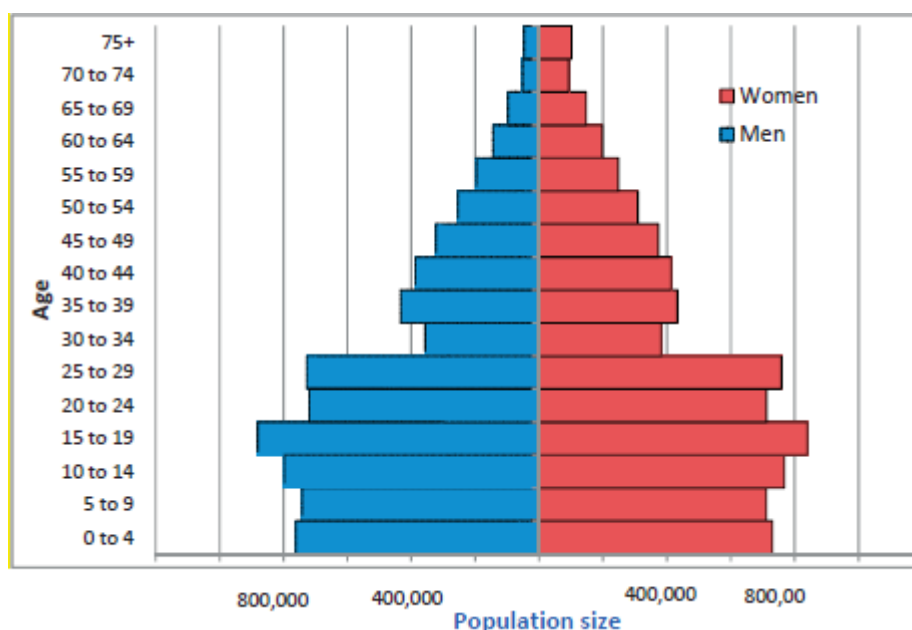
conflicting situations for women whereby they have to choose between staying home or contributing to the income of the family. However, since it is more accepted for women to stay home as part of traditional custom, it is easier for women to refuse migration whereas men will feel more pressure to migrate. In cases where migration has become part of a culture, it will shape the ideals of migrants and their families but others as well who cannot afford migration or who do not want to migrate.

### 3. Setting the context

#### 3.1 Youth in Cambodia

Today, Cambodia's population is dominated by people who are between the ages of 15 and 30. This can be explained by the baby boom that occurred after the Khmer Rouge regime (Ministry of Planning, 2012). As can be seen in Figure 1, people aged below 29 are overrepresented in Cambodia's population.

**Figure 1: Population Pyramid Cambodia, 2010**



Source: Ministry of Planning, 2012

As Lall et al. (2006) pointed out that most of the migrants are youth, this is also the case for Cambodia. When looking at the population of Phnom Penh, 1.2 million people were residing in this city in 2008 with 400,000 of them being migrants that arrived within five years before the census in 2008 was conducted. 55% of these migrants were aged between 15 and 30 (Ministry of Planning, 2012). That Phnom Penh is a popular destination among migrants, becomes clear when comparing the census of 1998 with 2008, this shows an increase from 567,860 to 1,237,600 residents. Population growth could be explained in terms of fertility but Phnom Penh has the lowest fertility rate in the country. 80% of this population growth results from migration. This number is expected to grow as rural youths continue to migrate to Phnom Penh because of labour perspectives (Ministry of Planning, 2012; Sovannara, 2007).

When comparing young residents in Phnom Penh with youth that migrate to Phnom Penh, Tabel 1 shows that migrants in general are younger than residents. The current flow of migrants to the city makes Phnom Penh thus a younger city. Table 1 also shows that under the age of 30 female migrants make up 33,7% of the total migrant population in comparison to 25,1% of female residents in Phnom Penh. Male migrants under the age of 30 have a share of 22,2%, this shows more similarity with male residents who make up 22,6%. It can be concluded that young migrants are more likely to be female than the original residents in Phnom Penh (Ministry of Planning, 2012).

**Table 1: Age/sex distribution of Phnom Penh residents in 2004 and recent migrants<sup>2</sup> 15 and older**

	Phnom Penh residents 2004 <sup>3</sup>		Recent migrants <sup>4</sup>	
	Males	Females	Males	Females
15 to 19	7.7	9.4	3.8	7.3
20 to 24	10.1	10.7	10.4	13.6
25 to 29	4.8	5.0	8.2	12.8
30 to 34	5.1	5.7	8.0	7.7
35 to 39	4.8	4.8	3.2	3.1
40 +	13.5	18.4	9.2	13.8
Total	100		100	
Median age	30.0		28.0	
Mean age (standard deviation)	34.0 (15.3)		30.7 (10.9)	

<sup>3</sup> Based on the 2004 Cambodian Inter-Censual Survey

<sup>4</sup> Based on CRUMP

Source: Ministry of Planning, 2012, p.20

### 3.2 Migrants' origins

One of the determinants for migration is the distance to a possible destination. Table 2 shows that the top four provinces of migrants' origins are the ones near Phnom Penh but besides this these provinces also have a relatively large population (Lall et al., 2006; Ministry of Planning, 2012).

<sup>2</sup> Recent migrants: "those that moved to Phnom Penh between mid 2006 and mid 2011" (Ministry of Planning, 2012, p.20).

**Table 2: Percent distribution of province of origin for Phnom Penh recent migrants, comparing three data sources**

CRUMP	%	2008 Census	%	1998 Census	%
Kandal	20.2	Kampong Cham	20.3	Kampong Cham	18.6
Kampong Cham	15.6	Prey Veng	15.4	Prey Veng	14.6
Prey Veng	13.0	Kandal	14.7	Kandal	14.3
Takeo	9.9	Takeo	10.5	Takeo	8.3
Svay Rieng	7.2	Svay Rieng	8.1	Svay Rieng	6.5
Kampot	6.2	Kampot	4.8	Kampot	4.9
Kampong Thom	5.4	Kampong Speu	4.4	Battambang	4.8
Kampong Speu	4.9	Kampong Thom	4.0	Khampong Thom	2.9
Battambang	3.4	Battambang	2.7	Kampong Speu	2.3
Other provinces	13.3	Other provinces	11.1	Other provinces	11.0
Other country	0.9	Other country	4.0	Other country	11.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Ministry of Planning, 2012, p. 23

**Map 1: Provinces of Cambodia**



Source: www.nationsonline.org

Migration can be stimulated once it is known that migrants of the same origin are already living in the destination. Networks with people from the same origin seem to be important in obtaining a job (Lall et al., 2006). This is to some extent also the case for Cambodia, the CRUMP project found out that half of the migrants has contact with a friend or relative in Phnom Penh when migrating but it depends whether the migrant migrates with his spouse or not. If a migrant migrates on his own, the chances are bigger that he already has contacts in Phnom Penh, most of the migrants contacts are from the village of origin (Ministry of Planning, 2012). Having a network when looking for a job in the city is important for migrants. The family can assist with this by connecting migrants to social networks existing of friends and relatives. These networks are necessary for a young migrant in obtaining a successful career. The networks are of an informal nature and fill in the gap of social protection that is lacking (Peou & Zinn, 2014; Sovannara, 2007). Once living in the city, migrants tend to stick with their own family and friends from the same village of origin. As a result of this, migrants are less integrated in the city. Another argument for this is that migrants cannot enjoy the urban living standards. Many of them came to the city to earn money in the first place and not necessarily to enjoy an urban lifestyle (Sovannara, 2007). Also, while living in the city, migrants are still determined by the norms from the rural areas. It can be argued that sticking to these norms gives the migrants a sense of belonging, it protects them in an environment that is unknown to them. At the same time however, the known rural hierarchies are challenged by people migrating to urban areas. Wealth and status can now also be determined through translocal linkages that reach beyond the village (Parsons et al. 2014).

The distribution of employment among migrants is set out in Table 3 according to the findings of the CRUMP project. Notable is that female migrants are more concentrated in certain jobs than male migrants. One third of the female migrants are garment workers.

**Table 3: Distribution of current occupation of employed migrants by sex**

	Total sample	Males	Females
N	638	284	354
Construction	4.2	8.1	1.1
Non-construction labour	8.8	16.2	2.8
Garment worker	21.8	7.7	33.1
Service/entertainment	7.7	3.5	11.0
Domestic worker	4.4	1.8	6.5
Driver	8.5	17.6	1.1
Business owner	22.4	15.9	27.7
White collar professional	4.1	7.7	1.1
Agriculture	2.0	2.5	1.7
Other work	16.1	19.0	13.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Ministry of Planning, 2012, p. 30

### 3.3 Remittances

Zimmer and Knodel (2013) confirm that having a migrant in the family does increase the amount of money that these families can spend. This is determined by several factors. When migrants live in Phnom Penh or Thailand, the remittances send to their families are higher than when migrants live in other rural areas in Cambodia. It also depends on whether the migrant is a daughter or son since daughters are more likely to send bigger amounts of money. More specifically, a single daughter is preferred over a married daughter. Once migrants are married, the support for the family will decrease. That migrants support their family who remain in the rural areas indicates migration as a risk spreading strategy of the household whereby decisions are not necessarily made on an individual base but from the household level with individuals serving the development of the livelihood of the household as a whole (Zimmer & Knodel, 2013). Remittances send by young Cambodian migrants to their families are a form of respect towards their parents and many migrants view this as their duty. Part of this duty is also that migrants are planning to return to their village of origin to help their parents as they grow older (Yagura, 2012; Derks, 2008). This might have an influence on the lifestyles migrants are living and the aspirations they have since their life in the city is only of temporary duration. But this is not always the case, Yagura (2012) argues that migrating to Phnom Penh might lead to finding a spouse in the city and this can change the plans of returning back to their village of origin. This is mostly the case for migrants who come from a poor background and who do not own a land or will not receive land from their parents in



future. Living in the city might thus to a certain extent have an impact on the future of a young migrant when it comes to meeting a prospective spouse. Derks (2008) describes how young female migrants in Phnom Penh experiencing a modern life in the city gives them a sort of independence that rural women never had before. These modern lifestyles might clash with traditional values of modesty and force migrant women to negotiate their own identities in the city between holding on to their rural values and adapting to the city life (Derks, 2008).

## 4. Methodology

### 4.1 Research questions

The objective of this qualitative study is to gain a deeper understanding of internal migration in Cambodia, more specifically it is focussed on the impact that migration has on youth in their transition to adulthood. This objective is translated in the main research question:

*What is the impact of migration on young internal migrants in their transition to adulthood in Phnom Penh, Cambodia?*

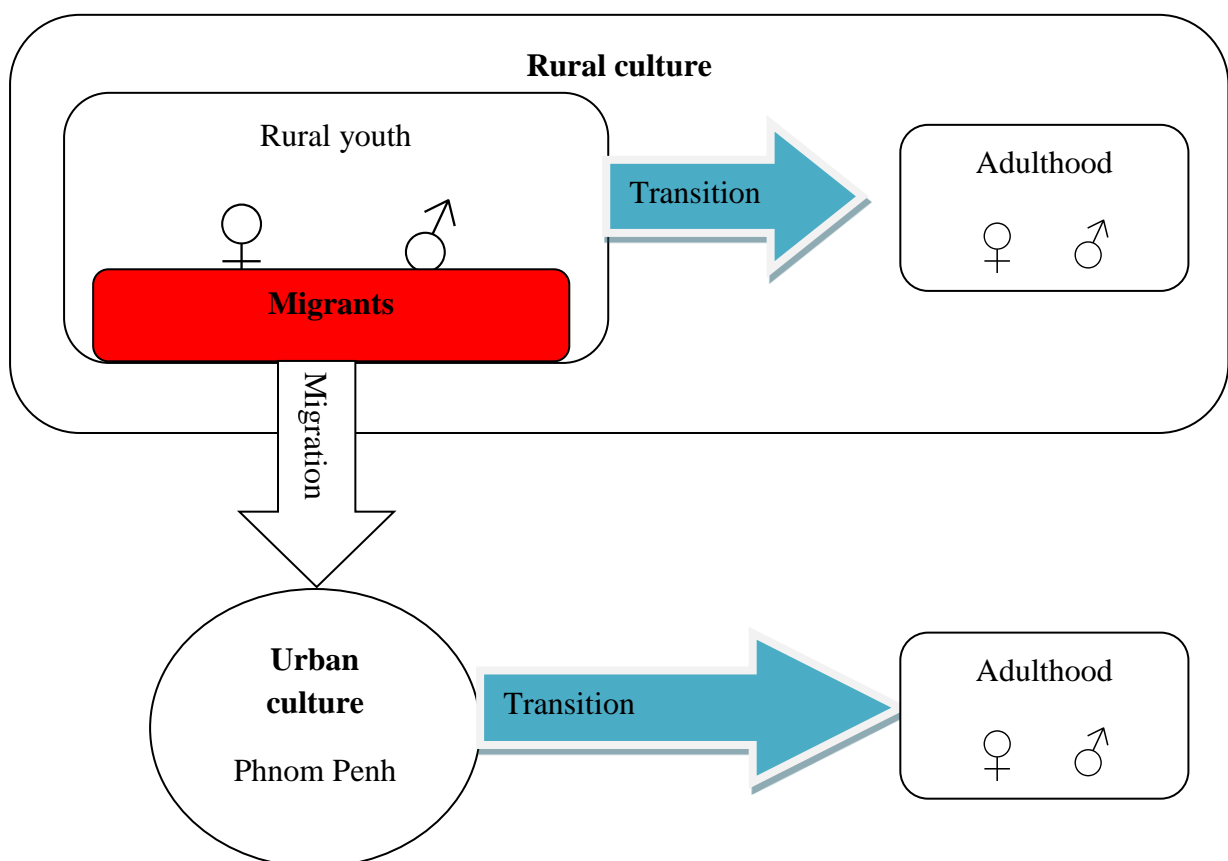
This research question will be answered through four sub questions:

1. *How do rural youth grow up?*
2. *To what extent can migrants be considered adults?*
3. *How does migration shape the identity formation of migrants?*
4. *To what extent do migrants get influenced by the city regarding gender?*

### 4.2 Conceptual model

The concepts that are central to this research are visualized in Figure 2.

**Figure 2: Conceptual model**



It should be kept in mind that young migrants are a part of rural youth as they were raised in their rural villages before migrating to Phnom Penh. The group of rural youth that includes the young migrants as shown in the model is raised with norms and values that are specific for their village. This rural culture has an influence on their transition to adulthood. However, when young migrants move to Phnom Penh, they also get influenced by the city and its urban culture which might lead to an impact on their transition to adulthood that differs from the rural youth who remain in their villages. Migrating to the city forces migrants to rethink their identities and to a certain extent they will have to adapt their identities to their new environment. This identity development is an important aspect of youth in their transition to adulthood and is triggered through migration. As was described in the literature, migration often leads to a prolonged transition to adulthood, this is visualized in the model by a longer trajectory before they reach adulthood. This study also pays attention to gender since female and male migrants might have different experiences with the impact of migration in their transition to adulthood.

### 4.3 Operationalisation

In order to use the concepts in this study, it is necessary to define these concepts to avoid ambiguity during the research process. The first concept is *youth*. The definition that is maintained in this research is a person between the age 15 and 30. Since this research will be focused on youth who migrate to the city, it is important to define the meaning of urban. In this context the definition for *urban* refers to the city Phnom Penh and the people that are living here. To define *migrants*, the definition used by the United Nations to describe internal migrants applies: “A movement of people from one area of a country to another for the purpose or with the effect of establishing a new residence. This migration may be temporary or permanent. Internal migrants move but remain within their country of origin” (United Nations, 2013). To place it into the research context, it will be specifically focused on the movement to Phnom Penh. All in all, when defining a young urban migrant, it is a person aged between 15 and 30 who moved from another area in Cambodia to Phnom Penh, where he/she is currently living, be it temporary or permanent.

### 4.4 Research methods

In order to answer the research questions, a fieldwork was conducted in Cambodia from February 2015 until May 2015. During these four months, semi-structured interviews were

used as the main method for data collection. Interviews were held with migrants but also with rural youth to find out how rural youth grow up and to what extent young migrants differ from rural youth now that they live in the city. In total 40 interviews have been conducted, this includes 25 interviews with migrants in Phnom Penh and 15 interviews with youth living in Battambang province. To gain a deeper understanding of the experiences and beliefs of Cambodian youth regarding adulthood, a qualitative study was preferred which required interviews. The preference for interviews also resulted from the fact that illiteracy among the target population might have obstructed the use of surveys. This problem could only be solved if the surveys were conducted face to face with a Khmer speaking research assistant. However, because of limitations in financial means and time, interviews were chosen being the most suitable method for this research.

In addition to interviews with young migrants and youth in Battambang, attempts were made to interview experts on migration. Various migration organisations and professors were approached but unfortunately there was no response or they did not have time for an interview. I only managed to have an interview with Mrs. Treleaven who is a PhD student and who contributed to the CRUMP project. Furthermore, personal correspondence with Dr. Derks contributed to useful insights during the research progress. Dr. Derks conducted her PhD study in 2008 in Cambodia with a focus on Khmer female migrants.

Besides interviewing, informal conversations with some of the respondents and translators were held to build rapport. It turned out that informal conversations were often easier for respondents to express themselves in English. Interviews might put a pressure on respondents as they try to answer the question in a language that is foreign to them. After realising that respondents had difficulties with answering questions mainly because of the language, it was decided that the focus of the research would not mainly focus on the tourist sector anymore, this selection was made beforehand because I assumed that it would be easier to interview migrants in the tourist sector because they would speak English better. When reality showed that this was not the case, the population target was extended to migrants in general working in Phnom Penh. After this decision, I found a translator who is a student English. She was willing to accompany me during interviews in Phnom Penh. In Battambang I worked with another translator who was studying English as well.

### 4.5 Research locations

Map 1 shows the research locations Phnom Penh and Battambang province situated in Cambodia.

Map 2: Research locations



#### 4.5.1 Phnom Penh

In total 25 interviews have been conducted with migrants aged between 18 and 28 in Phnom Penh. Since the focus was on migrants working in the tourist sector at first, the first interviews were held with migrants working in restaurants and bars at streets which are popular among tourists in Phnom Penh. Locations that were popular among tourists were identified. These were streets close to the riverside and Street 278. Interviews were held during the day when the respondents were not busy with work since most tourists would come at night. When entering a restaurant or bar, the purpose of the research was explained and potential respondents were asked for their permission to participate in the research. During this time,

only English speaking migrants were interviewed. Once I found a translator and the research population was extended to young migrants in general, Khmer speaking migrants were approached as well and this made it easier to find respondents. The next interviews were held in and around shopping malls and markets across the city namely TK Avenue, Aeon Mall, Olympic Market and City mall (see map 4). Inside these malls employees of restaurants, coffee bars and shops were approached and asked if it was possible to have an interview at that particular moment. I chose to do it this way because most of the migrants had long working hours and this made it difficult to interview them before or after their work. Also they did not always have a day off during the weekend and if they had, they were mostly not interested to have an interview during their off day. In case the person we approached was not able to have an interview with because he was too busy, he was too old or not a migrant, the next shop was approached.

At the end of the fieldwork, access was gained to the houses of garment workers and four interviews were conducted there. These interviews focussed specifically on topics that needed more clarification. It was interesting to include garment factors in the research population since they make up a big share of the female migrants coming to Phnom Penh but also because they have their own characteristics that distinguishes them from migrants working in the tourist and service sector.

**Map 3: Phnom Penh**



**Map 4: Research locations in Phnom Penh**

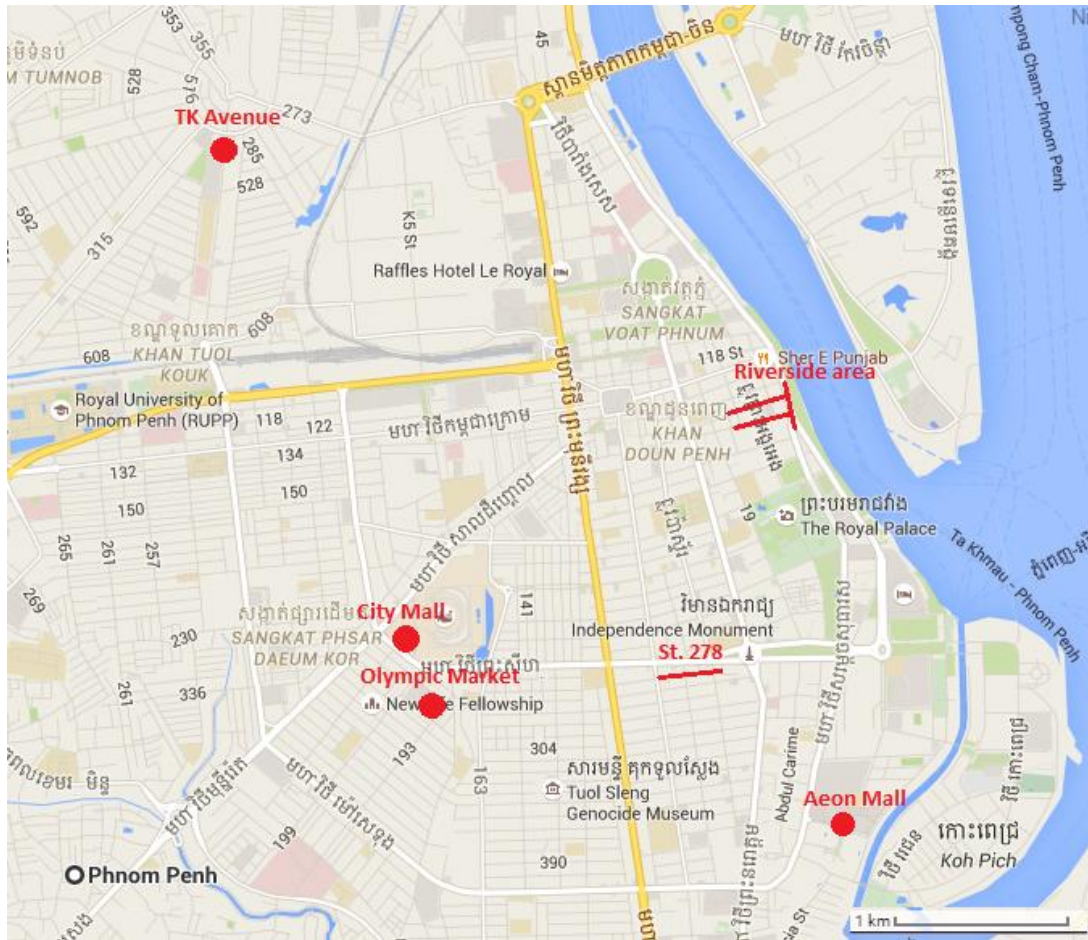


Table 4 shows the characteristics of the migrants interviewed in Phnom Penh. The names of the respondents are fictional for privacy reasons.

**Table 4: Characteristics of respondents in Phnom Penh**

No.	Name	Gender	Age	Province of origin	Year of arrival	Occupation
1	Arun	Male	20		2014	Cashier at bar
2	Chantou	Female	25	Kratie	2012	Sex worker
3	Bopha	Female	27	Takeo	2015	Bartender
4	Daevy	Female	27	Kratie	2009	Cashier at cafe
5	Heng	Male	22	Takeo	2000	Bartender
6	Narith	Male	23	Prey Veng	2014	Hotel receptionist
7	Mony	Female	22	Prey Veng	2012	Waitress
8	Sov	Male		Prey Veng	2009	Tuktuk driver
9	Phirum	Male	25	Banteay Meanchey	2010	Salesman
10	Nary	Female	19	Kampong Cham	2011	Hairdresser
11	Rith	Male	27	Kandal	2012	Waiter

<b>12</b>	<b>Prak</b>	Male	24	Kampong Cham	2010	Restaurant manager
<b>13</b>	<b>Reach</b>	Female	23	Kampot	2008	Waitress
<b>14</b>	<b>Sammang</b>	Female	22	Takeo	2012	Waitress
<b>15</b>	<b>Borey</b>	Male	26	Kampong Chhnang	2012	Waiter
<b>16</b>	<b>Chhaiya</b>	Female	22	Battambang	2006	Intern Indochina Research
<b>17</b>	<b>Sros</b>	Male	18	Siem Reap	2015	Waiter
<b>18</b>	<b>Vannak</b>	Male	28	Ratanakiri	2010	Cook
<b>19</b>	<b>Ponleak</b>	Male	18	Pursat	2015	Waiter
<b>20</b>	<b>Rangsey</b>	Female	20	Kampong Thom	2012	Saleswoman
<b>21</b>	<b>Soheat</b>	Female	20	Kampong Cham	2009	Saleswoman
<b>22</b>	<b>Kunthea</b>	Female	28	Takeo	2006	Garment worker
<b>23</b>	<b>Naiseng</b>	Female	25	Kampong Cham	2007	Garment worker
<b>24</b>	<b>Vathey</b>	Female	24	Kampong Cham	2010	Garment worker
<b>25</b>	<b>Serey</b>	Female	29	Banteay Meanchey	2005	Garment worker

#### 4.5.2 Battambang province

To find out the impact of migration on migrants, it was decided to include rural youth in this research to serve as a control group. An important gatekeeper in Battambang was the district chief who gave us the phone numbers of the village leaders in his district. After informing the village leaders about our purpose in the village, four villages were chosen. In these villages my translator and I would walk to the houses to find out if there were people residing who were aged between 15 and 30 and who were willing to participate in an interview. In total 15 youths were interviewed who lived in these villages. During the interviews I asked the respondents to make a word cloud about childhood and one about adulthood. This gave them more time to think about the characteristics of childhood and adulthood and made it easier for me to compare the answers. The focus of the interviews in the villages was on personal life experiences and becoming an adult in the village. Map 5 shows the area where the respondents were interviewed.



**Map 5: Research area Battambang province**



Table 5 shows the characteristics of the respondents interviewed in Battambang. Their names are pseudonyms as well.

**Table 5: Characteristics of respondents in Battambang**

No.	Name	Gender	Age	Province of origin	Occupation
1	Sokun	Male	27	Side Two refugee camp	Artist
2	Vanna	Female	17	Battambang	Student
3	Sovvanai	Female	16	Battambang	Student
4	Nhean	Male	22	Battambang	Student/ waiter
5	Choum	Female	28	Takeo	Tailor
6	Thavy	Female	23	Battambang	Nurse
7	Reaksmey	Female	23	Battambang	Works at bank
8	Sithon	Female	25	Svay Rieng	Factory worker
9	Sony	Male	18	Battambang	Unemployed
10	Heng	Male	30	Battambang	Mechanic
11	Phearum	Male	18	Battambang	Works at ricemill
12	Sophanit	Male	21	Battambang	Student
13	Tin	Male	25	Siem Reap	Student
14	Chavy	Female	28	Battambang	Unemployed
15	Sourkea	Female	20	Battambang	Student

#### 4.6 Research limitations

As shown above, the English language was a problem for some respondents when conducting interviews without a translator. This might have affected the interviews as questions had to be asked in simple language which sometimes missed the point of the questions or questions had to be skipped when the respondent could not understand it after several attempts to rephrase the question. Interviewing with a translator also comes with its limitations and risks, the translators were not professional translators. This decision was made mainly because of financial reasons. A risk of translation is that the English translation given to me is already influenced by the interpretation of the translator. The presence of the translator might also have an effect on the respondent and the way they answer questions. The translator that accompanied me grew up in Phnom Penh. When asking respondents about their opinions on people from Phnom Penh, they might have avoided some answers as to save the face of my translator. However, I discussed this with my translator as well and she assured me that it would be difficult for respondents to know her origin as she does not have a specific accent or dresses like a typical city girl. The translator in Battambang was an English student from the University of Battambang and had experience with translating. Since he came from the same province as the respondents, he could easily relate to them and rephrase the questions when needed so that it would be culturally appropriate.

Another bias could be the social desirability bias as respondents might have given answers of which they thought were socially desired but not necessarily their own opinion. In particular, the questions involving migrants supporting their families might have been biased by this as respondents might have tried not to lose their face when answering these questions.

Time is a limitation for the interviews as respondents are being interviewed during their work time and not all are allowed to have an interview during their work hours. Also, once agreed upon an interview during their work, some interviews were restricted to a certain time period which led in some cases to the selection of certain questions while leaving out others. The time frame for the research in general is rather short, covering 3,5 months which forces the research to be small scale, context specific and restricts the extent to which the research can be generalised.

## 5. Growing up at the countryside

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Migrants can be considered as a subgroup of the overall rural youth. They are part of rural youth until they choose to migrate to the city. Even in the city they can still identify themselves with the rural youth since their places of origin are often considered as their homes, places to which they shall return to eventually. First attention should be paid to what would be most likely to happen if migrants would remain in the village and grow up there. This will help in finding out what the impact of migration is on the migrant's transition to adulthood. This chapter is based on interviews held with rural youth in villages in Battambang province and with migrants living in Phnom Penh who originate from villages from across Cambodia. It will become clear how situations can be for rural youth who do not migrate to Phnom Penh.

### 5.1 Working in the village

In the village I don't know what to do, like what job. Some young people they go to Thailand to work. There are only old people, young have to work.

*[Kunthea / Female / 28 years old / 9 years in Phnom Penh / Garment worker]*

When I went to a rural village for the first time in Cambodia to look for respondents, I was expecting to find mostly old people. Kunthea pointed out to me that there is not much to do in a village therefore many youth decide to migrate to look for jobs somewhere else. This statement was often repeated by other respondents. I was about to get surprised soon. Once entering the first village it did not take much time to find suitable respondents for my interviews and this continued during the following days. Even if they claimed to be too busy to have an interview, it appeared that still a lot of youth are living in the villages. It turned out that most youth do aspire to work outside the village, however it takes capital to start a life somewhere else. Hence, some of the youth remaining in the village do not have enough financial means to migrate and are bound to stay home. Others remained in the village because they had an older brother or sister who had already left the village to work somewhere else. Popular destinations among migrants are Thailand and Phnom Penh, depending on the distance from the village to these places. Since the interviews with rural youth were held in villages closer to the Thailand border than to Phnom Penh, it was more common for migrants to go to Thailand in this area. Families living in a village often have rice fields as main source of income but the harvest depends on the weather. Migration can be

chosen to spread the risk that an income will decrease once heavy rains or prolonged droughts damage the harvest. Besides rice fields, families can plant other crops and have animals if they can afford it. Youth then who stay at the village tend to help at the farm of their families and have side jobs. Among the respondents in Battambang, these jobs varied from selling food or drinks whereas others could sew clothes or work at a construction site to earn money.

Children learn to work on the rice field as soon as they are able to do the work physically. Differences in tasks exists for boys and girls as the boys do work that requires more strength. Youth often drop out of school, not so much because of high school fees since public schools are free of charge in Cambodia but because their help is needed on the farm or because they look for jobs to earn an extra income for the family. Others who still continue with their study help their families in their spare time or have side jobs next to their studies. Children in the rural areas become already productive at a young age. They are still depended on their parents for food and accommodation but their parents also depend on their children for extra man force or financial support.



*Cows barn in Battambang province*

Source: author's footage

## 5.2 Being a child

When discussing with the respondents about what they think is typical for being a child, it appears that as much as children can help with house chores and have in this sense a productive role in the household, children still do not have responsibilities like adults. As Sourkea points out:

I think most of them don't think, they just play do whatever they want. [They] don't care about future, the mistake or whatever.

[Sourkea / Female / 20 years old / Student in Battambang]

This thoughtlessness as a characteristic for being a child was often mentioned by other respondents, as did Nhean:

Children were born with nothing even though when they become children they still don't have anything in their mind so they like playing a lot and they do not care of thinking about what life can do they just keep playing.

[Nhean / Male / 22 years old / Student and waiter in Battambang]

Besides not thinking about serious life issues, children have needs which they want to see fulfilled. Respondents pointed out that a child can ask for something the parents cannot afford. A child will still cry for their needs because children lack the ability of being thoughtful about decisions and the consequences this might lead to.

I mean the for the young people for example if they go to the market he likes the mango so if they need a mango we will buy for them. [...] If the parents do not buy he wants to cry so they always like something that they want.

[Thavy / Female / 23 years old / Nurse in Battambang]

In Figure 3 a word cloud is depicted that sums up the characteristics of a child that were mentioned by the respondents. The bigger the size of the word, the more it was mentioned.

**Figure 3: Word cloud childhood characteristics**



In general, the age of children ranges between 1 till 18 years old according to the respondents. The main activity of a child is to play a lot. Children cry when they do not get what they want or even if there is no particular reason. Crying was more accepted for children than adults. Even though respondents admitted that adults still cry sometimes, this is considered as embarrassing. When an adult cries, he should have a valid reason for it like problems or stress. Crying in public is preferably avoided as it is considered as a sign of weakness.

### 5.3 Being an adult

When growing up, children become more aware of the world surrounding them and they learn that their wishes cannot always be granted. The older they get, the more experiences they will go through. These experiences will make them more thoughtful about life and the decisions they have to make. The outcomes of the word clouds that were made by respondents in Battambang regarding characteristics of adulthood are depicted in Figure 4.

**Figure 4: Word cloud adulthood characteristics**



The main differences between adulthood and childhood as mentioned by respondents is that adults unlike children are more thoughtful, instead of playing they have to work and earn an income. Besides this they are independent and take care of their families. Another aspect of being an adult is that one can fall in love and have a boyfriend or girlfriend. Adults in general are more aware of their surroundings, about what is happening in the civil society and what is considered to be wrong or right.

When growing up in a village children learn to see the importance of hard work in order to survive and they do so as they get older. The switch from playing to working is thus not a sudden switch from child to adult since many already fulfil productive roles during childhood. Aspects of adulthood can already take place during childhood and although Figure 3 and 4 show differences in these life stages, it should be noted that this is rather complex transition. An important determiner for this transition is the ability of taking care of the family, this means not only taking care of your spouse and children but also your parents and

sometimes brothers and sisters. Sokun told me that it is typical for Cambodian culture to look after your parents as well:

In Cambodia even though we have a family, we always think about our parents. We do not only think about our family but we think about our parents.  
[Sokun / Male / 27 years old / Artist in Battambang]

Taking care of parents is a way of showing them gratitude, as Sophanit puts it:

My family is the one who gave birth to me so they are the most important in my life and I have to support them back.  
[Sophanit / Male / 21 years old / Student in Battambang]

When growing up a shift takes place whereby a child is first dependent on the parents, when able to the child will start helping the family on the farm while still relying on the parents and finally they will be the ones supporting the parents without relying on them. If parents receive support from their children they do not have to be totally dependent on this, often they still have jobs. This however changes once parents are too old to work, then the support of children serves as their pension and parents are thus dependent on their children. The form of support can change overtime, it might be physical labour first but later on change to financial support as children move away from their parents once married or they might have found employment somewhere else. Instead of sending money, goods like clothes or phones can be given to show appreciation towards the parents. Money tends to be more valued than physical labour, a reason for this could be that helping the parents through physical labour like house chores or working on the rice field is considered as normal and should logically be done already during childhood. Whereas giving money earned from a job is perceived more as a sacrifice and good deed from the child to the parents. Besides feeling the need to find a well paying job that can take care of their own family, youth also want to fulfil the expectations of being a good child towards the parents. Parents might not explicitly tell their children that they expect support from them, youth do feel the need to do this as it is an important part of their culture.

## 5.4 Getting married

### 5.4.1 A good wife

In general, leaving the parental home to start an independent life happens once youth get married. This is especially the case for girls as boys are more free to leave the house

unmarried if they find a job away from home. When growing up, girls stay mostly at home and are accompanied by male relatives if they need to go outside. They should be back home before it gets dark. Marriage gives girls more freedom in the sense that they are not under parental supervision anymore. Yet rules of modesty such as *chbap srey* often still apply to them once married concerning clothing styles and behaviours of a good woman. Boys as well have to cloth in a modest way but it is more accepted for them to leave the house to hang out with friends during the day.

Children are taught about *chbap srey* in schools however when asking respondents in Phnom Penh about *chbap srey*, not many could remember the exact guidelines of how a good woman should behave according to *chbap srey*. Despite this, most of the respondents know what is expected to be a good Cambodian wife and this is often related to *chbap srey*. Opinions about these rules differ, Chhaiya for example, who migrated to Phnom Penh to study and currently works as part of her studies curriculum, describes herself as being more influenced by western values. *Chbap srey* to her is not important as she prefers to be herself instead of being told how she should behave:

For me I'm quite different. I want to be whoever I want. I don't care what people say. I just want to see the world that they way I want to. I just want to have fun. I don't have to care like being very traditional. Being shy, nice, or dressed very properly. [...] I think being the perfect woman is being yourself. You don't have to pretend to be someone that you are not. [...] Because most of the girls they have to behave a lot. My friends, if I do something they said "Oh no you don't do that because you are Cambodian, you good woman".

[Chhaiya | Female | 22 years old | 9 years in Phnom Penh | Intern at Indochina Research]

Among male respondents opinions also differed about *chbap srey*. Some would prefer their wives to be themselves, others would still wish their wives to behave according to *chbap srey*. In general girls from the rural areas were seen as being more traditional. This was often perceived as a good characteristic since these girls do not go out, drink alcohol or have many boyfriends. Obeying to *chbap srey* then might be viewed as something traditional but it still serves as an indicator for some men to see if a woman can be a good wife.

#### 5.4.2 Partner choice

Respondents pointed out that marriage takes place around the age of 17 till 19. One of the reasons why parents prefer their daughters to marry young is the security a husband will offer



her by taking care of her and hopefully her family as well. Marriage of a daughter could be seen as a livelihood strategy for the family whereby the parents save money since the husband will take care of their daughter and whereby the household gains an extra source of income if the husband is contributing. Hence, marriage in the village marks for most villagers the change from living with their parents and being dependent on them to becoming independent and contributing to the parents.

When it comes to choosing the right partner, youth can be introduced to their potential spouse through relatives. After being introduced they can make their own decision whether they want to marry this person or not. Youth can also introduce their own partner to the family. Parents will then advise if they should continue to get married. If they will follow the advice of the parents depends on the person, most do as some pointed out that parents know what is best for their children. Also, if someone marries to a person that the parents did not agree with and one happens to get in troubles during the marriage, parents might turn their back on them claiming that they already warned for this to happen. Therefore, some respondents chose to be obedient to their parents in partner choice rather than marrying their individual choice. Sophanit argues that he as a child of his parents should follow their advice:

Because the parents have supported me since I was a child so I have to listen to my parents.

*[Sophanit / Male / 21 years old / Student in Battambang]*

Nonetheless, other respondents mentioned that while their parents will advice them, it remains their own choice who to marry. Contrary to Sophanits statement is Nhean's opinion on choosing who to marry:

But I want to get my partner myself because we can take time to get to know each other rather than just going to marry the one who is recommended by my parents because in future you are going to live with the wife forever not the parents. So it's better to understand the partner first before getting married. And sometimes after marriage with a recommended wife when they have a problem they will blame each other that because your parents did this.

*[Nhean / Male / 22 years old / Student and waiter in Battambang]*

Opinions might thus differ among youth on obeying to the parent's choice of future spouse or marrying their own choice. In general it seems that youth are relatively free in choosing who to marry. Even if they are introduced to a partner they still have the right to disagree. Also, if parents disagree with the partner youth can decide to listen to the parents while telling their partner how to change in order to be accepted by the parents. The family tends to play a role

in marriage while youth can exercise their own agency within the borders of the family structure that can make both parties come to an agreement.

### *5.4.3 Marriage and adulthood*

As mentioned, marriage is perceived as the right time to leave the parental home while it is also possible to remain at the parental home with the spouse. Parents can offer a piece of land to their children where they can build their own house. Living with the parents is a form of mutual support whereby the parents offer accommodation and the children help with the house chores or work on the land. While married, the roles of the family members continue to be more or less in place as they were before marriage. Depending on the situation, people can choose to live with the parents of the wife's side as well as the husband's. In this scenario,



*House in Battambang province*

Source: author's footage

marriage is the start of a life with spouse and children which asks for greater responsibility. Even when remaining at the parental home, having more or less the same tasks, the extra responsibilities of having their own families besides their parents requires them to be more thoughtful. Marriage in itself does not necessarily mark adulthood since a wedding might take place at an early age. It is the resulting life

of a married person that marks the differences between life as an unmarried person whereby parents have a great say and life as a married person where decisions have to be made on their own. Characteristics of adulthood mentioned by respondents such as responsibilities, being thoughtful and earning an income are naturally enforced by getting married. Overall it is accepted for boys as well as girls to have a job. Girls often combine this with house chores. Even though girls should preferably live a domestic life, the fact that money is needed urges them to look for a job outside the domestic sphere. In an ideal situation then, once being married and both partners are working, they would become more independent from the parents as they are able to take care of themselves as well as contributing to the family. But in

reality wages are often not enough to sustain a livelihood or to save money. Consequently, supporting the parents can also be seen as a safety strategy. Once emergencies occur and there are no financial means to solve the problem, asking parents for help would be an easy solution since they have been helping the parents beforehand. Preferably respondents would not like to ask for help and rather be financially independent but parents are among the first ones they would turn to in case they need help. This also depends on the financial situation of the parents, if the parents' situation will not allow expenditures on their children who need help, other relatives or friends can be approached. Resulting from this it could be argued that instead of having individual savings, people prefer to support their parents as a sign of gratitude. Parents do not always need this support but it is considered as desired behaviour. The parents in turn replace individual savings and can be consulted in times of need. Growing up in the rural areas whereby the family is central, adulthood here can be best described as being responsible and able to take care of your family instead of being independent, taking care of yourself and not having to ask your parents in case of help. Being independent was mentioned by rural youth as a characteristic of adulthood but circumstances sometimes forces them to turn back to their parents. This does not make them less of an adult but is a consequence of choices made based on priorities. These priorities are culturally influenced and passed on to newer generations. Them having the priority to support their parents over having their own savings might result in asking for help at times when they need it.

The need to support parents while jobs are scarce in the rural areas forces youth to look for employment outside the village which results in many young people migrating to Phnom Penh not merely to seek for individual fortune but to contribute in securing the livelihoods of the entire family. Under normal circumstances, leaving the parental home to live independently when still unmarried is unheard of but the need of an extra income for the household allows youth to do so. The current trend of youth migrating might induce a greater freedom for unmarried people as other families get inspired as well to send family members to the city to look for work. The poorest are often not able to migrate because a capital is needed to start a life somewhere else. This suggests that families who are able to send relatives to the city are already better off but still favour a higher income over holding on to traditional values. At the same time, values such as supporting the parents are perceived more important than values as staying at the parental home till marriage. Migration might not lead to total neglect of values, it finds a balance between financial needs for survival, aspirations of a better life and new ways of being a modest child towards the parents now that they are

spatially living independent. The next chapter will pay more attention to this independence through migration and what this means for migrants in their transition to adulthood.

## 6. Coming to the city

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### 6.1 Job opportunities

A lot of jobs in Phnom Penh but in the village we don't have a lot of jobs, only the rice fields. I want to work in the village but if I stay in the village it has no job because of the family condition I have to come to work in Phnom Penh.

[Vathey / Female / 24 years old / 5 years in Phnom Penh / Garment worker]

Phnom Penh stands for many youth equal to job opportunities. Not all migrants necessarily wanted to go there and they might still prefer a rural lifestyle together with their families but as Vathey noted, the living conditions in the rural areas and the need to change this pushed her to Phnom Penh. Besides employment being a great pull factor of Phnom Penh, education is another one that is popular among migrants. In Phnom Penh there is a wide variety of schools while in the other provinces there are not many colleges or universities to go to. Also the quality of education is perceived to be better in Phnom Penh. This research is mainly focussed on migrants working in the city, some respondents were able to combine this with studying, while migrants who came here for studying in the first place were left out of the research. Not all the migrants who chose to work and study at the same time were able to support their family back in the province. Others had parents who paid for their study while the income from their jobs was spend on house rent, food and other expenditures. If a migrant comes from a well off family, their incomes earned from their jobs could be spend on going out with friends, shopping or the money could be kept on a savings account. Not all migrants thus felt the need to support their families. This shows similarities with the youth originating from Phnom Penh. According to migrants, people from Phnom Penh often do not need to support their families, simply because the family does not need the money to survive.

In the case of migrants who do not support their family at the moment of interview, some pointed out that they hope to do so in future when they are able to while others said that their parents did not demand for it. The migrants who hope to do so in future could be considered as sharing the same values concerning the need to support their families when mature as the migrants who already do so. Even if these migrants will not be able to do so or if they gave socially desired answers and not necessarily the truth, it does show that they think it is socially desired to support their parents whenever they are capable. Thus, it is still a value they cling onto. Contrary to the migrants who do not feel the need to support their families.

## 6.2 Urban youth

When asking Rith about youth from Phnom Penh it became clear that according to him youth who come from well-off families in Phnom Penh do not have to take up productive roles in the household and can be dependent on their parents for a longer period of time, put in Rith's words:

It might be up till they get married because the men in the city don't really work at a low position. They don't like it because the parents are rich enough so they don't work, they just depend on their parents. Until they can get a good job or high position and get married that's when they don't need support.

*[Rith / Male / 27 years old / 3 years in Phnom Penh / Waiter]*

This was in contrast to Rith's life together with other migrants as well who were dependent on their parents during childhood but already had productive roles in the household. Adulthood for them was marked by them being able to take care of their own families including their parents. The phenomenon of youth being dependent on their parents till they find a job and not supporting the parents back was described by migrants as a foreign or western value whereby people are rather independent whereas Cambodian culture is known for sharing. This also came up when discussing the differences between the people from their villages and the people in Phnom Penh. Migrants tend to be more negative towards the people of Phnom Penh mainly because they are considered to be selfish. People in the village were described as people who help each other when necessary. Also people know each other in the village while in Phnom Penh life is more anonymous. It is possible to live in Phnom Penh while not knowing your neighbours, something that would be impossible in the places of origin of the migrants. Chhaiya described to me how she experienced the influence of foreign individuality in Phnom Penh and how this is different from Cambodian culture:

You know Cambodian tradition [we] have to help each other. [...] And then foreign culture is you have to be strong, you have to protect yourself. Go for your own benefit. Even the neighbours in Phnom Penh, they don't know each other. But in the province, in the whole village, we know everyone. Even the child, the grandparents, the parents. Every family we know each other.

*[Chhaiya / Female / 22 years old / 9 years in Phnom Penh / Intern at Indochina Research]*

Although knowing each other in a village might be an advantage when asking for help, Chhaiya herself did not always experience this as positive. Rather, she sometimes felt oppressed by the social pressure and rules she had to obey to in order to avoid gossip in her

village. Being anonymous in Phnom Penh gave her more freedom in choosing how to dress and where to go out to. The shift from traditional values of supporting the family towards more individualistic values results from better living conditions. When the need for a certain value is lacking, in this case supporting the parent as a dutiful child, the importance of the value tends to be overshadowed by other values such as independence that can now be realised. This shift in cultural values and norms can partly be explained by the development of Cambodia in general whereby the number of urban elite is rising. With globalisation having a big impact on the city, values from overseas might inspire urban youth to copy this. Migrants then, who experience the differences between life in the rural areas and in the city might also get influenced by the lifestyles of urban people in the sense that achieving such a lifestyle becomes one of their aspirations.

### 6.3 Development chains

When trying to find out the impact of migration on the transition to adulthood for migrants, one of the main changes that is stimulated by migration and that plays an important role in determining when one can be considered an adult is the change from being supported by the family to supporting the family themselves. With supporting their families, migrants show that they are not dependent on the help of their parents but they can live their lives independently and at the same time help their parents which is perceived as an important value of Cambodian culture. It is important to realise that supporting the family is not a static change whereby the parents used to help the children till they are old enough to help the parents. This is a dynamic process whereby children already help their parents at an early age, for example by working on the farm, while still being dependent on the parents for the food and shelter they provide as was shown in the former chapter. This process of supporting the family in multidimensional ways continues when the children have become older as parents will still help their children. In some of the cases the parents pay the school fees or the house rent of their children who migrated. Other migrants can call their parents when they are in need of money while they still send money to their family whenever they are able to. Thus, having a job and supporting the family on a regular base does not mean that the family does not support the migrants as well. Financial flows but also flows of goods going back and forth are the reality of a migrant's life and could be seen as translocal linkages (Zoomers & Van Westen, 2011). As a consequence the migrants and his family live translocal lives even when situated in one location. Parents might not leave their village but they do receive goods like

clothes and mobile phones from their children in Phnom Penh together with money earned from jobs in Phnom Penh. At the same time migrants receive money that was earned in their places of origin or food from their family farms like rice send to Phnom Penh. These linkages could also be referred to as development chains. The livelihood development of the migrant as an individual living in Phnom Penh has implications for the livelihood development of his family back in his rural home. The modern lifestyles and the luxuries that Phnom Penh offers flow through these chains into the rural areas of Cambodia. Chhaiya for example prefers to give clothes or phones from Phnom Penh to her family instead of sending money. At the same time she also asks them to send shoes if she needs any. In another case Vattey explained how her parents sometimes send her jewellery that was bought with the money she earned in Phnom Penh. Money that was earned in Phnom Penh can thus also stimulate businesses like jewellery shops in rural areas. Vattey's family chose to do this because it was cheaper there than in Phnom Penh. A downside of a development chain between Phnom Penh and villages was explained by Rith who witnessed drugs dealers close to his apartment in Phnom Penh and the use of drugs in his village:

Recently, like 2014 there is the drug influence to my village. [...] So many young boys they become addict and even they throw up their study at the age of 8 or 9. For some people, like the place I told, somewhere near, some people from my village go there and buy it and go as a middle business to sell. I know the person is from my village so most of the drug influence is from Phnom Penh.

*[Rith / Male / 27 years old / 3 years in Phnom Penh / Waiter]*

Goods that flow from the city to the rural areas and vice versa do not always have a positive impact. The downside of the development of translocalities also needs attentions as illegal goods might as well flow through these development chains.

As much as differences between villages and Phnom Penh can be described in dichotomous ways and different places come with different characteristics, through the presence of migrants in Phnom Penh who represent people from rural areas, typical characteristics of Phnom Penh find their ways into the villages. This creates new places that cannot easily be defined as simple or non-modern as such now that modernity penetrates these villages greatly influenced by the role migrants play in this development chain. As migrants visit their rural homes during vacations, they might inspire the people living there with their new clothing styles from the city. Rural people can aspire for these clothing styles and electronical gadgets as well which can lead to the establishment of new markets where goods



are sold originating from Phnom Penh. Rangsey points out that modernity is not only restricted to Phnom Penh but has found its way into the rural areas:

In the market we also have some clothes like in Phnom Penh. In the village they buy clothes here [in Phnom Penh] and go to sell there. So adults there also can find the clothes like in Phnom Penh. In Phnom Penh there are many people who are modern, stylish but in the province we also have some kind of those people. But just in the case that in Phnom Penh there are many of those people. But in the village there is not much people because like you know in the village it's not very crowded like in Phnom Penh.

*[Rangsey | Female | 20 years old | 3 years in Phnom Penh | Sales women]*

All in all, the money earned in Phnom Penh that is send back to the families of migrants who live in villages establish development chains between different places. These chains connect the rural with the urban creating translocal spaces for the migrants and their families but also among others as markets that sell goods from Phnom Penh in other provinces might attract rural people in general to adapt to urban fashion as well. Migrants at the same time receive goods and money from their rural origins, which keeps them to a certain extent dependent on their families.

#### 6.4 Family as safety net

Growing up in a village, going to school and working on a farm could be seen as a saver environment then the unknown life in Phnom Penh that awaits migrants when arriving there. Building their own lives in a city forces them to become independent, not only spatially but also in the decisions they make. Building their lives in Phnom Penh comes with responsibilities. As migrants noted that being a child means playing around without thinking, now that they are on their own in Phnom Penh, they have to be thoughtful. They cannot carelessly spend their money but they have to spend it in a responsible way so that they can survive in Phnom Penh but also reach expectations of their families by sending remittances.

Respondents who feel the need to remit, wish to continue doing so while having their own spouse and children in future. The amount of money might decrease once a migrant has his own family but the support of parents remains important. When living in the village, migrants helped their parents in the form of labour on the farm. Support then was not measured in financial terms. Differences between then and now are that migrants at that time were still taken care of by their parents by having accommodation and food to eat. Once

moving to Phnom Penh, migrants have to find this all by themselves. Remaining strong ties with their families allows them to have a safety net that can help them out in times of need. Migrants who choose to send remittances to their family over saving money are forced to ask their family for help since they have the money that the migrants could otherwise have kept for themselves. But by doing so, migrants show their willingness to obey to their parents and this makes it easier for them to ask for help. Fulfilling expectations in sending remittances and choosing the family over individual well being can serve as a strategy for times in need. Especially in countries where social welfare is missing and the state does not provide services for those in need, relying on the family remains important for survival. Migration might lead to independence when it comes to living on themselves and taking decisions but is not always the case concerning financial matters.

It should be noted that differences among migrants exists. Although most migrants who come for job opportunities to Phnom Penh do so to support their families, some do not feel the need to do so and prefer to invest in themselves by studying besides working. This can lead to a better job in future and eventually a higher salary that allows migrants to send a higher amount of remittances to the family. In other cases, migrant families were already financially stable and did not need the support of the children. This rhymes with well-off families in Phnom Penh. It could thus be argued that the development of livelihoods and being financially stable reduces the need for a family serving as a safety net. Migrants who do not need to support their parents will be more likely to save the money for themselves and use this money in case of emergencies instead of asking their parents for help. Migrants who were send to the city as an extra resource to the family and as a risk spreading strategy might as well long for this independence where they do not need to support their family. However, independence in their case is only possible if their families are able to live respectable lives without the help of migrants. Whenever this is reached, is questionable since people tend to compare themselves to others. If a migrant's family in the village is able to afford more than another migrant's family, this latter family might pressure the migrant to send more to raise their status. As much as these migrants are building their own safety net, they are also trapped in it whereby obligations undermine their independence. It is more likely for migrants to become financially independent through migration if they do not come to Phnom Penh with expectations from the family, but they migrate as a means to improve their individual livelihood. Contrary to migrants who come to the city as a means to upgrade their families livelihood.

Living alone does not necessarily indicate being an adult in Cambodia since it is accepted to live with parents even after marriage. In the context of Cambodia, living with parents then does not mean that one is still a child. More important is the contributions children make to the household. If children are still young, they go to school and some of them might work on the farm or have a simple job. However they are still dependent on their parents. Once children are able to earn an income, while still living at their parents, they can start contributing to the household of the family. This is an important change which marks the transition into adulthood. In the case of migrants, they choose to leave the house and are forced to live independent but at the same time they are able to support their family financially through their migration to the city. Their migration stimulated them to become adults in the sense that they are now able to contribute to the family. The change from being supported to being the one who supports is not a clear shift for most migrants, it should not be seen as exclusively being the one who receives help or being the one who offers help. Rather, it is the ability they gained of being able to support their family that marks an important characteristic of adulthood in Cambodia which is made possible through their migration to Phnom Penh, even if they still receive support from their parents once in awhile.

### 6.5 Generous daughters

A female migrant who comes to the city to work, can find herself in circumstances whereby she is stuck between contradicting values. As Derks (2008) shows in her study, female migrants want to be dutiful daughters by sending remittances but they might earn money in ways that questions their sexual modesty in the case of sex workers. This is in line with the result of this study whereby respondents still wanted to be good daughters towards their parents but to be one some felt forced to make choices that contradict their norms. Chantou is one of the respondents who works as a sex worker in a bar. She chose to migrate to Phnom Penh in order to earn money for her daughter and her



*Bar in Phnom Penh*  
Source: author's footage

mother who is taking care of the daughter in her village. However she could not tell her mother about the job she was currently doing since this would lead to disagreements and judgments of being immoral, something she would rather hide to save her face and to be treated as a good daughter. This leads to inner conflicts whereby feelings of shame and embarrassment have to be dealt with in order to fulfil obligations such as sending remittances. These choices seem to be particularly true for female migrants as they experience a burden of contributing to their families that weighs heavier on them than on male migrants. Female migrants are expected to contribute more as they have stronger family ties especially when they are unmarried whereas young Cambodian male migrants are freer in deciding what to do with the money. These differences are already present when growing up in a rural village. Girls are described to the domestic sphere, contributing to the household by doing chores while boys are allowed to go out with friends. Growing up in a village where people know each other, social control by neighbours and relatives ensures that girls will obey to the code of conduct. If a girl would not follow these rules, she can cause a bad name for the family and this might result in consequences for the whole family as they might become the talk of the town. A tight social network thus secures norms and values since people make sure these are respected by others but also by themselves to avoid losing face in public. Moving to the city can be experienced as freedom as the migrant escapes from this social control. However, maintaining the family ties can be of great importance to migrants to secure a safety net in case the migration does not lead to expected results and the migrant is forced to move back or ask for money. Since most of the migrants view their stay in Phnom Penh as a temporary phase in their lives to raise money, they have to keep their names clean as they plan to move back to the village in future. Eventually returning to their home village might raise their status, since they have lived in the city and were able to better the livelihood of the family, but their status might also be lowered if they do not match with the rural standards anymore in terms of modesty. Female migrants have to be aware of these norms during their stay in Phnom Penh while they adjust to the city life. Although parents cannot physically control their daughters whether they are living according to their standards, a daughter can choose to do so on her own. This can give her and her parents the confidence that she is a good daughter. So does Rangsey by being dedicated to her work and by not going out:

Even now I don't live with my parents but the thing that I moved here is for work. So being a good daughter, if you come here for work you have to work. I cannot just live in the city and hang out with other people, so this is the way I'm being a good daughter.

[Rangsey | Female | 20 years old | 3 years in Phnom Penh | Sales women]

## 6.6 Learning experiences

Once in Phnom Penh, respondents pointed out that they learned to work hard for their money. Choices of expenditures have to be made every time migrants receive their wages. Living in Phnom Penh surrounded by modern lifestyles, the latest gadgets and fashion, migrants have to find a balance between consuming these products for themselves or remitting money to their families. Being thoughtful is one of the main characteristics of adulthood as explained by the respondents. Through the jobs and the money they earned, migrants had to be more thoughtful on their expenditures compared to before where they did not have to think of house rent that needed to be paid. Even though migrants get influenced by the urban people in Phnom Penh and are longing for the same lifestyles, they realised that this might be difficult to achieve. Soy for example admires the way urban people look, but he acknowledges that it might be more difficult for him to achieve their life standards as he points out that their background allows them to live modern lives:

Most people they are originally rich because of the family so they just follow the own family business. So they don't worry very much about the money.

[Soy | Male | 6 years in Phnom Penh | Tuk tuk driver]

Knowing that as a migrant Soy might not reach the living standards of urban people can lead to feelings of marginalisation. To feel included and part of a group, Soy refers to his rural village as home and sees Phnom Penh merely as temporary stay.

Another learning experiences that migrants can come across while living in Phnom Penh is depicted by Borey who had a bad experience with someone who took advantage of him, afterwards he learned from this by not being discouraged by one person.

I learned from one of my housemates friend. At that time I was very helpful, I help my friend, I do many good things. But in return this friend really said bad about me. So through this experience I learned how to overcome that. I believe that there are many good people. I don't have to be discouraged or give up. I know that many people love like me and know me. So I don't let one person to destroy my life. From this mistake, this person I learned.

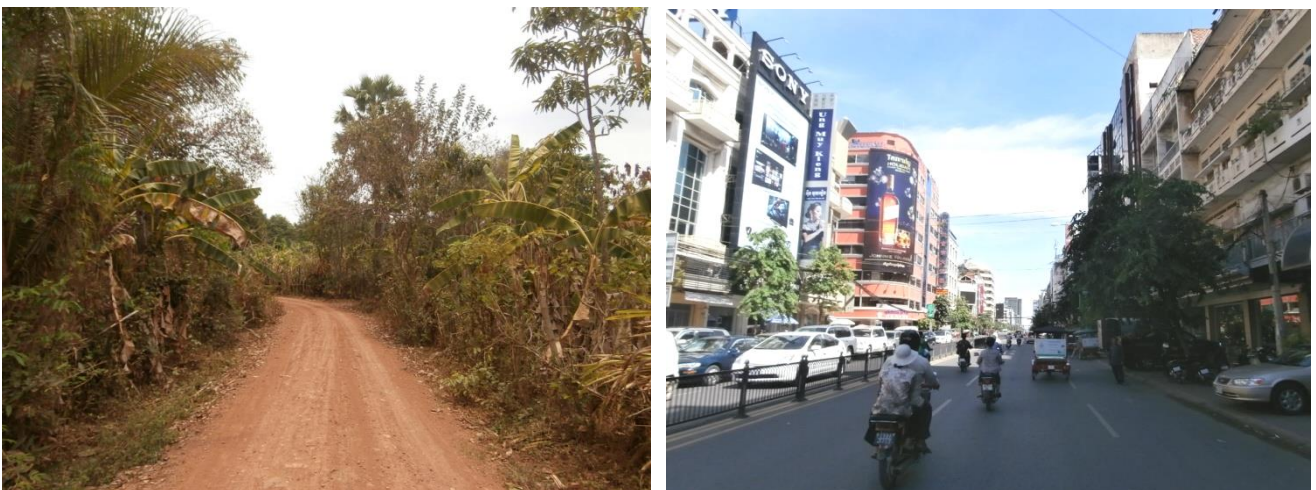
[Borey | Male | 26 years old | 3 years in Phnom Penh | Waiter]

Through these experiences, migrants familiarised themselves with the behaviours of people in Phnom Penh. Chhaiya described how people in Phnom Penh look friendly at first sight but they might do mean things behind your back:

What I learned from here is [at first] I think everybody is a nice person. But then when I come here I start to understand that people have two faces. They will be nice and then at the back they will be so mean. And actually I learned a lot about how to judge the people and understand. Somehow they talk very nice to you but actually the meaning is abusive. But they use a very good word to blame you.

[Chhaiya / Female / 22 years old / 9 years in Phnom Penh / Intern at Indochina Research]

Phnom Penh was experienced as a place that was unsafe compared to the places of origin. There are more cases of criminality and drug abuse, especially addiction to smoking the drug ice. Migrants learned to be careful when it comes to theft. Being careful then can also be linked to being thoughtful as migrants were forced to think of their safety. Precautions that had to be taken in order to avoid becoming a victim of crime makes migrants more aware of their own safety and teaches them to take responsibilities over their own lives. Before, rules such as curfew might have restricted youth in the villages from going out at night but this rule that serves for safety reasons might be ignored by migrants living in Phnom Penh now that there are no relatives or neighbours who make sure that they obey to these rules. As a consequence, migrants have to think for themselves which rules from their villages they still want to obey and how they can assure their own safety. Finding the right balance between holding on to traditional values and norms from the rural area and adapting to the new urban life is a struggle that every migrants has to undergo. Living in a new environment makes migrants aware of different identities. The impact of migration on identity formation during the transition to adulthood will be discussed in the next chapter.



*Street view Battambang province in comparison with Phnom Penh*

Source: author's footage

## 7. Who am I?

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### 7.1 First impressions

Once migrants have arrived in Phnom Penh, they are exposed to an urban culture that encompasses lifestyles to migrants they might be unfamiliar with. Visible things such as tall buildings, cars and shopping malls is what strikes young migrants when they first arrive. The downside of living in the city is the traffic and its emissions together with the smell of garbage. Respondents pointed out that once they go back to their villages for visits, they appreciate the fresh air and the nature there. Living in the city might be experienced as an easier life as houses have electricity and running water. At the same time, this makes life in the city more expensive considering the electricity and water bills that have to be paid together with the house rent. For many migrants the work place is better compared to the work in the rice fields as they do not have to work in the sun anymore. Working indoors with some places providing air conditioning makes it for many more comfortable. Avoiding work in the sun is another advantage because their skin colour will remain light. Having a white skin colour is how people from Phnom Penh are recognised and it is associated with people from a higher class. But having a lighter skin colour might be deceiving to people from the village as they think that migrants have a better life now that they do not have to work on a farm anymore while this is not always the case as explained by Vattey:

People will say: “Wow you look white, you are Phnom Penh”. At the village they try to work hard so they are black. But in here I have been working in the factories, I have to sit all day. They don’t know about my real job so they say: “Oh you live in Phnom Penh you have a good life”. But in real life it is not.

[Vattey / Female / 24 years old / 5 years in Phnom Penh / Garment worker]

Migrants do not always experience their lives as being improved compared to their lives before, but they realise that their migration to the city and the jobs they obtained are a better solution to them to help their families. Especially migrants who lack qualifications will have to accept jobs under questionable working conditions in order to meet the expectations of their families of sending remittances but also to pay for their own upkeep in Phnom Penh. As became clear in the former chapter, migrants who came to Phnom Penh to help their families as main reason can be considered as being more traditional compared to migrants who come to Phnom Penh to improve their own lives. Coming to the city as a rural person, challenges in adapting to a new life might be experienced as urban people might have different values.

Often migrants felt ignored or treated differently by urban people because they are considered as country people who are not from the same class. Prejudices can be based on appearances as rural people were recognised for having a darker skin, simple clothes and sometimes a different accent. Migrants can avoid this by for example adopting an urban clothing style, using skin whitening creams and having the latest phones. However not all migrants can afford to do so, lack of money obstructs them to fully adapt to an urban lifestyle and they will not be perceived as an urban person by others. Migrants themselves might also become aware of their different status now that they are in a new environment as was experienced by Kunthea:

When I first arrived in Phnom Penh the people they are beautiful and they have a lot of money to pay. So I feel upset because I looked down upon myself. Why am I like that.  
[Kunthea / Female / 28 years old / 9 years in Phnom Penh / Garment worker]

Because urban people will not involve themselves in friendships with rural people who are viewed as a lower class, migrants are forced to build a network in the city with other people of rural origin and are thus excluded from urban people. Migrants who are less involved with the urban life tend to hold on stronger to their family ties and obligations since they are still identified as a rural person but also because this gives them a feeling of belonging in a place where they feel as strangers. Remaining ties with the family will make it easier for them to return to the village in future. The prospects of returning to the village indicates that life in the city is only temporary and that they do not wish to live here the rest of their lives. This can also avoid them from adapting to an urban culture as they eventually return to the countryside again and thus feel less of a need to become part of the city life. Migrants can be excluded by others from becoming urban, at the same time they can also exclude themselves from this on purpose as they view their stay in Phnom Penh only as a temporary phase in life.



*Traffic in Phnom Penh*  
Source: author's footage



## 7.2 Becoming urban

Migrants who interact more with urban people tend to adapt more to the urban culture. For example a migrant who works in a shopping mall where she often serves rich clients originating from Phnom Penh will be more likely to get influenced by the latest trends than someone who works in a garment factory mostly surrounded by other migrants. Coming from a village where courtship is not common, one of the changes coming across in Phnom Penh is the freedom experienced in dating and having relationships without getting necessarily married with that person.

When they leave the province, firstly they don't have a girlfriend or boyfriend but when they move to Phnom Penh, they start to have a relationship. And some become not good because they try to change themselves.

*[Mony | Female | 22 years old | 3 years in Phnom Penh | Waitress]*

According to Mony, adapting to Phnom Penh is not necessarily a good thing because dating and relationships often result from going out to places and hanging out with friends. This in contrast to youth who grow up in the village. There, a relationship serves to get married with that person and the wedding can already take place within one month. Through marriage people are allowed to leave the parental home and live with their spouse. For migrants however, the meaning of relationships and marriage has changed since they have already left the parental home. Once living in the city, relationships are more common and accepted even if the relationship does not lead to a marriage. Respondents noted that people from Phnom Penh start with relationships in their early teenage years and they take more time to get to know each other. This is copied by migrants who discover that relationships do not have to go hand in hand with marriage as it does in the villages. Anonymity in the city makes it easier for them to go out with their boyfriends or girlfriends without their relatives knowing it. Also, migrants do not plan to get married at the age that is common in the village. Most migrants have already passed this age but because of their migration they have to postpone getting married in order to fulfil their duties first and to become financially stable.

Life in the city is not restricted to hours during daytime but continues at night. Contrary to a village where it is uncommon to be outside after sunset, electricity in Phnom Penh allows people to have fun at night as well. Popular places among youth are Diamond Island and Riverside. Youth gather here to hang out with their friends as they enjoy their time together. The multiple choices that are available for people to go out to depicts Phnom Penh



*Riverside Phnom Penh*

Source: Author's footage

as an exciting place compared to a village with no Karaoke clubs or any form of entertainment. Migrants who are exposed to this new exciting life have to decide for themselves to what extent they want to get involved in this life as it might be perceived negatively among their relatives

who remain in the village. Living in the city challenges migrants in the way migrants want to identify themselves. One option could be that they stick to their rural culture and behave the way they would in the village. By doing so they strengthen the family ties by obeying to their values and this ensures the family serving as safety net. Migrants are more likely to receive help from their families if they are obedient. At the same time, they also exclude themselves from the urban culture where they are currently living. The other extreme is fully adopting the urban culture, this risks lacking parental support and decreases the functioning of the safety net as parents disagree with the new lifestyle of the migrant. In most cases a migrant finds himself caught in between these two extremes as he tries to develop his new identity that deals with different cultures. It is this formation of identity that is important during their transition to adulthood that is challenged by their migration. Now that they are exposed to a new environment, they are forced to rethink their own values and decide what they agree on or what requires change. Hence, migration has an impact on identity formation in the sense that it strengthens the awareness of one's identity and might cause discontent with this identity leading to adaptation. The struggle of being caught in between is a common outcome for migrants like Samnang. When asking her how she identifies herself, she replied:

Half half. To me, now I feel I'm a provincial girl but when I go to my village they think I'm a Phnom Penh girl. Here I compare myself to others and I'm still a provincial girl.

[*Samnang* | *Female* | *22 years old* | *3 years in Phnom Penh* | *Waitress*]

Comparison and the way others identify her seem important for Samnang to find her own identity. Also, different environments influence identities. As Samnang pointed out that in the city she still feels like a rural girl but back in her village she is now treated as an urban girl.

The opposite was also mentioned by respondents whereby they felt urban in the city and rural once they visited their rural homes. Feeling urban in the city resulted in wearing makeup among girls and different clothing styles while if they would return to the village, they adjusted their clothes to the accepted styles in the village. As Mony explains:

In Phnom Penh I am from Phnom Penh. In the province I am a province [person]. [...] Because in university where I study, I have some thin make up. But back in the province I don't do that. I might become a strange person if I have make up in the province.

[Mony | Female | 22 years old | 3 years in Phnom Penh | Waitress]

Every migrant has his own way of identifying himself and adjusting to his new place. Some will embrace a new urban identity while others secure their identity with what they are familiar with from their rural areas. As migrants are often looked down on by youth from Phnom Penh, embracing an urban identity might lead to being treated as equals as they cannot easily be distinguished anymore. This also depends on the environment and spaces migrants involve themselves in. Living in Phnom Penh does not automatically mean that one is urban by simply living there because the city is divided in many different places. Living and working at a garment factory is mainly described to rural migrants. Consequently these migrants will not be exposed so much to the city life. Their rural identity will be less challenged as their values are shared among other migrants who are located in that area. A migrant who takes English classes besides working is more likely to interact with urban people. By avoiding to be looked down on or being treated as a lower class, adapting to urban cultures can be a survival strategy for this migrant even though it might contradict rural norms.

### 7.3 Rural values in the city

As many migrants came to Phnom Penh to help their families as an extra source of income, the pressure to fulfil this obligation influences the identity formation of migrants. Fulfilling the obligation of supporting the family by sending remittances creates a safety net for migrants whereby they can count on their family for help in times of need as described above. To establish this safety net, not only should obligations be met but the rural norms and values should also be maintained. This will build trust among the family members back home that even though the migrant lives far away, he or she is still able to live a decent life upholding rural standards in an environment with doubtful lifestyles. Identifying oneself as rural is then

a strategy to strengthen family ties to show the family that they are not influenced by the city. Migrants pointed out that urban youth are often spoilt since they come from rich families and they do not take care of their parents. Remaining rural is then a statement made towards others that as migrants they still value Cambodia's traditional culture where supporting the parents as a form of gratitude is highly favoured. This being in contrast to some urban youth who seem to neglect this value of gratitude towards the parents since they do not feel the need of supporting the parents. Even if this is the case, migrants felt that supporting the parents should not result from a need but should happen out of gratitude and respect towards their parents. Where migrants often felt treated as a lower class, they did feel better than urban youth when it came to respecting the traditional culture and being an obedient child towards the parents. Adapting one's identity to fit the urban environment was thus not always desirable as it is perceived as immoral besides being modern. Once living in Phnom Penh, every migrant will have to go through the process of weighing out the advantages and disadvantages of different identities. As a result, their identity cannot be pinpointed but fluctuates across space and time. Migrants develop a dexterity in applying multiple identities that suit specific occasions.

## 7.4 Gendered perspectives

### 7.4.1 Female migrants

Proving the family that they are still upholding rural values while living in the city is especially true for girls who are traditionally not allowed to leave the house when unmarried. This rule was broken by their migration to the city in order to get a job or higher education. Female migrants have to make choices between meeting the expectations of their parents and fitting in the urban environment. As they live in the city, they will be exposed to new lifestyles that might be tempting to them but will go against the expectations of their parents. Female migrants create their own code of conducts that balance their rural background with their new urban environment. Often migrants dress more fashionable than before and will therefore be seen as urban people by their relatives or neighbours when they pay a visit back home. The clothes they choose to wear are chosen with caution as these might not be over exposing but will still maintain the girls' modesty. As became clear, female migrants will thus develop an identity that functions in different contexts. It is specifically women who have to be more careful in their identification process as they feel the pressure of remaining a good Cambodian woman. The temptations of living a modern life in the city which comes with

going out and having boyfriends can be appealing to female migrants who have obtained a greater freedom through their migration. They are not under direct control of their parents anymore and can make their own decision. Before, they were only allowed to leave the house accompanied by a male relative but now they are able to go wherever they want. Women like Rangsey still live up to the expectations of not going out, other women can choose to go out but make their own rules that are to their opinion still applicable to good women. For example going out but not drinking alcohol. Or in the case of clothing styles, wearing jeans but not a mini skirt. Female migrants constantly have to make decisions on whether a good Cambodian woman should do that. These decisions might vary between individuals as the context they are in is new to them. Living in the city with no relatives around them or neighbours who practise a social control on them, female migrants will have to be their own judge when weighing out decisions. As being thoughtful was a typical characteristic for adulthood as was mentioned by respondents, this is ultimately practised among female migrants who have to make their own choices concerning appropriate behaviour and dealing with the consequences of their choices. The independence they gained by moving to the city gave them a bigger responsibility of proving that they can maintain their standards and live up to their traditional norms even when temptations of an immorally considered lifestyle are near.

When comparing this to women who would not migrate, it can be argued that female migrants on the one hand experience greater freedom and authority over their own lives as they can and have to make their own decisions in Phnom Penh, on the other hand they are more challenged to live up to the expectations of their families. A woman in a rural area can marry at an early age to secure her livelihood as her new husband will take care of her. While a female migrant sacrifices this security to be loyal to her family and to show her obedience towards her parents through sending remittances. By doing so, she risks finding a husband as she might be too old to be considered a right marriage candidate once she returns to the village. Also it is easier for a woman in the village to live according to the traditional culture since the social control of her neighbours are stronger. Besides this, there are simply no places available to go out to or not many clothes sold that could undermine the modesty of women. It might thus be easier for women in a village to live their lives as they are expected to do because of the environment that is more conducive to do so. Whereas women in the city experience challenges as they discover different values that do not necessarily match their old beliefs. Living in the city can be considered desirable because of modernity and wealth but if a woman would fully adjust to this new lifestyle, she might not be accepted anymore in her

rural community. When a female migrant visits her rural home, people might admire her for her new clothes and jewellery and inspire others to migrate as well. Together with other migrants a population is formed of women who adapt to an urban lifestyle to such an extent that it can still be accepted in their rural homes, depicting a surreal image of the reality in the city. At the same time female migrants create their own spaces in the city whereby they stick to rural norms while adopting some urban aspects. These new spaces take up an important part of the city whereas migrants make up a big share of the total population living in Phnom Penh. Female migrants who interact with urban people or foreigners will be likely to adopt more of those cultures. This again can have an impact on their rural homes when visiting or moving back. As much as migrants are influenced by their environment on their identity formation, they are agents who at the same time influence their environment.

#### *7.4.2 Male migrants*

When turning to men, what trends can be distinguished? As noted before, while growing up in the village men already enjoy greater freedoms compared to women. It is therefore more accepted for them to leave the house while unmarried to generate an income. Migrating to Phnom Penh is for them a logical decision as it stands for work opportunities. Also men will have to send remittances back to their families but it is accepted for them to send less than women. In this sense, men live an individual life compared to women who are more concerned with the well being of the family whereas men prepare themselves to start their own family. Respondents pointed out that women are the ones who save the money and when a man earns his salary, he gives it to his wife so that she can take care of it. It was believed that women spend money in more responsible ways than men. This could also be another reason why women remit more money. Firstly because they are more responsible and secondly they try to live up to this belief and proof themselves that they can support their families. Since men do not have to proof this belief, they might feel more freely in spending their money on their own pleasures.

A gendered division in employment can be found whereas mostly men work as construction workers and women as garment workers. Because the labour at a construction site is considered to be physically more challenging, men earn a higher income than women. Other jobs that are in general done by men are driving tuk tuks and motorbikes. While women predominantly sell food at local markets. This division in labour still fits with the traditional views of gender roles. The acceptance of men being more outgoing favours them to do these

jobs. As a tuk tuk driver, one needs to find clients which often requires an aggressive attitude otherwise one will be overruled by other tuk tuk drivers. Driving in Phnom Penh can be a dangerous task as traffic can be unexpected. Women working in a garment factory still fits with the view that the domestic sphere is ascribed to them. Sewing clothes is also in the village an accepted job for women. Selling foods on the market could also be seen as typical feminine since women are normally the once who cook at home. Nevertheless, a division in gender seems less prevalent when working in restaurants and malls.

Because male migrants feel less restricted to codes of conduct when living in the city, they can experience a greater freedom once they have left the village. As long as they meet the expectations of sending money to the family, they can choose to do what they want and do not have to prove their modesty as men as much as female migrants have to do towards their families. As a result one could expect that men would adapt more to urban lifestyles as it does not conflict much with their traditional lives. Wearing clothes that are typical urban fashion is less of a problem for men since they generally do not have to consider if it would question their modesty. But besides these advantages that can be experienced among male migrants who try to adapt to their new urban environments, there are still choices they have to make that will have an influence on their image of an obedient child and that can influence the mechanism whereby the family serves as a safety net of the migrant.

#### *7.4.3 Risks in the city*

For men in Cambodia it is accepted to drink alcohol, and they often do so whether it is at a beer garden in Phnom Penh or at a social gathering in a village. Since women are the ones who take care of the money, men might have to ask their wives for money to buy alcoholic drinks. This can cause disagreements in a household and in the worst case domestic violence. Besides alcohol abuse, some respondents pointed out that men cheat on their wives. Chhaiya told me how she would have to accept this if she wanted to be a good Cambodian woman:

In my family every guy cheats but the wife still has to be nice to him but he still cheats. When she gets pregnant she cannot stand, she cannot do anything. I told [my mum] that if my guy cheated on me, I will just get a divorce with him. Then she said that if you will do that you will have more than five husbands. So she said that it's a tradition, you have to be patient, you have to forgive.

*[Chhaiya | Female | 22 years old | 9 years in Phnom Penh | Intern at Indochina Research]*

Having a western husband instead was sometimes idealized among respondents, as they expected western men not to behave like Cambodians.

You know like western men when they have family they take care of the family a lot. And they marry happy together. But in Cambodia the man just f\*ck around. They have one lady, that's not enough. They get one more. They try to hurt them, his wife. Or they try to do the bad thing. Like the boys too they have the alcohol. They get some money, they get drunk, alcohol too much. Then they make problems. Come back maybe hit mother, maybe sister to get some money. To do something terrible.

*[Bopha | Female | 27 years old | 1 month in Phnom Penh | Bartender]*

These problems are not specifically described to a certain region as they occur both in rural areas as well as in urban areas. When young men migrate to the city, they leave with the expectations of finding a job and starting their own lives. Most of them are still unmarried and want to earn a reasonable income first before settling down with their own family. Living in a city with many places to go out to, they might involve themselves with friends who introduce them to clubs to go out to. Drinking alcohol is a social event which can extend ones network. Hence it can benefit a migrant who is unknown in the city. Besides alcohol, drugs is another substance that is easily available in the city and popular among youth. Migrants are thus exposed to several temptations in the city, they will have to take up their responsibilities for the choices they make. It seems that even though male migrants know about the lifestyles of urban youth who involve themselves in drugs and alcohol, they prefer to stay away from this themselves. Not necessarily because they are not allowed to drink alcohol according to their norms more so because they came to Phnom Penh to earn an income in the first place. Involving themselves with bad company might result in them not fulfilling their own expectations as well as their parents' expectations. Being obedient to parents seems to hold migrants in line with their objective that brought them to the city. In any case migrants are forced to move back to the village, it will be easier for them to be accepted back again if they do not have a criminal record. Male migrants might not experience as much pressure as female migrants about how they should behave, they do have to behave to an extent that they can eventually return without losing face. Family might not directly ask the migrant to send remittances, a migrant naturally feels his responsibility of supporting his family once moving to the city. It is often the family who provides the money that will allow him to go to the city and start up a life. Also, while living in the city migrants can still call their relatives for support in case they did not earn enough to pay for their upkeep. For that reason it is important to stay in good terms with his family and he can do so by not involving himself in



going out at night and abusing drugs. It can be argued that for a male migrant it is harder to find out how he should behave since the rules are less clear than they are for females. As much as struggles of identification and reaching expectations are different for every individual migrant, in general it seems that female migrants tend to have problems with adjusting to urban life while being tied to traditional codes of conduct. Contrary to male migrants who are not dictated by these rules but who have to find out what exactly is expected of them and what behaviour is accepted. It is this ambiguity of being allowed to go out but only within a certain framework that male migrants will have to discover once living in the city.

## 8. Discussion

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The research findings that were presented in the previous chapters will in this chapter be linked to the existing literature and debates on migrants in their transition to adulthood as the findings will be placed in the theoretical framework together with recommendations that will be made for future research.

### 8.1 Contribution to existing literature

In this study, an attempt was made to discuss adulthood according to local interpretations. When placing this study in the debate of whether migration can be seen as a rite of passage to adulthood, the focus should be on what the local interpretations of adulthood are. Barratt et al. (2012) showed with their study that migrants become independent through migration whereby independence serves as an important indicator of adulthood. This does not seem to be the case in the context of Cambodia. Rather, it supports Zhong and Arnett (2014) findings whereby adulthood is explained in terms of taking care of parents, a long-term career and family roles and responsibilities. Respondents pointed out that independence indeed was a state that they ultimately reached for whereas asking for help from their parents can be experienced as embarrassing and immature. Reality showed that being able to take care of parents and taking responsibilities are more important indicators for adulthood in Cambodia. Through migration, migrants were able to send remittances to their parents. Migration thus gave them this ability of taking care of their families. By contributing to the family while living in the city, migrants build a safety net for themselves. This safety net means for many migrants that they do not save money for themselves but instead send it to their parents. This undermines their independence because when in need, they do not have their own savings to help themselves but they are forced to ask their family members of which their parents are often the ones who are consulted first if they are able to. Migration thus, does not necessarily lead to independence in this case.

As many migrants move to Phnom Penh only to work for a few years and to return to their villages afterwards, it can be placed in line with Horvath's (2008) argument whereby he states that migration in itself is not chosen as a means to become an adult, rather migration enables youth to experience a prolonged transition to adulthood. These experiences then can eventually influence adulthood. Some characteristics of adulthood are already present among migrants when living in the city. Others however will be more likely to happen once married

and settled down in their villages once returned. Therefore migration enables migrants to experience an extra phase of life in the city as reported by the study of Amin et al. (1998).

This study paid as well attention to identity formation among migrants as Kroger (1996) pointed out that developing an identity especially takes place among people in their transition to adulthood. Migrating during this period of life can have an impact on identity formation as migrants have to adjust to new environments with different norms and values. It became clear that in Cambodia, migrants can experience great differences between their original rural culture and a new urban culture. Forming an identity was experienced differently among migrants as some would still identify as being rural whereas others would adapt more to an urban culture. It should be realised that identity formation among migrants is not a simplistic process whereby one chooses either rural or urban. Often it involves balancing out their own ideas and opinions together with the expectations of their families, keeping in mind that migrants eventually might want to return to their villages again. The results of this study thus support previous studies among internal migrants arguing that the identity formation involves a complex process (Nguyen et al., 2012; Derks, 2008; Baratt et al., 2012; Erman, 1998). Besides migrants making deliberate choices in forming their identities, others can also influence this (Erman, 1998; Jensen, 2011). Migrants in Phnom Penh often were aware that people from Phnom Penh perceived migrants as a lower class. Although migrants can long for the same lifestyles as some urban elites, it will be hard for them to interact with these elites as they are not interested in this. As a result, migrants will act according to the expectations of urban people by mainly interacting with other migrants and sticking to their rural values as access to an urban culture is made inaccessible by others.

A reason why the identity formation is rather a complex process can also be explained in terms of transient urban spaces that emerge as pointed out by Bork-Hüffer et al. (2014). The flows of goods and money between the rural and urban areas establish development chains between these areas whereby migrants live translocal lives in which rural and urban areas should not be considered as separate entities (Zoomers & Van Westen, 2011). Living in a transient urban space then allows migrants to uphold rural values while living in an urban sphere. Migrants practise their agency by influencing the existing urban spaces with its cultures considering that migrants are a big share of the population of Phnom Penh whose influence on the city should not be underestimated.

Moreover, this study contributes to the call for including gender perspectives in migration studies. Even though migrants will have their individual stories to tell, different trends and experiences among female and male migrants can be distinguished. Female migrants have to deal with possible discrepancies between traditional rules of modesty such as *chhap srey* and new lifestyles in the city (Curran & Saguy, 2013; Derks, 2008). Whereas rules for male migrants are less strict but this forces them to think of which expectations they need to fulfil and which unwritten rules they should still obey to.

## 8.2 Recommendations

As much as this study tried to contribute to existing debates on migration and youth in their transition to adulthood, more research can be done regarding this topic to bridge the knowledge gap. When approaching adulthood, it is important to value local perspectives of adulthood where future research will take place. Coming from a different background than the research population, our opinions of what adulthood should be like can influence the research findings. To minimize this bias, more attention should be given to local discourses if we want to understand why certain processes are taking place the way they are in certain contexts. Since time was a limitation of this research, I call for a longitudinal study on migrants whereby attention can be paid to migrants who have re-migrated to their rural homes. This might as well give important insights in the impact of migration on adulthood.

In the context of Cambodia, there is still a lot left to be discovered in future regarding migration. CRUMP has made a great contribution with their quantitative research on migration in Cambodia, nevertheless more qualitative research will be needed to add in depth information to the already existing migration numbers. Qualitative research can also help in clarifying individual cases together with raising awareness for migrants in Cambodia. The migration of many Cambodian youths is still taking place. To reduce this number, action should be undertaken in provinces outside Phnom Penh to stimulate development there together with creating job opportunities in the rest of the country so that Phnom Penh as a city not only experiences great development in a rather short period of time but that Cambodia as a country can enjoy this development. With the increasing population of Phnom Penh, mostly due to migration, awareness should be raised on how these newcomers can integrate in the urban environment and can benefit from their new environment as much as people who originate from Phnom Penh. To reduce the marginalisation of migrants, attention should also be paid to spatial planning. Currently many migrants are living in their own communities at the outskirts of Phnom Penh, not being able to participate as a full resident of Phnom Penh.

## 9. Conclusion

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This qualitative study attempted to give an answer to the central question:

*What is the impact of migration on young internal migrants in their transition to adulthood in Phnom Penh, Cambodia?*

It became clear that through migration young migrants gain more responsibilities as they have to start their own lives in Phnom Penh and earn money. Having an income allows these youths to support their families back in the provinces. Being able to take care of the parents is an important value in Cambodian culture that indicates adulthood. However, because of remittances that are sent to the families migrants do not have much money left for personal savings. This forces them to ask for help to their families in times of need and undermines their independence. Being independent is less of an importance to migrants who migrate to Phnom Penh than contributing to the family. When migrating to the city, migrant's families might have expectations as they hope for an extra source of income from the family member in the city. An migrant that fulfils these expectations ensures that his family functions as a safety net, something he can count on when he is in need as well.

Maintaining close ties with the family can have an impact on one's identity as well, as rural values are considered to be important. Obeying to rural codes of conduct might make it easier for migrants to be accepted in their home village. People in the village will look up to them because they come from the city but they also took care of their families in the village. By still abiding to the norms of the village when living in the city, it will be easier for migrants to receive help from their relatives. At the same time adaptation in the city can be made more difficult when upholding rural standards in the city. Adjusting to an urban environment has the advantage that migrants can be treated the same like urban people, avoiding marginalisation of migrants. Moving to a new environment makes migrants aware of their identity as differences in lifestyles and cultures forces migrants to rethink their own values. It is especially during one's transition to adulthood that an identity is formed which is influenced by their new environment in the case of migrants. Among many migrants identity formation will be a complex process whereby rural and urban should not be treated as different entities. It is not a mere choice between one of these but migrants will have to deal with different standards at different situations whereby outsiders also have an influence on the identity of migrants. Forming an identity takes place in a translocal context whereby urban

influences penetrate rural areas and vice versa through development chains that are established between migrants and their families.

Migrating as a young person to Phnom Penh has an impact, whether you are a female or a male. In this study trends were found that are gender specific. It was shown that female migrants tend to have a stronger pressure from home regarding being a dutiful daughter. This can conflict with them adjusting to their new environment and will hinder them from becoming fully independent. Male migrants do not have clear codes of conduct and therefore they can experience a struggle in finding out what is expected of them to make sure that they can fall back on their family.

Migration continues to happen in Cambodia as migrants seek for greener pastures. Consequently, coming of age in Cambodia can be experienced in multiple ways with migration having an influence on this. The family's wellbeing plays an important role in deciding if one should migrate. Migration then seems to be an attractive opportunity to be able to take care of the family. This being an important value of adulthood that is still cherished among many Cambodians. As Sophanit told me:

I know how it is to have nothing. [...] When I get rich my family will be rich either. I cannot be rich alone.

*[Sophanit / Male / 21 years old / Student in Battambang]*

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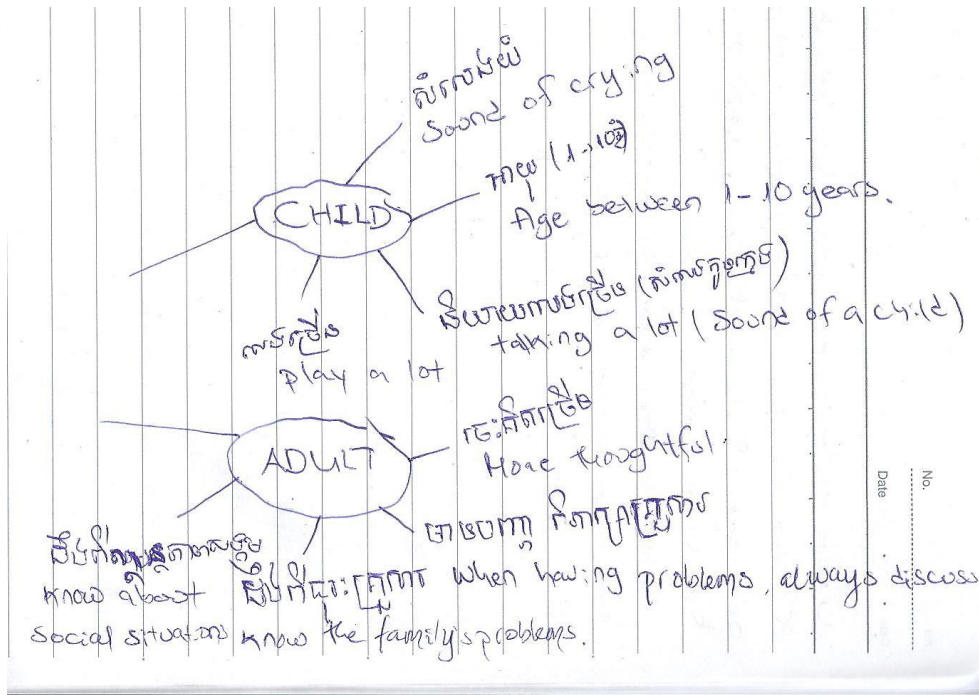
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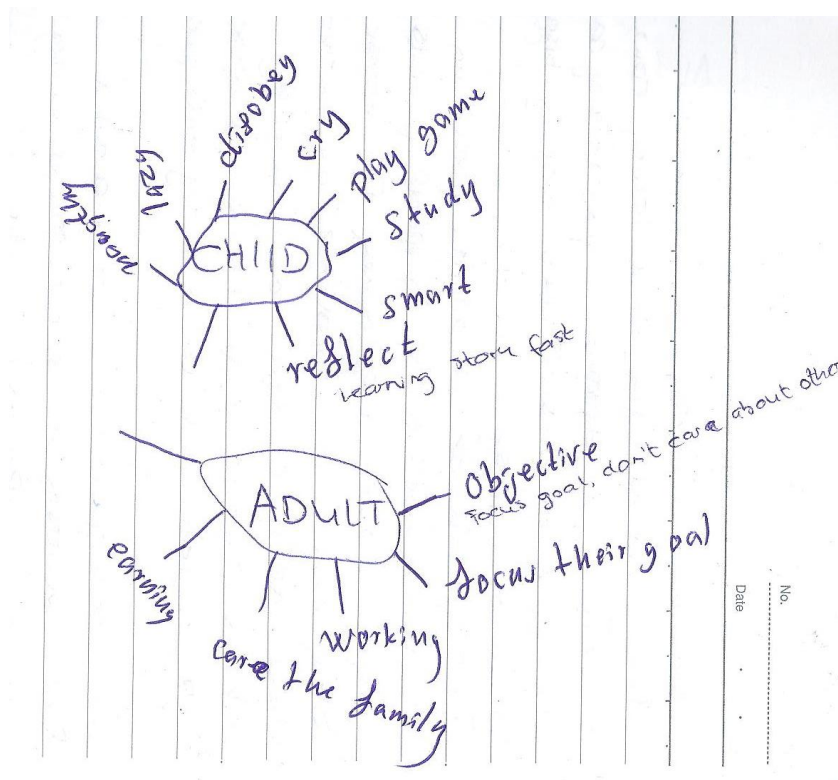
## Annex

Examples of word clouds on childhood and adulthood made by respondents in Battambang.

Example 1



Example 2



Example 3

