



**University  
of Victoria**

Graduate Studies

Notice of the Final Oral Examination  
for the Degree of Master of Arts

of

**EVELYNE LAURIN**

BA (University of Ottawa, 2012)

**“Loans as disservice: Cambodian women and predatory lending by unregistered  
microfinance institutions”**

Department of Geography

Friday, August 28, 2015

4:00PM

David Turpin Building

Room B215

Supervisory Committee:

Dr. Simon Springer, Department of Geography, University of Victoria (Supervisor)

Dr. Denise Cloutier, Department of Geography, UVic (Member)

External Examiner:

Dr. Marlea Clarke, Department of Political Science, UVic

Chair of Oral Examination:

Dr. Pamela Moss, School of Public Health and Social Policy, UVic

Dr. David Capson, Dean, Faculty of Graduate Studies

## **Abstract**

Over the past three decades microfinance has become one of the most important policy interventions used by international development practitioners, offering loan opportunities to those who lack access to basic financial services. Women have been the primary targets of this poverty alleviation strategy as it was presumed that they would be empowered through increased control over their incomes. In Cambodia, these strategies are guided by a business-approach to development and enforce regulatory measures encouraging competition, marketization and commercialization, and in so doing, put more economic pressure on women borrowers. Through the concepts of debt and trust, the following research will argue against the conflicting nature of empowerment through borrowing. Since microfinance was not designed to address social inequalities, it will also argue that deeply embedded patriarchal power relations go unchallenged and the status of women within the household goes unchanged. In stark contradiction to the empowerment discourses lauded internationally, usurious moneylenders and unregistered microfinance institutions practicing predatory lending are actually encroaching upon Cambodian women's domestic and work space. A feminist ethnography was employed in seeking to unearth participants' understandings of their circumstances and giving them a voice, where the specific methodological tools included semi-structured interviews with Cambodian women who have taken loans. The analysis was guided by examining discourse in microfinance policy reports as well as interviews with employees of Microfinance Institutions (MFIs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The resulting research is positioned within the critical literature in human geography on neoliberalization by examining whether or not the integration of the poor into the "market" benefits them or places them in highly exploitative circumstances.