



## Post-trafficking bordering practices: Perverse co-production, marking and stretching borders



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### ABSTRACT

This paper highlights the significance of post-trafficking scenarios for understanding bordering practices in political geography. In so doing, it addresses two significant research gaps: the lack of attention to trafficking in geography and the failure of wider interdisciplinary debates to engage with post-trafficking specifically. While extensive research in political geography has addressed the related experiences of refugees, asylum seekers and ‘illegals’, much of this work has centred on policies, processes and practices that aim to keep ‘unwanted strangers out’. By contrast, very little research has addressed how the border is configured for and by those who are crossing-back over; those who are ‘returning home’, in this case from diverse trafficking situations. The paper draws on recent empirical research on post-trafficking citizenship and livelihoods in Nepal which examined how women returning from trafficking situations deal with stigma and marginalisation. Our analysis illuminates how bordering practices circumscribe and shape women’s lives in powerful ways as they seek to (re)establish a sense of belonging and respect. We examine the interplay of state and non-state actors (national and transnational) in structuring mobility and anti-trafficking advocacy through a range of bordering practices and explore how the border is (co-)produced by varied actors at different border sites. This includes women returning from diverse trafficking situations, who invoke the border to argue that they are ‘not as trafficked’ as other women, and others who perform the border differently as agents for trafficking prevention.

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*“We heard the Nepal Government was denying receiving us in Nepal, calling us prostitutes, sickness ridden. We heard it from the people in India. They told us, ‘You are wild and the devil! Your government is not going to take you home. Nepal is calling you this and that’. We were kept in Andheri Jail at that time. The NGOs had gone to take us as the government was reluctant to bring us back in Nepal. The NGOs divided us into different groups and brought us to Kathmandu.”*

The post-trafficking testimony of a woman recalling her experiences fifteen years after being ‘rescued’ from a trafficking situation, along with a number of other Nepali women, following extensive raids on Indian brothels in 1996.

### Introduction

In this paper we draw on literature in political geography on critical border studies, including emerging research in feminist geopolitics, to open up an agenda on trafficking and specifically post-trafficking. Post-trafficking describes the processes and practices associated with leaving trafficking situations and refers specifically to the scenarios people face upon return as they negotiate the complex exclusions associated with being a ‘trafficked person’. Post-trafficking significantly affects individuals as they encounter the exclusionary political processes associated with the wider social worlds they are attempting to (re-) enter. Despite some emerging work (see, for example, Lisborg & Plambech, 2009; Molland, 2012; Yea, 2014), post-trafficking has largely been ignored to date in attempts to theorise and empirically explore trafficking. Therefore we engage with recent theorisations of the technocratic governance of border spaces in relation to other marginalised groups like asylum seekers, displaced peoples, exiles and refugees (see, for example, Cons, 2013; Gill, 2009; Johnson et al., 2011; McConnell, 2011; Mountz, 2010; Shewly, 2013) to

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reflect on the significance of post-trafficking scenarios for understanding bordering practices. In so doing we explore what political geography has to offer to the extensive and robust literature on trafficking. We follow these agendas by examining how geographical imaginaries of the border shape the circumstances faced by women when they return from trafficking situations. In these contexts they seek to (re)establish a sense of belonging and respect in a socio-cultural, political environment where, as trafficked women, they are stigmatised (for a more detailed discussion of the role of stigma in post-trafficking scenarios see Laurie, Richardson, Poudel, & Townsend, 2015b, forthcoming; Richardson, Laurie, Poudel, & Townsend, 2015a, forthcoming). We explore how the geopolitically strategic location of Nepal has consequences for how women are seen and treated upon their return. We go on to explore how, in these contexts, the border is marked and stretched by and for women returning from trafficking situations in ways that shape, and in many cases limit, their mobility and decision-making once back 'home'.

By focussing on post-trafficking in this way we also seek to contribute to border studies research including recent work on South Asia (see Cons & Sanyal, 2013) and South East Asia (Lamb, 2014). We indicate how a focus on post-trafficking scenarios can illuminate the ways in which even so called 'open borders' can become physically marked and stretched in varied and negative ways, closing them to some people and extending them beyond the borderline and crossing points for others. We illustrate how post-trafficking bordering practices render women returning from diverse trafficking situations 'out of place' and stateless, even within their home country. Responding to earlier calls '(f)or ethnography in political geography' (Megoran, 2006: 622), we aim to further more recent debates on the co-production of borders (Lamb, 2014) by examining the interplay of state and non-state actors (national and transnational) in structuring women's mobility and anti-trafficking advocacy. We examine a range of bordering practices to explore how the border is (co-)produced by different actors. Our post-trafficking emphasis highlights the perverse everyday biography of the border and cautions against an over-celebration of 'bottom up agency' in analyses of border co-production. Instead it points to the need to locate actors within the highly gendered scalar politics of border relations, influenced by social stigma and stereotypes which both help form and cut across women's (post-trafficking) solidarities.

The paper is structured as follows. The first section explains the research context and approach before moving on to conceptualise trafficking in the light of recent border studies scholarship in political geography. We outline the contribution that a focus on trafficking can make to current debates and then explore this contribution through two examples of different border sites associated with 'the transnational development-security nexus' framing anti-trafficking policy and advocacy initiatives. Here we draw on empirical research in Nepal including ethnographic observation at one of Nepal's border crossings with India. In the final section we examine how this open border materialises, dematerialises and re-materialises (Megoran, 2012a, 2012b) in differentiated ways for anti-trafficking activists and women returning from diverse trafficking situations. We contrast the agency women show in the border activism described in the previous sections with the ways in which their freedom of movement is curtailed by the return process. We also show how, in this context, some women invoke the border to argue that they are 'not as trafficked' as others. In the conclusion we summarise our arguments and call for more research in Geography on trafficking generally, and post-trafficking specifically. We reflect on our findings for current border research and challenge political geography to give greater attention the everyday realities of borders in the Global South.

## Research approach and context

The paper draws on recently completed research conducted in collaboration with the Non-Government Organisation 'Shakti Samuha', one of the first anti-trafficking organisations globally to be founded and staffed by returnee women, and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) Mission in Nepal. A key aim of the research was to gain knowledge grounded in the actual experiences of Nepalese women returning from trafficking situations themselves. Reflecting these goals, the research also aimed to feed into anti-trafficking advocacy (see Laurie, Richardson, Poudel, & Townsend, 2015a, 2015b) and engaged directly with current debates on citizenship in Nepal (see Richardson, Laurie, Poudel, & Townsend, 2015b, forthcoming). Data collection involved the extensive analysis of grey literature, participant observation in policy forums and during advocacy activities, 23 stakeholder interviews and 46 interviews with women who had returned from trafficking situations. The latter were conducted in Kathmandu and other district and rural sites identified by the government of Nepal for high occurrences of trafficking (UNDP, 2004). All 46 interviews were taped and transcribed in Nepali and then translated into English. Where we draw on this material in this article we do so using the idiom of the original translation as we wish to recognise that Nepali English is one of the many forms of global English spoken in the world. Our sample selected women who self-identified as returnee trafficked women and who had differing levels of engagement with NGOs and social movements, this included 9 women who identified as activists and worked on an almost full-time basis (sometimes as paid NGO staff) in anti-trafficking advocacy (these interviews were conducted via English–Nepali simultaneous translation). The paper also draws on ethnographic observation data gathered during a visit to an open border crossing in the South of Nepal where a number of anti-trafficking prevention programmes operate.

Nepal is an important source country for trafficked women in South Asia (UNDP, 2004). While many Nepali women have been traditionally trafficked to India for sexual purposes, new destinations facilitated by the traditionally open border between the two countries are emerging. India has recently become a transit route for trafficking on to the Middle East in particular and South East Asia in general. Much work on trafficking in Nepal examines its process and flows (see for example for Nepal: Bal Kumar, 2001; Beshford, 2006; Hennick & Simkhada, 2004; Human Rights Watch, 1995; and more widely: AWHRC, 2003; Brown, 2000; GAATW, 2004; Kangaspunta, 2006; Kempadoo, Pattanaik, & Sanghera, 2012). Very little research has focused specifically on post-trafficking situations. Donors, NGOs and government organisations influence the livelihoods open to women returning from trafficking situations through their role in what is often termed 'the rescue industry' (Agustín, 2007). This industry has a policy focus on 'the three Ps': Prevention, Protection and Prosecution which underpin the US State Department's annual Trafficking in Persons (TIP) report. This global data-collection exercise grades a specific country's implementation of policies and mechanisms in these three areas and feeds directly into the allocation of US bilateral aid. A subsection of these in implementation terms are the 3 Rs: Rescue, Repatriation and Rehabilitation. 'Rehabilitation' is a contested term for some anti-trafficking advocates including organisations such as Shakti Samuha because it seems to imply that women themselves are to some extent responsible for their experiences and need to be 'rehabilitated' in order to re-enter Nepali society. Repatriation is similarly problematic as the implied assumption is that all women wish to and will go home. Not all women return to Nepal as result of a 'rescue mission' by NGOs or the Indian policy of carrying out raids on brothels. Therefore some women remain outside the direct

influence of the NGO rescue missions. Nevertheless, for many the experience of gaining a livelihood and establishing a sense of belonging and respect after returning is influenced by access to NGO and/or government shelters and services.

Here we emphasize how crossing back over the border into Nepal is seldom a positive experience for women leaving trafficking situations, whether through a rescue process or other means. We explore how the process of return can lead to extreme anxiety about the consequences of being seen as a trafficked woman and in some cases the forced exposure of a trafficked past. When this is the case, women are typically subjected to various forms of sexual stigma through being labelled 'spoiled' women, HIV/AIDS 'carriers' or 'prostitutes'. As such, they experience high levels of social, economic and political discrimination (Brown, 2000; Joshi, 2001; Poudel, 2011; Richardson, Poudel, & Laurie, 2009; Richardson et al., 2015a, forthcoming, 2015b, forthcoming; Samarasinghe, 2008). Such stigma and discrimination are crucial elements in explaining the power ascribed to the performance of the specific bordering practices we examine in this paper.

### Conceptualising the post-trafficking border

Borders debates, which go back to the foundation of the modern discipline of Geography (Megoran, 2012a), have flourished in political geography in recent years following the rise of securitisation agendas post 9/11 (Johnson et al., 2011:61). These agendas have permeated all forms of bordering, indicating how borders are being stretched in myriad and significant ways beyond the line of the border itself, which marks the limits of the territory of a nation-state. These debates have opened up important discussion about what and who make up contemporary bordering agents. Emphasising the connectivity of borders rather than their role in limiting mobility, Rumforth, 2011, like Lamb (2014), argues that it is not only states which act as bordering agents but also other societal actors like NGOs. These observations are important in the context of this paper because, as we elaborate below, NGOs play a significant role in post-trafficking 'borderwork' and, in trafficking contexts, borders become sites where political claims are made on the basis of different actors being able to fix and mobilise particular identities for themselves and for others.

Feminist scholarship has provided an important critique of the dominance of securitisation agendas. It has made a significant contribution to gendered understandings of the links between geopolitics and migration by drawing attention to the range of scalar processes that make specific bodies 'stateless' and 'in and out of place' (see Hyndman, 2004). Given this work, what new insights does the analysis of women's trafficking and specifically post-trafficking bring to understandings of borders? First we would argue that it adds an important layer of complexity to current definitional debates concerning terms such as migrants, immigrants, asylum seekers, refugees and illegals by emphasising the importance of self-definition. Throughout this paper we use the phrases 'women leaving'/'women returning [or who return] from trafficking situations'. This terminology, as distinct from the expression 'returning home', is purposeful because it reflects the definitions that Shakti Samuha members use in public forums and among themselves. In the co-production of knowledge with NGO partners such issues are important as they reflect the imperative to include excluded voices but also to ensure that they are heard in terms that are familiar to those who are speaking and being spoken about in policy making.

Shifting attention to the return process highlights a second contribution of our research on post-trafficking to border studies. Our work interrogates the direction of flow of people and the connections between outward and inward acting processes. Much

research on the securitisation and migration nexus has come to prioritise how movements across borders are monitored. Reflecting a preoccupation with the *inward flow* of migration, important research in political geography has addressed the wide range of 'hi tech' measures used to prevent the entry of 'strangers' from biometric passports and e-border projects to a range of computer generated alerts which cross reference different types of risk-flagged data, and has analysed the 'spatial stretching' involved in these processes (e.g. see Amore, 2006, 2011). In the case of trafficking however, policy interventions mainly target *outward flows* with prevention measures focussing almost exclusively on stopping people from leaving their home country and crossing international borders in the first place. As a result, attention to the mobility of those returning from trafficking situations has been limited and internal trafficking and its links to international trafficking has been little researched (Laurie et al., 2015b, forthcoming). Our analysis below argues that post-trafficking research can illuminate much about the process of trafficking, the links between trafficking and post-trafficking scenarios and the success or not of prevention and, so called, 're-integration' measures. All these processes we would argue configure the border in distinct ways.

Before turning to explore these issues through examples of specific bordering sites, we first outline how the current citizenship regime in Nepal influences identity making and explore the wider geopolitical framing of trafficking in the region. Both these processes help structure and give power to the performance of bordering in ways that specifically affect women returning from trafficking situations.

### Citizenship, geopolitics and identity making

Citizenship is not conferred at birth in Nepal but rather has to be applied for upon reaching the age of 16. While this is usually quite straight forward for men, under the previous citizenship regime during the 1990s era a woman's application needed the endorsement of a male relative (Richardson et al., 2009). In 2007 the interim Constitution stated that it was possible for mothers also to endorse citizenship applications, however no law or other legal mechanisms were put in place to implement this provision (for more details see Richardson et al., 2015b, forthcoming). Therefore, as with laws relating to immigrants (Coleman, 2009) and refugees and asylum seekers (Black, 2001; McConnell, 2013) more generally, there is currently an implementation gap between passing new legislation and its actual roll out in everyday practice in Nepal. As a result, many women returning from trafficking situations, trafficked before they gained citizenship, are still unable to obtain it upon their return due to family rejection and the unwillingness of a male relative to endorse their applications (Richardson et al., 2015b, forthcoming).

Similar to scenarios in Europe and North America (see Gill, 2009; Mountz, 2010), the gaps between citizenship legislation and implementation often reflect the roles and power of intermediary gatekeepers and bureaucrats. These actors mediate on the ground practice in confused legal settings all of which can lead to discriminatory practices at the border. In the Nepal case a series of bureaucratic temporal conjunctures have recently empowered an array of local actors. Rankin (2015, forthcoming) illustrates how, following more than five years of post-conflict political stalemate at the national level and endless postponements of the constitutional writing process, the district scale has acquired new significance through interim provisions for local governance. As a result, a range of stakeholders have gained greater influence over decision making. These include officials such as Chief District Officer (CDO) and other relevant officials at District level and Secretary at Village Development Committees level, who hold executive power, as well

as a new set of district actors constituted in Integrated Project Selection Committees with power over District budgets and planning. Women claiming citizenship need to do so in their home districts via these actors. As Milan, a woman who has experienced trafficking explained, despite successfully obtaining her own citizenship upon return this is rarely straight forward for many women.

*"I have heard an episode about a friend like me. She went to the District to have her citizenship made. The CDO after knowing her as trafficked woman denied her citizenship. She had shared me about her sorrows. She said the staff who does the job of writing/documenting asked her many embarrassing questions which she couldn't answer."*

*Interviewer's question:*

*"What about her father? Hadn't he gone with her?"*

*"Her mother had gone with her because she didn't have father."*

In such settings women's negotiations with bureaucrats over citizenship are influenced by long held cultural beliefs about their lower socio-cultural and economic status (discussed in detail by Rankin (2013) in relation to accessing and managing productive enterprises in rural areas and Nightingale and Rankin (2014) in relation to political transformation). In turn, claiming political rights requires a change in the mindset of (male) district bureaucrats who process citizenship applications. As we have shown improving access to citizenship for women returning from trafficking situations has been a key focus of anti-trafficking activism in Nepal (Laurie et al., 2015a, 2015b), as even for women who are aware of their rights to citizenship through matrilineal relations, this is rarely an easy process. In the context of the TIP agenda, where the emphasis is on prosecuting traffickers, gaining citizenship has become essential in anti-trafficking, as Milan again explains.

*"Citizenship is needed everywhere. We need citizenship if we have to lodge case. We need to have our citizenship in order to catch up the dalal (trafficker). The trafficker gets released soon if we don't have our citizenship."*

In the next section we examine how wider geopolitical processes also frame the mobility and anti-trafficking advocacy, agency and identity of women returning from trafficking situations. We focus specifically on how the transnational security-development nexus configures the bordering practices associated with (post) trafficking in two sites.

### The transnational security-development nexus

Nepal's strategic location between China and India brings specific dimensions to border enforcement and national security issues. As well as historically playing a role as a 'buffer zone' in spheres of economic and political influence (Rankin, 2015, forthcoming) and represented in popular terms as squeezed between two emerging world powers (Harris, 2013), international concerns over cross-border security also focus on the influence of Maoist movements in the region. Despite the end of the civil war in 2006 in Nepal, international fears, especially those of the US and EU, remain over links between Nepali Maoists and the Maoist inspired Naxalite movement in India. (Many Nepali Maoists went into hiding in Naxalite strongholds during the 'People's War' across the Indian border into Bihar West Bengal and Uttar Pradesh (Rankin, 2015, forthcoming)). Whether or not these fears have

equal sway among the significant regional players in the global South and the newer emerging global powers, they nevertheless continue to influence traditional donor engagement in Nepal. Such international anxieties were not eased by Maoist interests being formally represented by a number of political parties following the peace agreement. The leading Maoist party, the Unified Communist Party of Nepal, won most of the seats in the 2008 Constituent Assembly (Rankin, 2015, forthcoming) and at the 2013 national election the Maoists came third.

International cross-border concerns map on to established antagonisms between Nepal and India that have long since informed bordering practices in the region. As we argue elsewhere (Richardson et al., 2015b, forthcoming), anti-trafficking agendas have also fed into such imaginaries. The trafficking of women into India, and more recently onto other destinations, has been facilitated by the 1950 treaty that established an open border between Nepal and India. Joshi (2001) indicates how in this context a focus on the abuse of Nepali girls and women through trafficking helps generate anti-Indian sentiment that serves narratives of nation building and helps draw a distinction between the two nations, despite the free flow of goods and people across the open border.

At the same time, the move to democratic reform through the establishment of a Constituent Assembly and now an elected government has generated great international donor interest in Nepal. In recent times donor agendas and international funding have come together to promote the re-integration into Nepali society of former male and female Maoist fighters. This has involved extensive demobilisation compensation programmes and the incorporation of 1422 former fighters into the current Nepali state army (NIPS, 2013). Such regional focussed geopolitical issues, combined with more global trends concerning the securitisation of migration, affect how post-trafficking policies are formulated in Nepal. This context gives priority to rescue processes, re-integration and rehabilitation immediately post return and emphasises the need for women leaving trafficking situations to take their traffickers to court, reflecting in part, the emphasis post-conflict on re-securitisation. Less consideration is given to the social and emotional cost of these processes for the women involved and their rights to citizenship and long term livelihoods (Laurie et al., 2015a, 2015b).

In the contemporary world terrorism and organised crime increasingly frame how migration and mobility are seen. As a result, trafficked people like asylum seekers "migrate through ever-thickening, geopolitical fields of securitization" (Mountz, 2010: 113). The dominance of such discourses, in turn, influences how development policy is conceived. As a result, international donors are increasingly linking anti-trafficking and securitisation (Sharp, Campell, & Laurie, 2011). Below we examine two scenarios where geopolitics and the transnational security-development nexus configure the spaces into which anti-trafficking advocacy can act. We explore the diverse technologies of trafficking prevention and question the extent to which prevention success at some borders produces new geographies of trafficking and bordering elsewhere.

#### Prevention at the border

Most research on border prevention focusses on keeping unwanted people out. By contrast anti-trafficking border measures aim to keep those who are wanted 'in'. As Joshi (2001) argues in the case of Nepal these are women, who by their cultural purity and differing degree of social seclusion, are assumed to embody the 'honour' of the nation. While much research on border prevention has concentrated on hi-tech mechanisms, as mentioned earlier, here we focus on far more mundane tools - the technologically unenhanced seeing and hearing faculties of border guards and anti-trafficking activists which characterises border surveillance in



much of the global South. By doing so, we seek to pull out the “larger ethical and political questions” (Megoran, 2012a: 475) associated with border controls and emphasise the everyday biography of borders, how they “are both produced by and produce social life” providing “a powerful geographical lens through which to make visible a range of social processes that might otherwise be overlooked” (Megoran 2012b: 468). In particular, we draw attention to sites where, as a result of open border agreements, unnumbered daily crossings are a way of life. These constitute what Sarah Smith would define as the many ‘leaky borders’ in South Asia. She argues that “[s]ecure borders are tied to the defended nation-state, and leaky borders to risk, in ways that underwrite the process of militarization, securitization, and racialization at the border” (2013:4). Below we explore these issues in relation to Birgunj, one specific open border crossing between India and Nepal.

Birgunj is located in the central south of Nepal on the border almost directly below Kathmandu, a distance of 283 km. There are daily flights of about an hour while the overland journey takes five–six hours by car or ten by bus. The beginning of the border zone is marked by an archway on the Nepali side.

Soon after, before the bridge marking the space between the two border control sites, there is a wide gate across the road that lifts and remains open. A border guard is located on a viewing platform immediately above. A second guard is stationed just before the gate itself, in front of the immigration office. The gate crossing is very busy, mainly filled with bicycles, and rickshaws. Cars are fewer and a number of people also crossover on foot. Vehicles transporting large amounts of goods file the requisite paper work at an office further up the street. Mid-way across the bridge stands an Indian soldier, pre-empting the crossing point on the other side. Because the river marks the line of the border for several miles, when waters levels are low and/or it is dark at night there are informal crossing sites out of view of the tower.

In the context of this paper, what is striking about this border is the location of an NGO anti-trafficking kiosk directly opposite the border guard, in front of the immigration office on the Nepali side. As Fig. 1 indicates this belongs to Maiti Nepal, one of the leading anti-trafficking organisation in the country. Maiti Nepal is a highly networked organisation with a wide ranging portfolio of projects encompassing hostels and skills training as well as border activism. The kiosk at the Burgunj border works in close association with the Maiti Nepal hostel in the nearby town. Maiti Nepal attracts significant funding from international donors and private sector sources and has developed a close working relationship with the government over a long period. It has a high profile internationally in anti-trafficking circuits (its founding director was nominated as a cabinet minister to look after the Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare portfolio in 2005 by the then King and awarded a CNN hero award in 2010). Its trafficking prevention programmes at border sites such as the one in Birgunj figure highly in the data returned for the annual TIP report.

When we visited the border in November 2011 the kiosk was occupied by a young woman activist, herself having returned from a trafficking situation in India some time before and subsequently employed as a border activist by Maiti Nepal. Interviews with other women who have returned from trafficking situations indicate that many aspire to work in trafficking prevention in this way. Tara explains:

*“I am interested to work staying at border areas. I myself experienced the human trafficking. I know how it takes place and how the traffickers take you across the border ... I'm interested in this type of work because it is what I had gone through and I wish for others not to face the same fate.” (Tara).*

Sita who expresses a similar desire, provides more detail about her personal motivations.

*“I have experiences and I'm ready to do that job. If I get the work right now I don't allow anyone to go cross the border and do a 24 hours duty there. I wish other women wouldn't have to receive and tolerate the same pain and tortures both mentally and physically like I have gone through. ...at that time [when she was trafficked over the border] we were made bewildered [drugged]. But I know [how] it [works]. In the checking points in border they ask for each and every evidence and proof. From that questioning also we could know who is being taken for trafficking purpose. Therefore, I believe I could do that work well.” (Sita).*

Like Tara, Sita believes that her own experience is the main skill she would need. *“Working in the border doesn't need any skills in particular, checking takes place there and the person deployed there has to stay in places where checking takes place, for example, Maiti Nepal has deployed its staff there”.*

Saraswoti, another interviewee, suggests that this desire in part emerges from the failure of state institutions, particularly the police, to deliver on a prevention agenda *“[the] government does not help us in taking legal action against traffickers, [the] police are corrupt they allow traffickers to walk around without any fear”.* This political situation, together with women's belief in their own abilities to do a better job at the border because of their personal trafficking experiences, are powerful motivators for involvement in anti-trafficking activism. However it is important not to oversimplify the journey women have taken to get to this point. When Sita first arrived back in Nepal from India, like many women, she had to struggle to hide her trafficking past. In her case she successfully explained her long absence from her village by claiming she had joined the Maoists. Not all women can tell such bold or convincing stories. The decision to work on the front line of anti-trafficking advocacy is a brave one. It risks further personal exposure as well as posing a threat to traffickers which could have dangerous consequences.

Focussing on the lived experience and potential advocacy of such women reveals the almost perverse everyday biography of this border as both open and closed. Mandated to be socially, politically and economically open whilst also being ‘closed’ in key respects, state rhetoric discursively performs the border as closed to trafficking, when in reality, on the ground, it is very ‘leaky’. In the following section we suggest that seeing the ‘anti-trafficking border’ as, ‘perversely co-produced’ helps bring to the fore the everyday negotiations between actors positioned differently within hierarchies of power in particular sites which help explain how the Nepal–India border can be performed as both open and closed. We draw on Lamb's (2014) definition of co-production to help frame our analysis: “instead of knowledge-making as a simple documentation [of] the border, knowledge produced at and about the border's social and physical landscape ... is itself an act of co-production”. We look at co-production in fine grained detail and argue that the performance of the co-produced anti-trafficking border by activists and border agents creates an ambiguous set of controls for women leaving Nepal.

#### *Perverse co-production*

While most trafficking prevention policies (both at border sites and areas designated as being at risk from trafficking) concentrate on the criminalisation of trafficking, Hyndman (2012) reminds us that at certain moments policies aimed at stopping vulnerable migrant groups from immigrating have also led to a range of measures to curb the emigration/outward movement of such



Fig. 1. NGO anti-trafficking kiosk at the Birgunj border. Photography by Diane Richardson, November 2011.

people. These policies have focussed in time and place on the points at which potential migration journeys are likely to start. Here the focus on preventing 'the coming in' is linked to efforts targeted at stopping 'the going out'. The co-produced trafficking border also expresses some elements of the links between those who seek to come in (come back) and those who wish to leave, as we now turn to explain.

In her cabin the Maiti Nepal activist had a series of pamphlets explaining the common ways in which traffickers trick women into being smuggled over the border. When we asked both her and the border guard what specific actions were taken in order to prevent trafficking at this site the answers were vague. Both mentioned that they attempted to 'spot' and 'engage in conversation' with groups, and young 'couples' who they considered to be suspicious. While

the border guard had the authority to stop and search people the Maiti Nepal activist was only able to relay her suspicions to the authorities (Fig. 2).

The volume of trafficking and the speed at which rickshaws, in particular, sped past the gate while we were standing there raised serious doubts in our minds about the effectiveness of such measures. When we explored this further with the border guard, asking what criteria he used to 'spot' potential traffickers and their victims and whether he had received any training in this, he replied that he had only moved to this post from the goods processing office down the road, a few days previously. He stated that he would very much like to receive some formal training. When pushed further on the criteria looked for, he said that he tried to spot people who 'looked out of place' and who had physical features or an accent that



Fig. 2. Border guard 'spotting' those coming in and going out of Nepal. Photography by Diane Richardson, November 2011.

suggested that they were not from around there; for example people from the hills. Therefore, with no formal training he was reliant on drawing on commonly held stereotypes that stigmatise particular regions, to inform his decisions. For example, people from areas such as Sindhupalchowk (in the middle hill region) traditionally seen as having high levels of trafficking stand out as different among the border people as they are predominately from the Tamang ethnic group. Findings like these reflect wider work on the role of stereotyping in influencing the work of low–middle ranking border gatekeepers (Mountz, 2010).

To again quote Smith (2013), the “risk” associated with such forms of “racialisation” at the border is illustrated by a story told separately by both the border guard and Maiti Nepal activist about two young people who had been detained a few days previously. The young man and woman were travelling in a rickshaw together over the border and when intercepted claimed to have run away from their families so they could be together as a couple. Doubts were raised over the veracity of their story because of their lack of papers and, as a result, the young man was held in custody while the young woman was housed in the Maiti Nepal hostel nearby and attempts were made to contact their families. However, what if their story were to be true? What if they were fleeing violent family opposition? By identifying them as potential trafficker and ‘victim’ both these young people were being placed at ‘risk’. For the young woman in particular, the situation could potentially be grave if she were to be seen as polluted and bringing shame on her family. Under such conditions the young woman would likely be stigmatised and shunned much in the same way as a woman returning from a trafficking situation. In this sense the outcome of the ambiguous set of controls generated by the co-production of the anti-trafficking border by NGOs and state border agents would be perverse and have long-lasting effect.

There is very little research on the ways in which prevention strategies may directly and indirectly create ‘trafficking victims’. Therefore the drive to count examples of where prevention strategies and technologies are successful (as exemplified in TIP) tells only part of the story. In the next section we push this point further and examine the way in which anti-trafficking in some places is also producing a new geography of trafficking elsewhere.

#### *A new geography of trafficking: border activism and new routes*

Rural sites play a significant role in trafficking either as an exit/transit point to India or an entry/transit point to Nepal. These sites become the focus of anti-trafficking activism, both in terms of prevention measures and also in providing some services for those returning from trafficking situations. While such activism is meeting with much success, as documented by TIP, it is also encouraging traffickers to change their tactics, as one of the Executive Committee members of Shakti Samuha explains:

*“Now sisters from all around the country are being trafficked. Earlier particular areas, districts and certain Village Development Committees (VDCs) within that districts such as Nuwakot, Sindhupalchok etc were affected from trafficking issues. But now it’s no longer [only] there, all the areas, districts and VDCs are equally affected. Another dimension is earlier the traffickers used to target sisters living miserable life, more like innocent and naïve sisters but now they target women of all class and background, for example women who are looking for employment opportunities, women who are opting for abroad study [and] women living miserable lives etc.”*

Such insights gained from a post-trafficking perspective indicate how migration often leads into experiences of trafficking; a point

which we elaborate upon further, elsewhere, in relation to return migration debates (Laurie et al., 2015b, forthcoming).

Samarasinghe (2008) argues that border monitoring at the most frequently used crossing points is forcing traffickers to change their routes and use more difficult ones, despite the increased transport challenges these involve. As in the case of people smugglers (see Mountz, 2010), traffickers are able to innovate and respond more quickly than the state to change. Marshall and Thatun (2005) describe this as a ‘push down pop up’ effect as trafficking prevention displaces trafficking activity rather than resolving exploitative practices. At the Shakti Samuha Annual Conference of Trafficked Survivors in 2009, presentations from members from rural districts reported that traffickers were moving women from the south east and central south to traffic them through the far mid and far west region into India (personal communication, research team meeting with Shakti Samuha, February 2010). They argued that the success of NGO awareness training in the south east and central south area and around that border region was forcing a shift in trafficking flows. As a result, Shakti subsequently expanded its activities in mid west and far west Nepal. The push down pop up thesis suggests that such changes in anti-trafficking activity usually have further knock-on effects. In what follows, we focus on a recent shift in the trafficking frontier in the north along the border with China. We argue that a post-trafficking approach, which engages with the expertise and advocacy of women who have themselves experienced trafficking, facilitates a nuanced reading of the complex inter-relationship between internal and external trafficking in the shifting terrain of migration, trafficking and anti-trafficking activism in Nepal.

Responding to questions about a recent fact finding visit by the President of Shakti Samuha to the Tatopani border area of Sindhupalchok district with China’s Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR), the Special Rapporteur commented that she added this into the 2012 TIP report as one of the emerging trafficking sites.

*“It is a new trend, I have heard about it ... So I am listing how trafficking has been changing now because people go to China [and] Tibet. It is a new trend. I have heard [about] it but I don’t know whether or not it is true. So research has to be there and for this we need projects.”* (Interview with Padhma Mathema, Special Rapporteur, TIP, Office of the National Rapporteur on Trafficking in Women and Children, National Human Rights Commission on 2 November 2011)

Focussing on this northern border Sara Shneiderman (2013) makes an important contribution to regional border debates by highlighting how, unlike much of the rest of South Asia, the non-postcolonial context in Nepal has allowed the emergence of alternative categories of citizenship that allow for a dual sense of belonging for those living in the border area and an everyday mobility in economic, political and religious terms. By contrast, here we draw attention to the abuse of this category of dual residency and sense of belonging by specific interested parties like traffickers, forced to switch location and modus operandi in the light of increased surveillance and activism at borders to the south. Following these changes, the northern border is witnessing the emergence of significantly different patterns of trafficking. While these involve crossing the northern international border, they display unique characteristics that link internal and international trafficking processes producing a specific geography of trafficking in this region. Trafficking at this border involves the short-term cyclical movement of internally trafficked women deployed in dance bars in Kathmandu. As explained by a Shakti Samuha Executive Committee member. *“There are cases where women who encountered internal trafficking were also taken to border areas in*



China.” Following her fact finding mission to Tatopani in Sindhupalchok and Khasa in TTAR, the Shakti Samuha President recounted how, previously confined largely to dance bars in the Thamel area of Kathmandu, increasingly women are being taken over the northern border to bars in Chinese Tibet. Here they work in dance bars operated by their Nepali bosses from Kathmandu and stay legally for up to three months on a business pass (not available to ordinary citizens and only for use for business purposes) before being moved back across the border to work again in Kathmandu for a period of time. In this example we see how successful anti-trafficking activism at some borders (to the South) has pushed traffickers to look for new routes, generating hybrid forms of internal/international trafficking at the Northern border which in turn produce a sporadic and temporary stretching of this border in Chinese Tibet.

By focussing on the everyday “biography of the border” (Megoran, 2012a, 2012b) this section has illuminated how post-trafficking bordering practices operate differently at different sites in Nepal. Our analysis has revealed the ways in which social processes and economic circuits and flows of capital touch down in different ways in these sites, helping to configure how the border is experienced by those crossing and/or producing it. We have shown how the border is crossed by women in both directions - going to and returning from trafficking situations and have examined the configuration of the ‘anti-trafficking border’, highlighting a range of bordering practices that construct the identity (of) ‘trafficked women’ in stigmatising ways.

Below we return to the place of the border itself and explore how boundaries “materialise, rematerialise and dematerialise in different ways, in different contexts at different scale and at different times” (Megoran, 2012b: 477). We are specifically interested in how the border is marked by and for women returning from trafficking situations.

### Marking and stretching the border

In her work on the co-production of borders Vanessa Lamb (2014:3) identifies a growing trend for border research to focus on how people living on or near a border are able to use the border to position themselves as individuals and/or groups vis-à-vis others economically and politically. Highlighting the importance of gendered discourses and performance at borders, Kathryn Cassidy’s (2012) ethnographic account of trading communities along the Ukrainian–Romanian border illustrates such an approach well. She shows how Ukrainian women are unable to advance trade to the same degree as their male counterparts, due to the hegemonic masculinities in both settings, nevertheless restricted sexualised discourses about women in Romanian are used to advantage by Ukrainian traders in general. She details how trading interactions are sexualised through innuendo and ‘male talk’ usually instigated and mediated by Ukrainian men and targeted at their female trading partners. As a result, women receive more favourable treatment from border guards and customs officials with regard to the illicit goods they are able to transport. In this way the biography of the border is co-produced, however it is important to note that women’s agency is limited, circumscribed by dominant sexualised norms. Women’s agency is similarly circumscribed in the context of the “grounds for claims making” (Rumforth, 2011:67) around the post-trafficking border. In this setting, the limited agency women sometimes mobilise can cut across post-trafficking solidarities expressed in the sorts of anti-trafficking advocacy discussed above. This is seen most clearly in cases where women returning from diverse trafficking situations mark and use the border to say “I am not trafficked because I was not there long enough” or “I’m not ‘as trafficked’ because I ‘escaped/was rescued’ before I crossed”. In this

way the open border becomes a closed definite line that is useful to women to mark in attempts to be seen as ‘in’ rather than ‘out’ of place’ upon return. Kamali who was trafficked to Saudi Arabia as a domestic worker reflects upon the importance of the length of stay away in creating a believable narrative about not having crossed the border.

*“Sometimes I think I wouldn’t have experienced this kind of rejection and stigma if I had returned within a month. In that situation, I might be assumed to have returned without reaching abroad. It could be easier, I think”.*

Whereas Uma makes a case about the need to be open about personal trafficking experiences in order to prevent others from experiencing the same fate.

*“I don’t think it is necessary to hide. Say, If I had hidden it ... (the trafficker wouldn’t have been caught) We should raise voice against in order to stop other sisters for being trafficked in the coming days”.*

Despite her own position on these issues Uma described how some women use the border to hide their past.

*“They hide it in different ways. They might say I didn’t go for the purpose of this work [sexual exploitation] ... or some might say I was taken into a trafficking situation but I didn’t reach the place; I was almost to reach there but I returned ... I was not trafficked”.*

This invocation of the border constructs a differentiated version of the binary of ‘acceptable and unacceptable’ femininities. Whether or not in reality they crossed the border for any length of time, for some women trying to materialise the border in this way is one of a limited set of options available to establish themselves as ‘honourable’ (sexually pure) upon return.

These bordering practices re-scale the border in relational ways, affecting both women’s pre-conceived fears as well as the role of the police and NGOs (both foreign and Nepali) in the ‘rescue’ process. Many women interviewed, including the founding members of Shakti Samuha who were initially ‘rescued’ through a large-scale raid on brothels by Indian police in 1996, experienced forced detention in prison-like conditions. Many were held for up to six months in barred rooms in India before they were taken back to Nepal by NGOs because the Nepali government refused to accept them initially. Milan was among a group of women deemed to be too young to be allowed into the country.

*“First they brought the bigger groups comprising older women. They brought the groups consisting younger ones like us. They had a decision to bring those who were under 20 in age. NGOs were transporting trafficked women to Kathmandu turn by turn. We were not allowed to come back as we didn’t meet the age requirements. I then was sent to a child rehabilitation centre. I stayed there for two years. I together with other children used to go to school during that time. This NGO after two years went to pick us up and brought us back in Nepal.”*

Such examples point to the arbitrary way in which the border is stretched, in this case curtailing mobility and policing what constitutes childhood.

In these settings the notion of a protector state is often called into question. A number of our interviews with women who had returned from trafficking situations suggested that rapes by police officers are commonplace and occur with impunity as women return and/or when after they try to take their traffickers to court. Sita



who was trafficked through India to the Middle East describes how once a woman is in the ‘rescue process’ it is almost impossible for her to assert any influence over the process or the police.

*“Police doesn’t let you free once they catch you ... We were to be handed over to the representatives of X [named a leading Nepali anti-trafficking organisation] by police. They [representatives from X] had even reached to India to bring us via plane. I had also heard X also takes pictures and spread the news, thus destroying our ijat [honour]. So I said I wouldn’t go to X instead I asked the police to drop somewhere at a border in Nepal. But the police don’t work this way.”*

In this example we can see that the so called ‘open border’ through which a woman was originally trafficked re-materialises as something closed, she is no longer able to travel back across it freely. It is also re-scaled in contrasting ways for NGOs and the women themselves. On the one hand, the NGO can reach out beyond the confines of the national border to bring a woman ‘home’. On the other hand, while in the rescue process, the physical boundary that women returning from trafficking situations experience is scaled to the most local of levels, the space in which she is confined by the Indian police prior to return; and her personal home community where NGO publicity will most likely affect how honour is constructed, even while she is still far away. These local geographies are therefore experienced as intimately relational and connected for these women.

The story told by Nita below indicates that foreign NGOs can also move in similar ways to their Nepali counterparts with freedom to travel over the open border. As a result, the Indian border is re-scaled to have much greater reach and NGO staff can travel far into Nepali sovereign territory. In this sense the rescue industry produces a dematerialised border where foreign NGOs are able to exert considerable control over the movement of women returning from trafficking situations, re-scaling the geography of ‘home’.

*“When I encountered the problem there [India] I through the support of different NGOs was directly brought home by a bus. This is how all the people in public knew that I had encountered problem (trafficking). It had bad impact upon my parents. It definitely perturbed me a lot. ... I had requested them a lot to drop in the middle. They [Indians] spoke Hindi, however I could also speak bit of Hindi ... [but I couldn’t convince them]”*

While a long way from the physical border, Nita continued to experience its restrictions, underscoring the negative reach of the post-trafficking border for those returning. The NGO drove her to her home village in an Indian bus with Indian number plates, despite the fact that she had asked to be dropped at a distance so she could make her own way home. By working across the border in this way we would argue that NGOs contribute to the social rejection of the women they say they are trying to ‘rescue’. In the context of a post-trafficking border, that affords them so little protection, it is clear why so many women in interviews said they did not trust the rescue industry (see also Agustín, 2007).

In this section we have shown how the state is not the only bordering agent in post-trafficking scenarios. We have shown how post-trafficking bordering practices are marked and stretched by NGO and state actors (both foreign and national) as they ‘reach far into’ different sovereign territories in order to control the movement of women returning from diverse trafficking situations who have very limited agency in these settings and for whom the border becomes scaled at a very local, confining level.

## Conclusions

In this paper we have drawn attention to the lack of research on trafficking in Geography as a discipline and have shown how a focus on post-trafficking in particular, can contribute to current research on borders. We have sought to build on and further research on bordering practices and the everyday biography of the border by pointing to the hidden social processes that make up post-trafficking. In so doing we have revealed an otherwise invisible set of bordering practices and have examined how and where these are performed and by whom. Our analysis has shown how, on the one hand, post-trafficking bordering limits the mobility of women (those leaving trafficking situations as well as those suspected of being at risk from trafficking), while on the other, granting anti-trafficking activists freedom of movement across national borders. In this way we have identified how post-trafficking bordering practices help co-produce an ‘anti-trafficking border’ and call for further research on post-trafficking border practices and the production, performance and scaling of ‘anti-trafficking borders’ elsewhere. Extending this agenda beyond trafficking, future research could identify other sites of ‘perverse co-production’, this includes exploring borders where the agency of different vulnerable groups are structurally ‘scaled out’ of the picture and confined (literally) to a variety of linked local spaces. In responding to calls for engaging with the bigger ethical and political questions of border research (Megoran, 2012b) we would seek to set this agenda alongside the need for careful and engaged research on co-production which aims to reveal how advocacy activities challenge this type of border scaling in ways that neither reproduce discourses of the ‘victim’ nor over celebrate success in the face of overwhelmingly challenging circumstances.

In the context of trafficking research we recognise that this is not an easy task. On the one hand, bordering generates claims around an identity as a post-trafficking activist that argue for a greater presence in prevention at border sites (women returning from trafficking situations know the border and what happens at it and so can be more effective in preventing trafficking affecting others). On the other hand, the border is also invoked to establish hierarchies of trafficking and respectability. Claims that “I was not as trafficked as I did not cross the border” are not a strong basis for collective anti-trafficking activism. However research frameworks in border studies need to understand and theorise such scenarios in the context of shared cultural values where honour and stigma dominate gender and sexual discourses about women.

Our focus on post-trafficking has purposely given priority to a view from the global south where ‘hi-tech surveillance’ and ‘off-shore’ locations are not the norm in border terms but where, nevertheless, bordering practices provide important grounds for claims making. In so doing, it challenges political geography to re-focus border studies onto the ‘majority world’. While emerging work in political geography is beginning to look at the ways in which high tech surveillance in the ‘North’ relies on often quite unsophisticated forms of behavioural analysis and observation, a majority world-led agenda emphasizes contexts where the sorts of ‘low tech’ technologies of bordering discussed above (hand-operated gates that cross busy dirt roads, non-specialist border guards who rotate through diverse jobs), dominate. Given the rapid yet uneven diffusion of surveillance technologies globally, this agenda allows for greater attention to be given to the diverse ways in which low tech and high tech forms of surveillance come together and configure border sites in different parts of the world. Exploring the technological disjunctures and slippages, as well as, the priorities for financial and human investment at these interfaces would reveal much about why certain border crossings generate interest, why, at which moments, from whom and with what outcomes for

the controls placed on different individuals and collectives. Placing shifting global political concerns around securitisation alongside what are often seen as the more mundane issues associated with social lives in this way would help re-balance how we as researchers see borders. It would allow for a more global overview of what makes up the multiple experiences of bordering everywhere, not just in sites of special interest to the global military complexes or certain wealthy states, and shed light on how such processes are intimately bound up in the re-scaling of borders in ways that make them more or less open or closed for different groups of (in this case gendered) people.

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