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### **"Tat Marina, Victim Pure and Simple"**

Chea Vannath is one of a handful of prominent Cambodian women embarking on what is almost "mission impossible". She is a member of a small club seeking to prove that women can be leaders in a society where men at every level remain dominant. I am therefore reluctant to take issue with her comment that "Tat Marina is wrong for entering the affair", but I must. I am sorry - Tat Marina is a victim pure and simple.

A few months ago, I took up the same issue with two other colleagues of Ms. Chea Vannath, at the Project Against Domestic Violence and the Women's Media Center. In an otherwise excellent TV program, comments were made to the effect that men beat their wives because of the beer girls. This was not answered or qualified. I said that even if men did spend money needed for their families with these girls, and arguments ensued at home, in no way could the blame be attached to the beer-girls, and the men somehow excused for beating their wives.

The world of the karaoke bars and beer-girls is one frequently visited by men but seldom by most women, and probably never by the elite women of Cambodia. The girls who work there are there - as the Cambodia Daily article reported - mainly to earn money, like Tat Marina, for their families, not for prostitution.

- For most, it is their only option of escaping poverty.
- Some have been sold or forced into this work. One beer-girl I know was procured as a 15 year old and later discarded by a prominent man. The transaction involved her own mother.
- Even those who do this work voluntarily, for money for clothes, jewelry, etc. are victims. They have grown up in a society where they are expected to be beautiful and please men. Many have had little education

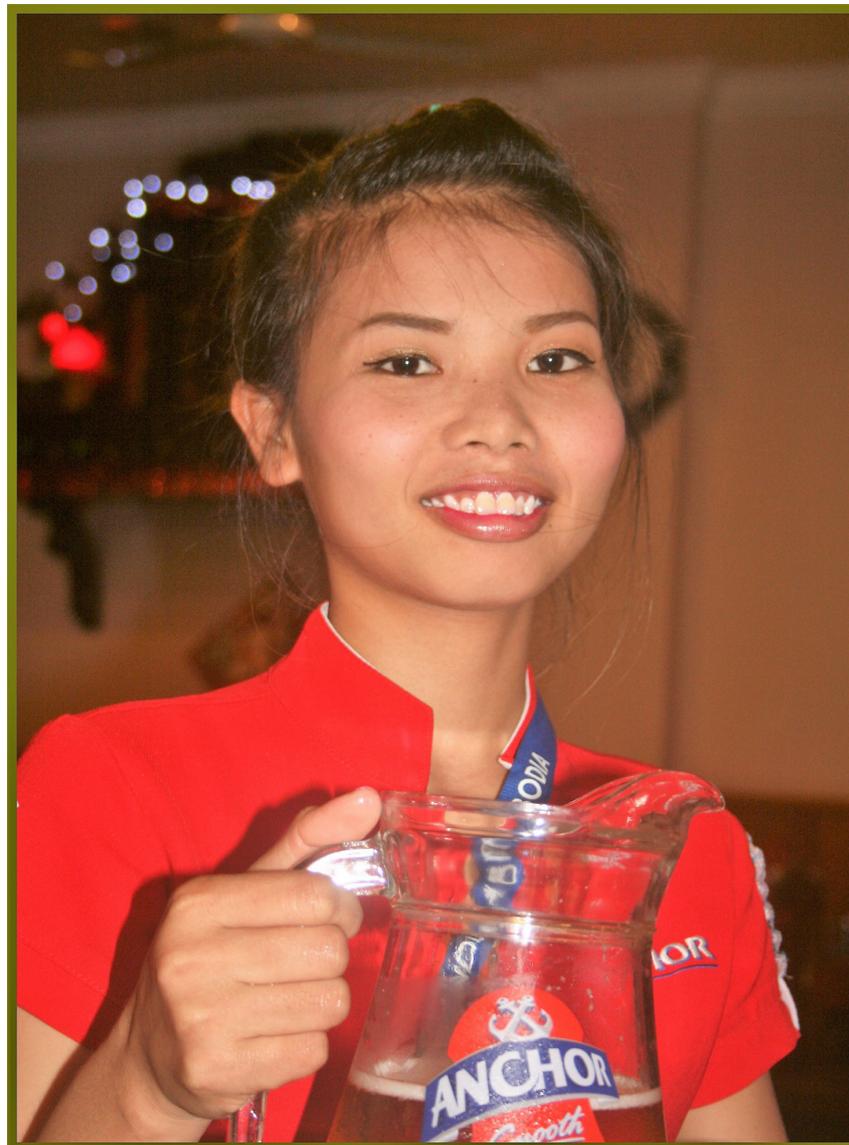
What happens is once they are in this business, they face very heavy pressure to give in to the advances of men. Men use all kinds of methods and incentives to lure them. They use alcohol, food, money and gifts. They use older girls. They use owners. They

use threats and as we know in the case of Miss Cheng Srey Pao, aged 19, they will make the girls pay the ultimate price for a refusal. (On February 2nd 1999, this Karaoke waitress was shot dead by a police officer known as Sin Kim Sann. He shot her in the forehead after she refused his sexual advances. This policeman has never been arrested.)

This is the reality of life in today's Cambodia for tens, perhaps hundreds of thousands of women and girls. They are all victims. I wish Chea Vannath, her colleagues, and all honorable leaders well in their quest to eliminate this evil in a society with so many other fine traditions.

Yours sincerely

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A “Beer Girl” in Cambodia employed by the major brewers, on minimal pay and poor working conditions, to promote the sale of their brands. You can read more about them in this blog: <http://anorthumbrianabroad.blogspot.com/2016/12/more-to-peering-than-appears.html>