‘It is a dangerous journey’: A Tibetan experience of borders, border control & irregular migration

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Abstract

There is a growing body of research coming from criminology in particular, that points to the border as an indisputable organising feature of modern society. This scholarship has highlighted that the way in which the border is constructed and enforced across many nations and regions, often has detrimental implications for irregular migrants. Drawing on the experience of irregular Tibetan migrants living in exile in India, this thesis interrogates the nature of borders and border enforcement in their irregular border crossing experiences. The thesis is grounded in an emerging criminological literature that is committed to revealing the way that borders impact the constantly changing forms of, and trends in human mobility. Specifically, it draws on the notions of the sovereign performance, and technologies of control to investigate and explore the contours of the border and border regulation when it is attached to a non-democratic government regime in the context of an ongoing occupation. Given that the majority of research regarding Tibetans is focused on either their lives and experiences in exiled communities around the world, or on the situation inside Tibet, this study offers an account of the journey between these two contexts via its focus on the border crossing between Tibet and Nepal. Empirically, this study builds on our understanding of a highly complex migration corridor that has witnessed an ongoing exodus since the 1950s. It sheds light on the nature of the border and border control in this very specific geopolitical and historical context. Theoretically, this insight into the Tibet-Nepal border, and the enforcement mechanisms around it contributes to a much broader body of work on borders by offering a platform to examine the application of the sovereign performance and technologies of control, that to date have drawn on the borders of democratic, pluralistic government regimes. Finally, based on my commitment to learn from the barriers and challenges faced in this research, this study also contributes to the body of methodological literature focused on
research with political and politicised groups. It highlights the importance of capturing the lived experience, and what can be revealed by recognising and documenting the experiences that are left unsaid.
List of acronyms

PRC  Peoples Republic of China
PLA  Peoples Liberation Army
TAR  Tibetan Autonomous Region
UNHCR United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

Definitional notes

Ani  Tibetan word for ‘nun’
Tibet  Refers to the pre-occupied provinces of Amdo, Kham and U-Tsang
Irregular migrant  A person that crosses a border outside legal pathways

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Chapter 1: Tibet – a new geopolitical context to examine borders and the performance of sovereignty

This study is focused on the experiences of irregular Tibetan migrants who have crossed the border from Tibet to Nepal. It brings to the fore specific aspects of the border performance and the challenges facing those seeking to depart from Tibet outside the available legal avenues. Through this, it offers a distinct contribution to the existing study of border crossings and border enforcement; a body of work that predominantly focuses on the efforts of nations in the Global North keeping unwanted migrants out, as opposed to this context, where the Chinese state is focused on ensuring Tibetans remain within the border.

The Tibet-Nepal border has remained in the peripheries of the criminological research and scholarship on border control and enforcement, despite the ongoing irregular migration of Tibetans since the 1950s (Tibet Justice Centre 2016; Van Schaik 2012; Shakabpa 2010, Smith 2009). While empirical research on border enforcement has consistently demonstrated the ways in which migration and border regulation impacts migrant populations differentially, to date there has been little interrogation of the Nepalese border; a border enforced by both Nepal and China. Nepal is one of the poorest nations in world, and while technically democratic, has experienced much political upheaval over centuries, and is currently experiencing a period of instability following the introduction of a new constitution. (Asia Foundation 2012; Human Rights Watch 2017) In addition, there are ongoing recovery efforts following the 2015 earthquake which left an estimated 9,000 people dead, almost 20,000 injured (Human Rights Watch 2017), and crippled the economy (Shakya 2016). China on the other hand is an economic super power, and while arguably an authoritarian State, (Youwei 2015; Herscovitch 2014), it operates as a “socialist state under democratic leadership” (China Legal Information Centre 2015). Given that the research on irregular border crossings and
border enforcement is predominantly drawn from pluralistic democratic states (see Light 2012), this study of the Tibet-Nepal border and the experiences of those crossing this border irregularly, offers insights into the way that borders are created and enforced in a complex geopolitical context, and the implications that this has on a highly political and politicised migrant population.

This thesis explores the contours of borders as a key feature of a performance of sovereignty, how this manifests in a specific geopolitical setting, and the impact this has on irregular migrants. The growing body of work coming from border criminologists in particular, points to the fact that borders are an indisputable organising feature of contemporary society, and the way in which they are constructed (Bosworth 2008; Banerjee and Chaudry 2008), enforced (Weber 2008) and performed (Villegas 2015; Wonders 2006), can have implications for unauthorised or irregular migrants in particular (Gerard and Pickering 2013; Ham, Segrave and Pickering 2013; Weber and Pickering 2011; Bosworth 2008; Weber and Wilson 2008; Weber 2007; Pickering and Weber 2006). Therefore, this research offers a contribution to and builds on this emerging, interdisciplinary study of borders and their regulation, which interrogates the notions of sovereignty, borders and migration and the implications that they can have, via an examination of the lived experience of those that cross borders.

The conceptual and theoretical underpinnings of the research are grounded in the literature which argues that borders are not simply geographical lines that delineate one nation-state’s territory from another. Rather, borders are an increasingly potent feature of the sovereign performance, particularly within the context of globalisation. In this context, the nation-state has lost significant powers on the one hand, but on the other has sought to shore up sovereign
power via the control of human migration and the delineation of who can and cannot cross and the conditions of entry. Further, border enforcement via regulatory practices within the nation, at the border and external to the nation, forms part of the border performance described by Wonders (2006, p. 64) as one that involves various state actors in an ‘elaborate dance’ with citizens and non-citizens both inside and outside the state’s territorial borders.

Bosworth (2008), Weber (2007) and Weber and Pickering (2006) – among many others – have examined the features of the border and the associated regulations that shape border experiences. Their work on technologies of control explores and interrogates the distinct ways in which borders are enforced in the name of sovereignty. This body of work examines the infrastructure that supports the territorial border delineation, such as the establishment of passports, airport and border surveillance technologies and increased powers of border officials to determine who can and cannot enter a territory (Bosworth 2008; Wilson and Weber 2008; Weber 2007). It also examines the legal and policy context that supports or justifies increasingly militarised and securitised borders (Andersson 2016), which in turn identifies and sorts the socially and economically beneficial migrants from those that are deemed a threat to and/or undesirable for the nation; most often those who are not seen as offering a potential contribution as a result of being low- or unskilled and having little fiscal or knowledge wealth to contribute (Wonders 2006). Much of the empirical research on borders and border control concludes that in the face of these shifting patterns of human mobility and globalisation, borders are heavily fortified, militarised and securitised and a point at which the desired and undesired of the world’s population are delineated (see Bauman 1998; 2000). This draws attention to the impact that contemporary border constructs have on the (in)ability of some migrants to cross them via regularised border crossings.
As noted above, the growing body of research on borders tend to be premised on research conducted in the border zones of democratic, pluralistic governments in the Global North (Light 2012). This is in part, the result of efforts that sought to understand and respond to the expansion of labour migration flows that originated from nations in the Global South. This is not to say that there is no border scholarship coming from the Global South, rather that there is a tendency to apply or import theory from the centre (the Global North) to the periphery (the Global South) (Carrington, Hogg and Sozzo 2016). While the argument regarding theory transfer by Carrington, Hogg and Sozzo (2016) is important, the rapid economic growth and democratisation of nations that fall into the Global South category (namely Latin America, Africa, Asia and Oceania) blurs the economic and social differences that formerly divided the Global North and South. Premised on the argument that borders are a performance of the state, and there is a declining relevance of the North-South divide, the nature of individual States must therefore be considered. Drawing on research that explores migration regulation and control in non-democratic nations (namely China and the Former Soviet Union), a more useful distinction in this study are the borders attached to states with different regime types – such as authoritarian or occupied states. This distinction informs one of the key research questions; how are borders created and enforced in different geopolitical settings? This is answered through the focus on a context largely absent from interrogation in this sphere: the Tibet/Nepal border.

Based on interviews with twelve irregular Tibetan migrants living in India, this research interrogates the nature of borders and border control in a unique and highly politicised geopolitical location through accounts of crossing the border from Tibet to Nepal without
authority and outside of the regulated border crossing check points. Their border crossing is defined here as irregular, as they left Tibet without the permission of the Chinese authorities and thus outside the parameters of what is considered legal migration. For the purposes of this study, the participants are referred to as ‘irregular’, as opposed to refugees. I adopt the terminology used by Gerard and Pickering (2012), which defines an irregular migrant as ‘[a person] crossing borders outside the legal pathways’ (2012, p. 339). By adopting a definition that has a wider scope than that of refugee, this study moves away from presumptions about the right to, or experiences of, formalised protection as it is rightfully owed under the UN Refugee Convention and related protocol, thereby acknowledging the perspectives of those who left Tibet without authorisation but did not report facing persecution.

The Tibetan border context is examined for three main reasons, not least because to date there has been relatively little empirical research on this border crossing. The first reason is that while Tibetans – as a large and well-organised diasporic population – have long been of interest to anthropologists, sociologists and historians alike (McGranahan 2010; Barnett 2010; Smith 2009), they have remained in the peripheries of research on borders and migration. This is despite the ongoing Chinese occupation and constant flow of Tibetans to exiled communities around the world. For criminology, and the criminology of borders, this border crossing has essentially been neglected and is not a focus of the growing scholarship focused on the criminalising features of borders, migration and related challenges such as people smuggling and human trafficking (Banerjee 2011; Pickering and Weber 2011; Bosworth 2008; Franko-Aas 2007).
The second reason for examining the Tibet-Nepal border is the importance of considering the existing examinations regarding the border performance and their relevance and applicability in relation to the specific historical and geopolitical context of Tibet. The history of Tibet is important because the events that unfolded during the initial occupation in 1949 (as detailed in Chapter Two) resulted in what is now one of the most protracted refugee movements in the world. Since the 1950s, and particularly since the flight of the Dalai Lama in 1959 (who at the time was still the political and spiritual leader of Tibet), Tibetans have been fleeing the country in response to the Chinese occupation and associated human rights abuses enacted by the Chinese. These violations include cultural, religious and political oppression, forced internal displacement, arbitrary detention and torture in prison, limited (and discriminatory) access to education and employment opportunities, and intense surveillance practices (See Tibet Justice Centre 2016; Human Rights Watch 2016a, 2016b, 2013a, 2013b; International Campaign for Tibet 2011). In addition to the substantial evidence detailing the situation inside Tibet, there is also a strong body of literature examining the post-migration outcomes for Tibetans, including mental health (Sachs et al. 2008), education and employment outcomes (Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights 2015; Hasmath and Hsu 2007), activism (Dorjee 2015) and the cultural preservation efforts in diaspora communities (Basu 2009). What is less known is what happens during the border crossing from Tibet to Nepal and then to India, and what factors shape that experience – which is the focus of this study.

Research on irregular border crossings suggests that the physical border crossing can have detrimental consequences for migrants (see Gerard and Pickering 2013; Weber and Pickering 2011). This resonates with what is known about Tibetan border crossings. Available research suggests that those seeking to leave Tibet and enter Nepal and then travel onto India are faced
with physical and emotional hardships, harassment, extortion and physical and sexual abuse from both Chinese and Nepali authorities during the border crossing into Nepal (Domla, Singh, Lohfeld, Orbinski and Mills, 2006; Moynihan 1996, 1998; International Campaign for Tibet 2011, 2008). The documented experiences of Tibetans seeking to flee Tibet resonate with some of what is known about other irregular migrant populations (see for example, Gerard and Pickering 2013; Pickering and Cochrane 2013; Khosravi 2007; Jandl 2007). What distinguishes this border crossing from other major migration corridors is that the country of origin of participants – Tibet – is occupied by an arguably authoritarian, socialist state.

Grounded in the contemporary conceptualisation of the border as a feature of the State’s performance of sovereignty, and the unique geopolitical context of Tibet, this study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the border crossing experience of irregular Tibetan migrants fleeing Tibet to Nepal, and India?
2. How is the border performed in the geopolitical setting of Tibet, in relation to the unauthorized crossing of Tibetans to Nepal?
3. How does the way the border is performed shape the individual border crossing experience?
   a. What are the distinct features of the performance that shape that experience?

By examining the border crossing experience of irregular Tibetan migrants, what emerges is a story of the border performance from below, which in turn reveals the way the border is controlled and enforced from above or by the State. The lived experience of the distinct geopolitical and cultural setting of this study revealed a series of complex themes regarding the way the borders are created and enforced when the focus of border control efforts is
different to the majority of borders that form the empirical basis from which our current theoretical understanding is derived; such as Spain (Wonders 2017), the United Kingdom (Bosworth 2008) or Australia (Weber and Wilson 2008; Weber 2007). What this research has found is essentially a reverse story of those unauthorised migrants seeking to enter a country that does not want them to enter; the stories from Tibetans who crossed the border without permission and via irregular routes, brings into focus a border regime that sought to keep them in, as opposed to keeping the undesirable ‘other’, out. The consequences associated with crossing borders – a finding of this research, but also drawn from research on other non-democratic borders – draws attention to the meaning of the border crossing. If the border is in fact a performance of sovereignty, then the crossing of such a border undermines or disrupts that performance. By exploring the lived experience of highly politicised and political migrants, this thesis also highlights an opportunity to reflect on the border crossing as a form of resistance against the State (Spener 2009) and the legitimacy of the assertion of sovereignty.

1.1 Thesis overview

There are nine chapters in total that expand on the points raised above. As this first chapter has shown, this study is grounded in, and contributes to the criminological scholarship focused on the border and irregular migration, in particular. Chapter Two contextualises the study by providing an overview of the historical and contemporary context of Tibet. The first section of the chapter outlines the nature of the Chinese occupation, which lead to the Dalai Lama fleeing to India in 1959 and the beginning of what has been an ongoing exodus of Tibetans into exiled communities around the world. This historical section of the chapter is important for two reasons; first as it forms the collective narrative of Tibetans and as will be explained in Chapter Four, arguably shaped the way that individuals shared their border
crossing story. The second reason is that the study draws on the historical context to inform the terminology employed, namely the term ‘occupation’ and ‘irregular migrant’ (as opposed to refugee). The second part of this chapter examines the contemporary policy context; a context that is largely characterised by policies that seek to prevent social unrest via restrictions on mobility. It highlights the way in which many of the policies contribute to systemic discrimination and inequality between the Han-Chinese and Tibetan population, which as the following chapters demonstrate form part of the reason that some participants chose to leave Tibet. The chapter concludes by highlighting a disjuncture between the meaning of a perceived decline in Tibetans leaving Tibet and the lived experience of border control in China, and points to the importance of interrogating the border and the border performance via the lived experience, in this case in relation to the irregular border crossing.

Chapter Three details the conceptual and theoretical foundations of this study. Drawing on the importance of the border highlighted in Chapter Two, the first part of this chapter examines the interdisciplinary literature on borders, including how and why borders are created. This section lays the foundation for this thesis, which has been established by the contemporary scholarship that recognises that borders are in a constantly being performed by the State as a feature of their sovereignty. The second part of the chapter interrogates the way in which borders are enforced and the implications that this can have for migrants that come into contact with not only the territorial borders, but also those constructed to specifically target the irregular and undesirable migrants inside the state. This section highlights that borders as a performance of sovereignty often create a space for violence and vulnerability which can lead to life-altering experiences and post-migration outcomes. In drawing together all the literature above, the final section details the theoretical framework for the thesis. The theoretical and conceptual foundations of this chapter is premised on the work around
‘technologies of control’ (McDowell and Wonders 2010; Weber 2007, 2013; Bosworth 2008; Wonders 2006; Dauvergne 2004). This final section outlines engages with two key control mechanisms that are used to enforce borders - immigration legislation and policy, and the organisational infrastructure and border enforcement (McDowell and Wonders 2010). These features of border control inform the way in which the lived border crossing experience is examined; by interrogating participant experiences with different technologies of control, this study offers a view ‘from below’ into the nature of the sovereign performance within Tibet and on the Tibet-Nepal border.

Chapter Four details the research design and methodological foundations of the study. The methodology draws on the scholarship of feminist researchers (Ackerly and True 2003) to inform both the fieldwork and incorporation of reflexivity and positionality. It also draws on the work of researchers that have conducted research with highly politicised populations to negotiate many of the contextual challenges presented by this study, such as the recognition of silence, and the collectivisation of personal narratives. The chapter details the fieldwork experience, including the practical and ethical challenges, and concludes with a discussion about the contribution of this research to the ongoing study of irregular and hard-to-reach migrant populations whose experiences of border crossings and border regulation offer important insights into the nature of the border performance and its impact on different populations.

Chapter Five, Six and Seven present the analysis and findings from this research. Chapter Five focuses on the participants; who they are, where they came from and their life in Tibet. This chapter begins to answer the first research question, in that it examines the participants’
experiences prior to leaving for the Tibet-Nepal border, as well as providing insight into the nature of borders, and the border performance in the early stages of the participants journey, which beings to address the second research question. Broadly, this chapter draws out some of the socio-political and contextual features that influence and shape the beginning of the participants border crossing journey. It begins with an analysis of how participants described their lives, and themselves, which ultimately informed the way that they were categorised for the analysis; participants were either political or non-political. This means that participants were either politically active and fled Tibet as a result, or were not explicitly or actively involved in political activities or activism and left for more personal reasons. This categorisation provided a framework to examine the similarities and differences between participants in terms of their lives in Tibet, the factors – personal and contextual – that informed their decision to leave, and the way in which they prepared for their journey to the border. Through this categorisation, this chapter examines how border control manifest inside Tibet and the implication this had for participants’ as they prepared to leave for the Nepal border. By examining participants’ experiences of control measures inside Tibet, this chapter suggests that while there were differences in the way that the political and non-political participants experienced the border, no participant was untouched by the regime. The final section of the chapter highlights the complexity of interpreting participant experiences in light of the historical, cultural and socio-political context.

Chapter Six moves our attention to the first stage of the irregular border crossing: preparing to leave and the journey to the border. In the analysis of this aspect of participant experiences, the Chapter examines how the border regime shaped the participants’ experiences in the period immediately before they crossed the border. It builds on the notion that the borders manifest in the participant narratives as different controls, which varied between the political
and non-political participants. To understand how these borders shaped participant preparation for leaving Tibet, the concept of a ‘site of control’ is adopted, which is an analytical construct that provided a way to map the personal experiences of participants as they navigated the different border structures they encountered before they made it to the territorial border between Tibet and Nepal. By mapping participants’ journeys to the border in this way, this chapter provides an insight into the way that borders manifest in this geopolitical setting – further contributing not only to the second and third research questions, but also building on the ways in which we can interrogate the border at different points via the lived experience. In addition, by examining borders as various constructs that essentially sought to contain participants’ in Tibet, I suggest that there is an evolution of the meaning behind their migration, which is arguably one of resistance and disruption. Thus, this chapter argues that the initial categorisation of political and non-political becomes less relevant once participants reached the territorial border zone, either near Shigatse or the actual border crossing into Nepal, as they were all equally subject to the same controls that sought to contain them regardless of why or how they were leaving Tibet.

Chapter Seven details participants’ border crossing journey: the processes involved in leaving for the border, and the different issues faced when they arrived at the territorial border crossing. The chapter follows the journey of participants across the border where the physicality and risks associated with the Himalayan mountain range are examined alongside the various political enforcement and control structures. A feature of this chapter is its contribution to the emerging body of work that problematizes contemporary stereotypes that shape human smugglers as inherently exploitative, and irregular migrants as inevitably vulnerable (see for example Sanchez 2014). It is at the stage that participants reach the territorial border that the initial analytical categories of political and non-political loses it
meaning. Regardless of the reasons, or the way in which participants’ left Tibet, once they crossed the territorial border without permission they were all politicised: if caught, they all faced similar consequences; repatriation to Tibet, detention and all the associated human rights abuses associated with imprisonment in Tibet. Based on the understanding that the regulation of the borders around Tibet is a performance of Chinese Sovereignty, then the unauthorised border crossing, this chapter argues, can be identified as a disruption to the assertion of authority and sovereignty.

The concluding chapter of the thesis – Chapter Eight – reviews the contributions that this thesis makes to the broader literature on borders, and border control. It is comprised of two key sections; the first section explores the empirical contributions, which lays the ground for the second section on the theoretical contributions. The empirical contributions of this thesis are primarily grounded in the way that we examine, interrogate and subsequently understand borders and the performance of sovereignty. It suggests that underpinning the challenges faced by participants in trying to cross the border is their relationship to the State (in this case, the Chinese government). It outlines how this relationship effectively shapes the nature of the border and subsequent border controls, and how individual identities and circumstances can interact with the border to create specific crossing experiences. Beyond this, it also provides insight not only into the way that borders are performed in a non-democratic regime, it also illustrates how the way that these borders are enforced can shape the irregular migration experience in different ways for different people. This section of the chapter also expands on how the participant experiences suggest a re-articulation of the way we view border crossings, particularly when the border is conceptualised as a performance of sovereignty. This provides the segue into the theoretical contributions, which explores the application of key components of both technologies of control and the sovereign performance
literature at the Tibet/Nepal border, and how these were examined via the lived experience of participants.
Chapter 2: History matters – Tibet, borders and criminology

This chapter provides an overview of contemporary Tibetan history, focusing primarily on the period from the 1949 when the Chinese forced first crossed the border into Tibet until today, as this context is critical to understanding the border crossing and border enforcement practices that are the core focus of this research. The chapter does not seek to provide a comprehensive account of the historical and political developments in this region, but offers a brief chronological account of the key historical events that led to His Holiness the Dalai Lama and thousands of other Tibetans eventually fleeing into exile in India. It then examines the situation inside Tibet today, focusing on the policies and practices that arguably shape the lives of all Tibetans. This overview provides insight into the internal situation and the challenges facing both those who are persecuted for their political activities, and those who live less actively political lives, yet live under the same regime. The final section of the chapter examines the current body of knowledge regarding Tibetan migration, and highlights the limited study of the border crossing experience and thus lays the ground for this specific setting as an important site for this research.

2.1 Tibet – geography and demographics

The Tibetan plateau covers over 2.5 million square kilometres, with its borders spanning from China in the north and northeast to Nepal and India in the south. While historically Tibet was divided into three main provinces – Kham, Amdo and U-Tsang – the divisions changed under Chinese rule, and what is now known as the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR) is divided into five broad ‘administrative units’ (Central Tibetan Administration,  

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1 The TAR is the name given to the ‘autonomous region’ of Tibet established following Chinese occupation. For the purposes of this research, the country of origin of the participants is referred to as Tibet, which denotes the pre-occupation provincial delineation of the country (Kham, Amdo and U-Tsang), as this is how the participants
Historically, Tibetans were primarily an agrarian society involved in small-scale agricultural farming and animal husbandry. Recent efforts to develop the plateau, however, has involved the introduction of a range of new industries intended to modernise the formerly ‘backward’ Tibetan society, including, for example, large-scale mining across the largely untapped rich mineral landscapes, and the development of dams across various rivers that feed water into the rest of South Asia (Information Office of the State Council of the People’s Republic of China, 2013; Anonymous, 2011; Watts 2010).

While estimates on the total number of Tibetans are limited, those that are published have significant disparities. For example, the Central Tibetan Administration (2017) indicates that there are approximately six million Tibetans in total, with 2.09 million living in the TAR and the remainder living in administrative areas that were formerly part of Tibet or communities in exile. However, the Tibetdata.org website claims, based on analysis of census data from around the world, that there are likely seven million Tibetans globally, with 97.8 per cent living in Tibet (not the smaller TAR). The website suggests that there are only 94,204 Tibetans living in India, with gradually smaller population sizes in Nepal, the United States, Canada and Switzerland – the nations with the five largest Tibetan populations (Tibetdata.org, 2015). The Central Tibetan Administration figures for Tibetans living in India, however, differ again: putting the exiled population (including all Tibetans living outside Tibet) at 128,041. The discrepancies draw attention to the politics in numbers, but also the existence of a large and constantly growing Tibetan population living in communities in exile around the world. The figures relating to the number of people actually leaving Tibet referred to their country of origin throughout the interviews. The term ‘TAR’ will only be used in explicit references to the Chinese-based ‘administrative units’.

References to Tibetan being ‘backwards’ has been entrenched in Chinese political discourse since the initial occupation in the 1950s, based on characterisations of Tibetans society as a feudal theocracy, and the need to liberates Tibetans from serfdom (see Shakya 2009).
are discussed in more detail below. At this point, however, it is important to note that the number of people leaving Tibet has never been static, and, as will be explored further below, this is largely due to the changing political situation inside China, Tibet and Nepal.

2.2 Contemporary Tibetan history – a brief overview of events from the initial occupation to today

This section provides a historical overview of what is arguably one of the most significant periods in contemporary Tibetan history – the Chinese occupation. From the late 1940s, there were dramatic political changes within China, eventually leading to the establishment of the People’s Republic of China (PRC). In an effort to re-establish itself, China sought to ‘reclaim’ a hold over the Tibetan plateau, and in doing so to regain influence across the region (Goldstein 2007). As history would show, however, China’s inevitably ineffective propaganda and policies aimed at promoting social and ethnic unity ended up offending cultural and religious values, exacerbating discontent and tensions, and instigating an ongoing oppressive occupation that would continue for decades to come (Terrone 2016; Goldstein 2007). The 1949 intrusion of the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) into Tibet instigated series of events that eventually led to the spiritual and political leader, the Dalai Lama, and thousands of Tibetans fleeing to India. Those who remained endured the establishment of a violent military occupation that eventually provided the segue into the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s. Today, information coming from Tibet – albeit limited – demonstrates the ongoing social, cultural and political oppression that targets not only those who outwardly challenge the Chinese presence in Tibet, but also the population more broadly. The historical and contemporary relationship between Tibet and China is important
as it broadly contextualises the experiences of the participants in this research, and provides the sociopolitical grounding for the analysis of those experiences.

2.2.1 The Chinese occupation: 1949–1959

Despite claims of independence in the months before (Teng 1995), on 24 November 1949, the newly established PRC announced its intentions to ‘liberate Tibet’ from foreign imperialists, feudalism and serfdom. After months of China making an effort to negotiate the terms of its impending control over Tibet (see Goldstein 2007), on 7 October 1950 approximately 40,000 ‘battle hardened’ (Han 2009, p.67) Chinese troops entered Tibet. By the end of October 1950, Chamdo – the eastern capital of Tibet – had been taken. Many historians suggest that the impending rise of communist China and the ambiguous status (argued to be de facto independence) of Tibet prior to 1950 meant that Tibet’s calls for support from India, Britain and eventually the United Nations never materialised beyond condemnation of China by said countries (Shakapba 2010; Sperling 2009, Smith 2009).

Following the military intrusion into Tibet, a note dated 26 October 1950 from the Indian Government requested that China return to peaceful negotiations as opposed to pursuing military action. The response from China only four days later stated:

Tibet is an integral part of Chinese territory. The problem of Tibet is entirely the domestic problem of China. The People’s Liberation Army must enter Tibet, liberate the Tibetan people and defend the frontiers of China … no foreign interference shall be tolerated. (Han 2009: 68)
Goldstein (2007) suggests that early discussions between Chairman Mao and his military commanders on the Tibetan border recognised the sensitive nature of their movement into Tibet, which highlights that they were ready to negotiate their control peacefully. Despite this, the ‘deep nationalistic and symbolic value’ (Goldstein 2007, p. 20) of Tibet in the restoration of China globally meant that any hint of hesitation by the Tibetans would mean an occupation by military force. While the military was still in Eastern Tibet, on 29 April 1951, the Chinese agreed to negotiate the terms by which they would ‘liberate’ Tibet, and hosted talks with a Tibetan delegation to discuss what was later referred to as the 17-point Agreement. Formally titled the Agreement of the Central People’s Government and the Local Government of Tibet on Measures for the Peaceful Liberation of Tibet, the 17-point Agreement basically enforced Chinese sovereignty by allowing the movement of Chinese troops into Tibet to ‘unite and drive out imperialist aggressive forces from Tibet’ (Smith 2009: 299). Based on available documentation of these initial negotiations, Goldstein (2007) asserts that any proposals of independence by the Tibetan delegates were adamantly refuted by the Chinese delegates. In theory, the Agreement implied that the Tibetan Government would maintain significant autonomy, with key principles in place to maintain Tibetan social, cultural and religious traditions, including the use of the Tibetan language in schools. For example, point seven stated that ‘the religious beliefs, customs, and habits of the Tibetan people shall be respected, and lama monasteries shall be protected’ (Smith 2009: 299). However, word from Tibetans living in the already occupied eastern territories of Tibet suggested otherwise, with claims that the Chinese were conspiring to murder the Dalai Lama if he did not comply with the Agreement (Goldstein 2007).

Historical records indicate that the Tibetan delegates sent to negotiate the 17-point Agreement were not in a position to formally accept the terms offered by the Chinese. Regardless, on 26
May 1951, the Chinese announced the 17-point Agreement as the way forward with Tibet’s ‘peaceful liberation’. Despite the (albeit limited) international condemnation of the occupation, China pushed forward with its ‘liberation’ efforts, eventually moving into Lhasa and instigating a decades-long violent military repression. In Han’s (2009) examination of this period in Tibetan history, he explained that there were countless victims of the early ‘liberation’, despite efforts to project it promoting social and economic development. The disconnect between the theory propagated by the Chinese and the reality of what happened in Tibet, however, is well-established. Han explained that:

After the rebellion and suppression, the Chinese completed control over Tibet. They call their rules with too flowery words such as ‘democratic reforms’, ‘emancipation of the one million serfs and slaves’, ‘socialist transformation’ and so on. But the truth has just come out: it drove Tibetans’ spiritual leader and more than one hundred thousand people into exile; caused some 1.2 million Tibet deaths (20 per cent of the Tibetan population) and destroyed 6,400 (99 per cent) monasteries. (Han 2009: 72)

In the following decades, the Chinese occupation of Tibet occurred against a backdrop of ‘forced population displacement, widespread hunger, restrictions on cultural and religious freedoms, well-documented political violence against specific cultural groups, mass arrests, imprisonment of political prisoners and execution’ (Mills et al, 2005, p.2). By 1957, people from Kham and Amdo were fleeing to Lhasa as large numbers of PLA forces were introduced to quash any continuing resistance. Refugees arriving in Lhasa carried ‘tales of Chinese brutality, including the humiliation, arrest, and public execution of Lamas and the looting and destruction of monasteries’ (Smith 2009, p. 422). Despite a period of reprieve
The conflict peaked in early 1959. In March of that year, the Chinese invited the Dalai Lama to a performance at the military barracks and requested that he come with no bodyguards or attendants. Word quickly spread throughout the community and, on 10 March, hundreds of local Tibetans surrounded the Norbulinka Palace\(^3\) to prevent the Dalai Lama from attending the performance. Despite the Dalai Lama’s refusal of the Chinese invitation, the crowds organised themselves into a guard around Norbulinka and started calling for Tibetan independence. On 17 March, mortar shells fell within the Norbulinka compound in an effort to quell the protests. Then, on the advice of his supervisors, that night the Dalai Lama fled Tibet, and was escorted into India. In the months that followed, some 80,000 Tibetans would follow the Dalai Lama and seek refuge from the military crackdown (Tibet Justice Centre 2016; Smith 2009; MacPherson, Bentz & Ghoso 2008b; Goldstein 2007). In what is now known as the largest national uprising against the Chinese occupation, Tibetan estimates suggest that 5000–10,000 Tibetans were killed in Lhasa, and over 20,000 were arrested (Smith 2009). Chinese sources indicate that almost 90,000 enemies (Tibetan protesters) were ‘eliminated’ in the rebellion from March 1959 to October 1960 (Tibetan Young Buddhist Association 1990: 356). While Sautman (2006) points out that many of the figures in relation to the early occupation and the subsequent famine must be read with caution as they are primarily based on unsubstantiated refugee reports, the important point to note here is that the large number of Tibetan deaths and the violent nature of the occupation form a significant part of the Tibetan history and collective narrative.

\(^3\) Norbulinka Palace is the home of the Dalai Lama, and one of the most revered buildings in Lhasa.
By early 1959, it became clear that the 17-point Agreement was no longer being respected by the Chinese Government, and on 28 April, the Dalai Lama announced from India that the Agreement was signed under duress, that Tibet was an independent nation and, as a result of the continued occupation, the Tibetans could formally discharge themselves from the Agreement (International Commission of Jurists Report, 1960). With the Dalai Lama in India, however, any protests against the Chinese presence were brutally repressed. In the period immediately after the 1959 rebellion, thousands of Tibetans were killed, or perished in labour camps. According to the Department of Information and International Relations:

Amdo became China’s biggest Gulag with tens of thousands of Tibetan and Chinese prisoners who were put to road and railway construction, exploitation of mineral resources, building of nuclear waste centres and running of state farms for the People’s Liberation Army. At least 200,000 inmates starved to death. (2006: 15)

The use of labour camps was widespread, and famine gripped the plateau as a result of the agricultural collectivisation policies being implemented. The same period bore witness to the much wider Cultural Revolution across the Chinese mainland. This eventually spread across the so-called autonomous regions in the peripheries of China proper, and throughout the 1960s through to the 1980s, Tibet was quashed under a socialist transformation. Over 6000 monasteries were razed to the ground, and over 1 million Tibetans were killed, or died from torture or starvation (Tibet Justice Centre 2016).
2.2.2 The aftermath of the occupation – the 1980s to today

Despite a so-called temporary opening-up of Tibet in the 1980s after the death of Chairman Mao, the repressive policies in Tibet have continued in varying degrees of severity. Throughout the late 1980s and 1990s, there were several high-level hostilities and mass uprisings, resulting in the imposition of martial law, increased security measures in communities inside Tibet and within the exiled communities around the world via the growing influence of China (Tibetan Justice Centre 2016; Human Rights Watch 2014; Tibet Justice Centre 2002). From 1980 onwards, significant reforms were implemented across the Tibetan plateau aimed at modernising Tibet, but more importantly control its people (Smith 2006; Chung 2006; Yun Ma 1993). What is significant about this more recent period is that the policies introduced across Tibet were not only intended to control and repress the political dissidents, but also to target a much wider representation of Tibetan resistance – their culture, religion, social lifestyle, and worldview.

Social development policies

In an effort to quell international and minority concerns about unrest in Tibet, China has made significant investments into social and economic development projects in ethnic minority areas. These include significant financial investment into public infrastructure across Xinxiang and the Tibetan plateau, as well as reducing restrictions on religious practice, family planning and cultural celebrations among ethnic minorities (Human Rights Watch 2014; Chung 2006). Evidence suggests, however, that the reality is quite different, as many of the policies implemented in the name of socialist (and social) development have led to widespread discrimination by the Han Chinese against Tibetans specifically, and have effectively worked to erase the Tibetan identity (Tibetan Justice Centre 2016).
Evidence of discrimination against the Tibetans at the hands of the growing Han Chinese population in Tibet lies primarily in access to education and employment opportunities. While there is some evidence of improved access to ‘western forms of education’ across Tibet, Hasmath and Hsu (2007) found that the top-down implementation of education policies meant that it often did not accommodate local realities, particularly in remote parts of Tibet. Reports from the Universal Periodic Review of China (see Human Rights Council 2009, 2013) found that China has increased subsidised boarding fees for children from remote pastoral communities to attend school in urban or rural areas, and has made significant investment into ‘minority education’ institutions. However, the reality of education funding and implementation systems has been argued to result in disparities in the quality of education among the urban, rural and remote localities of Tibet (Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 2015; Society for Threatened Peoples’ 2009). While this is not a unique challenge as it is seen in many other parts of the world, the 2016 Human Rights Report indicates that the implementation of the ‘centralised education policy’ has disadvantaged Tibetan children, not least because the primary teaching language is increasingly Mandarin (Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labour 2017). In light of all this, critics argue that the urban/rural divide (most Tibetans live in rural areas) prevents many students from accessing the quality education needed to enter the Chinese language-biased Tibetan job market (Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labour 2017; Society for Threatened Peoples’, 2009).

The disadvantage faced by Tibetans in the education system then leads to challenges in accessing employment. Some argue that this is not reflective of systematic discrimination; rather, it is the high levels of illiteracy, low skill levels and lack of understanding of the labour market as it currently operates that prevents Tibetans from gaining skilled positions
(Hillman 2008). However, this is disputed by human rights groups who suggest that many of the skilled and public positions are reserved for the migrating Han Chinese (Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor 2017; Society of Threatened Peoples 2009). Beyond highly skilled positions, the US Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor (2017) suggests that it is more difficult for Tibetans to access the permits and financial support needed to start businesses, are generally paid less than their Han Chinese counterparts for the same work, and the large-scale development projects generally benefit non-Tibetans and increase the influx of Han Chinese into Tibet. While other research points to improvements in health, education and employment across the TAR (Hsu 2007), issues of discrimination and disadvantage form a large part of the narrative surrounding Tibetans’ frustration with the Chinese occupation. These issues do not speak specifically to targeted persecution, yet they do provide insight into the internal circumstances and challenges faced by Tibetans in modern Tibet.

Efforts to undermine the Tibetan identity have long been the subject of concern. Such efforts are evident in several policies implemented in Tibet that are purportedly aimed at fostering unity, but which have effectively worked to fundamentally change Tibetan lifestyles. For example, in 2013 the Chinese Government began to implement its ‘Comfortable Housing’ policy, the aim of which is to relocate and sedentarise nomadic families into compounds in an effort to ‘build a new socialist countryside’ (Human Rights Watch, 2014). The controversial policy reportedly ‘forcibly’ evicts Tibetan farmers and herders from their traditional land and relocates them to purpose-built Tibetan communities throughout the eastern provinces of Tibet. The official policy response to concerns about what is effectively forced internal displacement is that ‘these steps offer a chance for economically backward ethnic minorities to take part in the modernization and economic development of the region and nation’
The Human Rights Watch report also highlights the acceleration of the ‘Western Development’ campaign, intended to develop the western provinces through urbanisation and the exploitation of natural resources (despite the Chinese Government’s claims that herders are being removed from the Tibetan plateau to ‘protect the fragile ecosystem of the Tibetan-Qinghai plateau’) (Human Rights Watch 2013b). In addition, efforts to assimilate the Tibetan identity into China have been recognised in recent campaigns to encourage Tibetans to marry Han Chinese (Wan and Yangjingjing 2014). Other efforts target the Buddhist culture and identity. Most recently, China has been condemned for the ongoing destruction of the Larung Gar Buddhist Academy (see the European Parliament 2016; Wong 2017), which led to the expulsion of thousands of nuns, monks and their families from the wooden structures in and around the academy. As mentioned earlier, these policies do not necessarily amount to specific persecution; however, the circumstances they create for Tibetans living in Tibet are challenging.

Social (dis)order policies

In response to the protests staged by Tibetans against the policies discussed above, the decades following the 1980s has been characterised by the implementation of a raft of crime prevention programs and policies. These efforts have largely targeted political dissidents and activists, and, as recent research shows, are associated with increasingly harsh penalties. There have been specific events in contemporary history that gave rise to national uprisings, protests and conflict across the Tibetan plateau, but now such protest is also being seen among Tibetans living in exiled communities around the world. Vocal and visible protests, however, have been swiftly and brutally ended, and those involved imprisoned for their ‘crimes’ against the state (Smith 2009). The response by the Chinese authorities to these events is illustrative of the nature of persecution, and systematic targeting of freedoms, including the freedom of religion, assembly and speech.
For example, in the period between 1987 and 1989, a series of protests occurred throughout Tibet. Initiated by the monks of the Drepung Monastery\(^4\) in defence of the Dalai Lama, the protests soon included lay Tibetans as they circumambulated the Jokhang Temple – Tibet’s holiest temple. All the monks were arrested. Then, on the founding anniversary of the PRC, monks from the Sera Monastery took to the streets calling for the return of the Dalai Lama, but also the release of the Drepung monks who had been imprisoned days earlier. As Dorjee explains, ‘the monks were arrested immediately, taken to the police station and beaten’ (2016, p.44). The protesters moved to the police station in support of the monks, yet were brutally suppressed. Across the three years (1987–89), the protests continued but were repeatedly quickly and violently supressed, culminating in the implementation of martial law in 1989 (Dorjee 2016). Social discontent was criminalised through a suite of policies designed to prevent ‘separatism’ or ‘splittism’, and those found guilty of political activism were subject to an average of 5.7 years in prison (Human Rights Watch 2016b), and the beatings and torture that ultimately ensued.

Another more recent example was the 2008 National Uprising, on the 10\(^{th}\) of March. This day is recognised annually in two ways: first, by Tibetans as the anniversary of the failed national uprising against the Chinese forces in Lhasa in 1959 (Dumbaugh 2008); and, second, by the Chinese as the ‘Serfs Emancipation Day’, which is the commemoration of the ‘democratic reforms that liberated Tibet from Buddhist feudalism’ (Harnett 2013: 285). In addition to these commemorations, there were several other important features of the period surrounding the 2008 uprising: it marked the lead-up to and celebration of Beijing hosting the 2008

\(^4\) Drepung Monastery is the most well reputed monastic institutions in Tibet, and is one of the three great seats, which include Drepung, Sera and Gaden.
summer Olympic games (Kovan 2013); the enactment of the 2007 ‘Reincarnation Law’, which required Buddhist monks who wished to reincarnate to obtain prior approval from Beijing; and sustained efforts to foster atheism through ‘patriotic education’ campaigns (Dumbaugh 2008). Then on March 10, protests erupted across Tibet, and in exiled communities around the world, many around the Olympic torch relay (CNN 2012). The protests inside Tibet were again quickly subdued, with hundreds of Tibetans killed, or arrested and charged for their involvement, receiving sentences ranging from three years to life (CNN 2012). In one account, an eyewitness reported ‘seeing 26 lay people being shot at from a black vehicle while protesters neared Drapchi Prison, demanding the immediate release of political prisoners detained there’ (Department of Information and International Relations 2010: 16).

The 2008 protests against the Chinese occupation and repression of political activism led to a raft of policies aimed at both punishing and preventing further protests and dissent. In the lead-up to the Beijing Olympics (between 2006 and 2008), local authorities in the TAR implemented several policies and policing measures coined ‘stability measures’ (Human Rights Watch 2016b), or, in the broader context, labelled as ‘a system of stability preservation’ (Feng 2013). A Human Rights Watch report defined these measure as ‘[a] range of policing and administrative methods aimed at preventing, controlling or punishing social dissent and social disorder’ (Trevaskes and Nesossi 2013, as cited by Human Rights Watch 2016b). Feng (2013) argues that, as a result of the ongoing ‘legitimacy crisis’ of the Chinese Government – fuelled by the bankruptcy of communist ideology, structural corruption and social alienation resulting from the aforementioned policy context – local authorities were given the power to resort to extra-legal measures and methods to preserve social stability in Tibet. The lack of stability, however, is in large part a direct result of the way in which the
The government is implementing its various policies. The ongoing protests against these developments underpin the instability, questioning as they do, the Chinese legitimacy and sovereign right to control Tibet. In response to these challenges to the government, ‘the state bureaucracy [has been given] a free hand, more coercive power and more resources to crush dissent’ (Feng 2013, p. 7).

A stark example of the stability measures is the implementation of wide-reaching surveillance mechanisms across Tibet. Following the 2008 uprising, the Chinese authorities launched the ‘Benefit of the Masses’ campaign; an ‘Orwellian’-style surveillance program involving the deployment of 20,000 Chinese cadres to Tibetan villages (Human Rights Watch 2016a). The aim of this campaign was to prevent any further mass protests and related discontent across Tibet (Human Rights Watch 2016a; Tibet Justice Centre 2016). In the aftermath of the 2008 protest, these ‘stability measures’ were far more pervasive, and targeted Tibetans suspected of being involved in protests, or instigating political dissent via the spread of ‘ideas and information thought to cause dissent’ (Human Rights Watch 2016b, p. 17). Then, following a series of self-immolations in 2011, the so-called stability measures were expanded, targeting internal movements of Tibetans more broadly, with identification measures in place to prevent Tibetans from leaving their province of registration and/or entering other provinces. By 2012, the restrictions on mobility also included international travel, with many Tibetans unable to get a passport.

The most recent iteration of the surveillance-based stability measures has been more localised. Human Rights Watch (2016a) reported that there were three or four cadres for every 5000 Tibetans in their designated communities. Their role in the communities is to
effectively quash any dissent *before* it happens. Since the implementation of these most recent measures, there has been an increase in detention and imprisonment of Tibetans for offences previously considered minor. Research conducted by Human Rights Watch (2016b) on the impact of these measures found that, in the period between 2013 and 2015:

Many detentions documented here were for activities that the Chinese authorities previously considered to be minor offenses or not politically sensitive. Many of those detained came from segments of society not previously associated with dissent. In addition, many of the detentions took place in rural areas where political activity had not previously been reported. (2016b)

The cases examined for the report included children whose parents had self-immolated and lay, religious and community leaders, all of whom were detained for a variety of ‘political offenses’. The Human Rights Watch report confirms that the ‘political activities’ of which people were found guilty were previously considered minor, including any activities that could be indicative of impending political activities, ranging from having sensitive information or images on a mobile phone, through to self-immolation (or being associated with anyone who self-immolates) (Human Rights Watch 2016b).

A more historical example of efforts to control dissent was the Strike Hard (Yan Da) campaign. This was initially established as a way to prevent the perceived increase in social disorder and crime in Tibet. Coined the ‘bloodiest chapter in post-Mao Chinese Politics’ (Tanner 2000, p. 93), the campaign was based on swift and severe punishment for various
crimes, including (but not limited to) ‘splittist/separatist’ or anti-China activities. These activities constituted any actions or activities that could be viewed as being anti-China or disputing Chinese policies, anti-China public lectures, distributing anti-China propaganda material, and participation in protests. The Yan Da campaign resulted in ‘tough policing, roundups and detention of suspected separatists, terrorists or participants in illegal religious or other gatherings’ (Chung 2006, p. 81). Then, following the September 11 terrorist attacks in the US, the campaign was reinstated alongside anti-terrorism legislation that was viewed by commentators as merely an ‘excuse to crack down on what it deems to be terrorist activities on Chinese soil’ (Chung 2006, p. 76), including any activities considered to be separatist, or against the government. The campaign continued, and terrorism legislation was adopted that defined separatism and religious fundamentalism within the parameters of what constituted terrorist activity. This approach to crime prevention meant that the causes of separatism were not addressed. Chung reiterated this, explaining that ‘the presence of the “three evils” also means that the root causes of terrorism – religious freedom, cultural autonomy, living standards, and political rights of ethnic minorities are not addressed directly or earnestly enough by the Chinese authorities’ (2006, p. 78). In light of the repressive social control policies, public and group resistance is significantly harder, and attracts severe consequences. As a result, protest and resistance have manifest in ongoing self-immolations. As of the end of May 2017, over 150 Tibetans had self-immolated (International Campaign for Tibet 2017). This form of resistance has also been subject to strict controls, with people who are associated with, involved in or supporting self-immolation, or who are attempting to self-immolate, subject to imprisonment.

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55 The ‘Three Evils’ refers to terrorism, separatism and religious fundamentalism; all of which are considered threats to Chinese national security and stability.
The contemporary policy context sheds light on the nature of the targeted and systematic control of political dissidents in Tibet, and establishes the context to examine the reasons why Tibetans are leaving Tibet irregularly, and how they undertake this journey. In doing so, this overview also draws attention to the ways in which mobility is one aspect of control in such a setting. In turn, there must then be consideration of the specific cross border relationship between China and Nepal, and the implications this has for borders, and those that seek to cross them.

2.3 The Sino–Nepal relationship and its implications for Tibetans

The situation inside Tibet is exacerbated by the shifting reception of Tibetans entering Nepal on their way to India. Following an intervention from the Chinese in 1989, the Nepal Government ended its formalised support for Tibetan refugees and stopped allowing them to settle permanently in Nepal. Support continued informally, with the ‘Gentleman’s Agreement’ between the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and Nepal allowing Tibetans to transit through to India safely (Human Rights Watch 2014). Nepal is not a party to either the 1951 UN Refugee Convention or the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees (UNHCR 2015), and Nepalese law prohibits non-citizens from accessing rights such as non-discrimination; freedom of expression, assembly and movement; or the freedom to engage in trade or buy property (Tibet Justice Centre 2002). In decades following the occupation of Tibet, under political pressure from the Chinese, Kathmandu increased the restrictions on Tibetans’ rights in Nepal, particularly around rights of assembly and expression. After the 2008 uprising, Kathmandu oppressed demonstrations, with protesters being arbitrarily arrested and detained (Human Rights Watch 2008). More recently, the Sino–Nepal relationship has led to a combined effort of the Nepalese and Chinese
military sealing off the borders in an effort to ‘end the constant trickle of Tibetans fleeing the region’ (Human Rights Watch 2015, p. 5). This, combined with the Nepalese Government’s decision to stop allowing Tibetans to settle in Nepal, has meant that the post-border-crossing experience is now marred with further insecurity, risks of repatriation and continued restrictions on social, religious and political freedoms, ultimately pushing Tibetans on into India or leaving them in a state of transit. The Chinese influence in Nepal has meant that risks remain for Tibetans seeking to enter the country, including forcible repatriation to China, detention on the border, and extortion at the hands of Nepalese border guards (Tibet Justice Centre 2016).

Then, in 2011, China and Nepal entered into a security agreement that covered all aspects of border security, including ‘a mechanism for intelligence-sharing and cooperating between Chinese and Nepali security agencies and border forces’ (Human Rights Watch, 2014: 29). By 2012 China and Nepal reached another agreement to ‘bolster’ district-level border control and monitoring. Part of this included China providing the funding to support the infrastructure required to ‘enforce an effective security strategy along the Sino-Nepali border to check cross border crime’ (Human Rights Watch, 2014, p.31). The funding was reportedly tied to requests that Tibetans identified in Nepal not be handed over to the UNHCR, but instead be returned to China. Today, Tibetans who do not seek to enter India through the UNHCR channel are blocked by Indian border guards and not granted the Special Entry Permits that are required to then apply for registration in India. Without that registration, Tibetans cannot move freely throughout India, cannot access property and have severely limited employment and education opportunities (Tibet Justice Centre 2016). Referred to by the Central Tibetan Administration as ‘push-backs’, those who are not permitted entry are returned to Tibet and therefore forced to, and do, seek out other irregular routes along the
Nepal border after being returned to Tibet (Tibetan Justice Centre 2016: 14). To date, as explored below, the examination of the irregular border crossing experience in this setting is limited.

2.4 Tibet as an occupied territory – a note on terminology

The debate about contemporary Tibetan history and the nature of the Chinese presence in Tibet underpins much of the tension between China and Tibet. For some, Tibet has technically been a part of China since the Yaun dynasty (1271–1368) (see Sautman 2002; Sperling 2009⁶), while for others Tibet has always been an independent nation and the relationship between Tibet and China has taken the form of Chö-yön – described as being similar to the relationship between priest and patron, as opposed to sovereign and subject (Shakabpa 2010). This relationship is otherwise referred to as suzerainty. For proponents of the latter view, the occupation of Tibet by China was a breach of international law; whereas for those who hold the former view, the Chinese presence in China is an ‘internal issue’, meaning that any international intervention or involvement would be a breach of Chinese sovereignty (Sperling 2009; Sautman 2002; Teng 1995).

There is yet to be a consensus on the legitimacy of the initial entry of China into Tibet in 1949, and efforts to negotiate the nature of the ongoing occupation – in particular, in regard to the extent of Tibetans’ genuine autonomy – have been stalled since 2010 (Central Tibetan Administration 2017). While Tibet now calls for genuine autonomy (as opposed to independence) and control over the religious and political affairs of Tibet, China holds that Tibet is an autonomous region, and that any issues that arise therein are ethnic, as opposed to

⁶ Note that some China scholars argue that it was in the Qing Dynasty that Tibet became a part of China (Sperling 2008).
political dissent relating to the occupation (Huaxia 2015). The status of Tibet pre- and post-1949 has been the topic of much scholarly debate (Shakapba 2010; Sperling 2009; Sautman 2006; Sautman 2002; Teng 1995; International Commission of Jurists 1960), but this debate is not the focus here. For the purposes of this thesis it is important to simply recognise the debate, and to be clear that this research is founded upon the understanding that Tibet is an occupied territory. This position is informed by the way in which the participants described and interpreted the situation in their home country, by the historical and contemporary scholarship of Tibetan accounts of their history, which details the experience and impact over decades of Chinese occupation and authoritarian rule (see Goldstein 2007, for example).

While there is no consensus on the status of Tibet as being occupied, that is the position that this takes. It is important to note however, that this position does then assume that all participants are refugees as per the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees (hereafter the Refugee Convention). Rather, this thesis examines the lived border-crossing experience through an individualised lens, and by distancing the analysis from pre-formulated expectations or a framework of persecution, this thesis provides a more nuanced and contextually specific insight into the situation in Tibet, and the way that the different personal contexts can shape border-crossing experiences and outcomes.

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7 As per the 1951 Refugee Convention, the definition of a refugee is as follows: ‘‘Owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.’’

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2.5 Tibetan border crossings – a review of the empirical literature

After the Dalai Lama fled Tibet in 1959, it is estimated that between 80,000 (Smalley 2010) and 100,000 (Tibet Justice Centre 2016) Tibetans followed in the subsequent months. Since then, the number of Tibetans leaving Tibet has varied depending on the nature of the situation inside Tibet and the strength of the Sino–Nepal relationship at any given time. By 1994, it was clear that a key element of the relationship between China and Nepal was an agreement to prevent Tibetans from leaving Tibet. In a testimony to US Senate Relations Committee (Unpublished Refugee Studies Centre collection), Maura Moynihan indicated that, in 1994, 6383 Tibetans were stopped at the border of Nepal, representing a 23 per cent increase from 1993 (Moynihan 1996). Efforts to stop Tibetans entering Nepal continued into 1995 and, following the Nepalese Prime Minister’s visit to China, hundreds of Tibetans were reportedly remanded in custody. Those caught on the border were detained for a couple of days to weeks before being deported back to the Chinese authorities in Tibet (Moynihan 1996). In this period, reports from newly arrived Tibetans in Nepal suggested that those who were deported back to Tibet faced severe consequences:

Many of the deportees are conscripted into hard labour on the Kumbum-Lhasa railway, others are made to work on the road gangs, some are imprisoned, some are forcibly returned to their villages and denied permission to travel outside their districts. (Moynihan 1996)

Despite these restrictions on the borders, Maura Moynihan indicated that, between 1989 and 1996, another 25,000 Tibetans fled to India. Of that number, approximately 44 per cent were Buddhist nuns and monks, and 30 per cent were unaccompanied children (Unpublished...
By 1998–99, there were approximately 20,000 Tibetans in Nepal, which included some of those who did not move on to India after fleeing in 1959 (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, 1999a). In the same period, there were between 98,000 and 110,000 Tibetans living in India, including the 80,000 who had arrived in 1959 with the Dalai Lama (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, 1999b). In the 10 years between 1998 and 2008, anywhere between 1500 and 3500 Tibetans were arriving in Nepal annually before being processed by the Nepal and Indian governments and the UNHCR (Tibet Justice Centre 2016).

Following the protests in 2008, however, China intensified efforts to prevent Tibetans from leaving Tibet, which had a significant impact on the ability of Tibetans to flee. In the years leading up to 2008, around 2600 Tibetans were arriving in India annually. However, in 2008, only 650 arrived, and in 2014, only 100 Tibetans arrived in India (Tibet Justice Centre 2016). The decrease in arrivals was mirrored by the gradual militarisation of the border zones and known border-crossing points. This militarisation was made clear in 2006, when a group of mountaineers caught Chinese border police opening fire on a group of Buddhist nuns trying to escape across the Nangpa-La pass, killing 17-year-old Kelsang Namsto (Watts 2006). The border enforcement efforts were further intensified in 2008 following the large-scale protests across Tibet and around the world:

Since 2008, Nepali police have tightened up security related to Tibetans on the border between India and Nepal and have increasingly harassed, delayed, extorted and detained Tibetans attempting to cross. This threatens the quality of life of thousands
of Tibetans who visit India for Buddhist pilgrimages, education, and to visit family.

(International Campaign for Tibet 2011:11)

Pehrson (2003) notes that, in addition to the increased border controls, the criminalisation of guides has made it more difficult to leave Tibet; guides who are hired within Tibet are no longer considered Sherpas or guides as under Chinese criminal law they are considered people smugglers (Pehrson 2003). This is further complicated by allegations that the Chinese Government has been guides, or Sherpas, to undertake the journey and then hand the Tibetans over to Chinese police at the border (Human Rights Watch 2008). While the criminalisation of guides is a relatively recent legislative shift in China, evidence from the 1990s suggests that the precarious nature and work of the guides often resulted in unaccompanied minors being abandoned in the Himalayas if the threat of being captured was too high (Moynihan 1996).

While there has been limited academic engagement with the journey of Tibetans across this particular border in contemporary literature, non-government organisation reports from Nepal and India have provided some insight into the nature and outcomes of these journeys and migrants’ subsequent experiences in Tibetan borderlands (International Campaign for Tibet 2011; International Campaign for Tibet 2008; Moynihan 1998; Moynihan 1996). The available evidence suggests that Tibetans seeking to enter Nepal from Tibet are often faced with physical, sexual and emotional abuse, harassment, and extortion from both Chinese and Nepali authorities. (Domla, Singh, Lohfeld, Orbinski and Mills, 2006) In an article published by the US-based International Campaign for Tibet (ICT), the potential dangers for Tibetans captured either crossing into Nepal or following their arrival included ‘beatings and imprisonment in detention centres of military barracks for periods ranging from several weeks
to several months, in some cases longer’ (ICT, 2007). Tibetan welfare officers in the 1990s believed that the sexual assault of Tibetan refugee women by Nepalese border guards was almost routine, and unaccompanied minors were often abandoned by guides (Moynihan 1996).

The available research demonstrates that, like many other borders around the world, in times of conflict or instability they become increasingly militarised (Carter and Poast 2017; Günay and Witjes 2017). This militarisation or securitisation has implications for the experience of those trying to cross them (Weber and Pickering 2011). While specific empirical research into Tibetan border crossings is limited in comparison to other migration corridors, much of what is known about the Tibetan migration experience resonates with the broader body of literature which is that crossing borders irregularly can have detrimental and lasting impacts for migrants (see Gerard and Pickering 2013 for example). Based on the historical and policy context outlined throughout this chapter, the next section outlines why the Tibetan border crossing experience warrants further attention in regard to borders and border control.

2.6 Conclusion – why conduct research on borders in and around Tibet

The historical and contemporary political situation inside the TAR, and the continually growing population of Tibetans outside Tibet, draws attention to the nature of Tibetan migration experiences. This chapter has pulled together the significant features of recent Tibetan history, and provides insight into how the nature of control, first instigated when China entered Tibet in 1949, has evolved and intensified into the situation we see in Tibet today. The evolution of that control has arguably shifted to focus primarily on mobility and the movement of Tibetans (and their influence) in and around Tibet. The way this has
occurred is arguably based on the notion of the border as a vehicle to enforce sovereignty. The policy context that supports this idea is detailed in the section above, and provides some structure for understanding why the different types of experiences may occur; however, it does not capture or account for the individual-level experiences that have been given scarce attention in the academic literature, particularly in comparison to other high-migration corridors such as the US–Mexico border or the borders across Europe.

In addition to the historical context, there is a body of research that argues that both sovereignty and, inadvertently, borders underpin the reasoning behind the ongoing occupation of Tibet. In her examination of Chinese nation-building in the Qing era, Girsch highlights that China had to build a state that could function effectively within the new global system. Jian (2007) reiterates this, indicating that, after the 1949 Communist Party victory, the government was faced with the issue of how to define China, including the boundaries and overall composition of China as a nation. While Chinese historiography would argue that China had long been a nation-state, the rise of the PRC arguably coincided with the establishment of a new state (Guerif 2010). Fiskesjö supports this view, outlining that by the ‘twentieth-century [the] challenge for China, an empire in ruins, was to fit into the then-dominant international system of unitary nation-states’ (2006, p. 16), a key component of which included establishing sovereignty over the different ethnic groups that previously fell under Chinese control during the imperialist years (Jian 2007; Guerif 2010). Zolberg argues that minority groups in China are considered obstacles to state sovereignty and legitimacy, and contends that, ‘in order for the nation to come into being, the population must be transformed into individuals who visibly share a common nationality’ (1983, p. 35). The historical analysis of Chinese politics from the Tibetan perspective mirrors this interpretation. In his examination of the role of the 17-point Agreement, Mervyn Goldstein argues that ‘a
part of [restoring national dignity] was restoring full sovereignty (actual control) over all that had been China during the [Qing period]’ (2007, p. 20). It is increasingly evident that sovereignty and the performance of sovereignty were, and remain an ongoing driver of the occupation of Tibet. Enforcing this, however, required the incorporation of Tibet back into the ‘motherland’.

A key tool for ‘unifying’ ethnic minorities is the border and bordering processes. In looking at the period immediately prior to the 1949 occupation of Tibet, scholars argue that the first step for the newly established PRC was to ‘maximize territory and militarise boundaries’ (Girsch 2008, p. 6), and, as Durara (as cited by Giersch 2008) explains, to eradicate any imperialist informal arrangements and the multiple sovereignties extant throughout the territory at that time. A key consideration was the role China’s territorial borders:

[T]he borders of old were by no means always marked, mapped or even self-evident, and certainly not taken as the final word. The edges of the empire were continually contested, and truces made with adversaries such as Tibet and Vietnam resulted in temporary demarcations. But ‘territoriality’ as a new attribute of the state was certainly involved in the considerations of whether to give up the vast imperialist conquests achieved by the last dynasty – above and beyond the more limited questions about what precise borders a modern China would have. (Fiskesjo 2006, p. 18)
Premised on the Westphalian system, sovereignty represents the recognition of ‘having supreme authority and being rightfully entitled to exercise that authority’ (Berg & Kusk 2010, p.40). This authority manifests as structures and/or powers that are used to create, preserve and enforce national realities, and, specifically, national identities. Drawing on the historical interpretation of the way that control has manifest and evolved throughout contemporary Tibetan history, it can be suggested that China has used the border and migration as not only a control measure, but also as a performance of sovereignty within the territory of Tibet and around the world. Taken at face value, the decline in the number of Tibetans leaving Tibet from over 2000 annually to fewer than 100 in the space of 10 years could be indicative of an improved internal situation in Tibet and the acceptance of China’s legitimate sovereignty. However, based on the lived experiences captured in the available literature, the force behind the decline in departures is the control of borders and migration. This then suggests that the way that the Chinese borders have been enforced has had serious consequences for Tibetans seeking to leave Tibet; a suggestion that is one of the core drivers of this research.

The role of the border and its implications for migrants have increasingly become the focus of criminologists, as the following chapter details. Criminological inquiry is important as it has focused on the way in which borders are enforced and the human cost of that enforcement (Weber and Pickering 2011; Franko Aas 2007; Pècoud and Guchteneire 2006). The intensification and militarisation of the borders around Tibet have created a range of challenges for Tibetans seeking to leave Tibet, and it is evident that the way this border has been enforced ultimately creates those challenges. What is less understood is how this border is enforced, and what implications those enforcement mechanisms have on the lived border-crossing experience. There are very few empirical studies that document the border-crossing processes, experience and outcomes of Tibetans (see MacPherson et al 2008a; Dolma et al
2006). This is significant given the increasing understanding of the impact that borders can have, particularly on irregular migrants (see Weber and Pickering 2011, for example), and the way in which China’s borders appear to be enforced.

The disjunction between the reasons for the perceived decline in Tibetans leaving Tibet and the lived experience of borders and border control in China points to the importance of interrogating the border and the border performance via the lived experience of migrants. Further, it draws attention to the importance of understanding the performative and physical impact of border enforcement at the time of crossing the border and afterwards. In light of the above, this research is interested in the specific border-crossing experience of Tibetans leaving Tibet irregularly for Nepal and India, and the different contextual factors that shape both their experience and outcomes.
Chapter 3: Technologies of control – a theoretical framework to examine the performance of sovereignty and the impact of borders

Contemporary scholarship focused on borders, border control and migration is increasingly interdisciplinary, and forms the foundation for this examination of irregular Tibetan border crossings. This chapter locates this study within this scholarship and lays the foundation for the development of empirical and theoretically grounded research that extends the existing knowledge and understanding of these issues via the examination of a complex and diverse geopolitical site. Within criminology, there is a growing body of scholarship concerned with the theoretical and empirical interrogations of border regimes, border crossings and the implications of border regulation and enforcement. Much of this literature has engaged with key concepts from international relations as well as the scholarship of geopolitics, migration studies, anthropology and sociology (Andersson 2016; García-Mascareñas 2015; Weber 2014; Fraser 2013; McDowell and Wonders 2009; Prokkola 2009; Sassen 2008a, 2008b; Franko-Aas 2007; Pécoud and Gutchteneire 2006; Agnew 2005; Donnan and Wilson 1999; Anderson and O’Dowd 1999; Newman and Paasi 1998). Through the focus on the Tibet-Nepal border site, this present study seeks to contribute to this scholarship on the criminological interrogation of the impact of the criminalisation of migration and the examination of sovereignty, borders and migration through the experience of those who have crossed the border (Gerard and Pickering 2013; Ham, Segrave and Pickering 2013; Weber and Pickering 2011; Bosworth 2008; Weber and Wilson 2008; Weber 2007; Pickering and Weber 2006).
The concept of sovereign national borders, and the impact of border control on people, particularly irregular migrants, is at the core of this study. As the previous chapter demonstrated, the territorial borders around Tibet play a fundamental role in the nature of control exerted across the Tibetan plateau. Further, the border is a pervasive construct in Tibetan history, shaping the ongoing relationships between Tibet and China, and China and Nepal. Given the central role that the border plays in the historical and political context of the Tibetan border, this chapter will first look at what we know about the shifting nature of borders globally, and examine why and how borders are created and enforced. Drawing on examples from both non-democratic and democratic states primarily beyond the parameters of the Global North, this chapter highlights the importance of attending to different geopolitical contexts in the examination of borders and border control. The second part of the chapter looks more closely at the impact of borders both inside a state and around it. This draws extensively on the increasing focus within criminological scholarship that seeks to understand the impact of border enforcement for different populations. The final section lays out the analytical framework for this research which is informed by the idea of *technologies of control*. It draws out the key concepts from this scholarship that forms the basis of the approach to exploring irregular Tibetan border crossings.

### 3.1 Borders and sovereignty

This first section of the chapter looks briefly at how we understand the border across disciplines as a distinct construct and feature of the modern nation-state. Green contends that a theoretical understanding of both why and how borders are constructed is vital, indicating that the ‘meaning, purpose and qualities of the border … are likely to inform the building of borders as well as the subsequent activities and practices that generate how borders engage
with, and help to create the world in their own image’ (2010, p. 261). Borders are a fundamental feature of the national transformation processes that characterised the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries (Agnew 2008; Newman 2006; Held 2000; Hannerz 1997), and in light of this, for the purposes of this chapter, the border is first and foremost a line drawn by states in and around their territory. However, as the scholarship on borders has demonstrated, borders evolved to attract different meanings, roles and functions; all of which will be explored in this section.

Borders, in their simplest form, are ‘lines separating sovereign territories’ (Newman & Paasi 1998, p.198). Yet, in practice these borders represent an array of complex interactions and processes between the economic, social, political and cultural contexts in which they manifest. In a social context, borders are often typified as ‘multi-dimensional phenomena, directing and manifesting themselves in various institutional and everyday practices’ (Prokkola 2009, p.21). Alternatively, in what could be a legal or policy context, Salter suggests that a border is an ongoing state of exception that is often based on a prior assumption of the authority to define a particular territory (2007: 2). In anthropological studies, Donnan and Wilson (1999) argue that the border is a construct premised on the major changes in the strengths and weaknesses of the nation-state and the associated social, political and economic processes. This perspective draws attention the volatile nature of the border and its use by the nation-state. Then, from a geopolitical perspective, borders typically define and contain a state’s sovereign power within its territory. In her examination of the Israel-Palestinian Separation Wall, Busbridge (2013) suggests that borders – which in this context is the wall between an occupied territory and another state – are a ‘multipurpose technology for controlling and regulating space, bodies and populations’ (2013, p. 685). Examining borders more specifically as a tool of the state, Busbridge (2013) builds on the concept of walls and
barriers to explain how efforts to control a population or territory via a border are largely about legitimising sovereignty.

This summary of various border conceptualisations highlights the indisputable relationship between borders and the state, which is premised on the need to establish, exert and maintain sovereignty. While he later contested the relevance of sovereignty to contemporary nation-states, Agnew (2005) does recognise that, traditionally, sovereignty – and the ability to enforce the associated authority – was tied to a territory. He argues that all claims made by a political authority regarding state sovereignty are associated with a strictly bounded territory from an external world (2005, p. 437). Referring here to the historical evolution of the border as defining a nation’s sovereignty that ensued following the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648, Agnew argues that sovereignty can be practised ‘non-territorially’, and that authority (via sovereign rights) is not necessarily predicated on strict or fixed territorial boundaries. If sovereignty is not bound to territory, however, the relevance, role and nature of borders come into question, and the relationship between the state and the individual comes to the fore.

While there is seemingly a disconnect with the ongoing relevance of borders where contemporary understandings of sovereignty are not strictly attached to territory (and therefore borders), the two concepts are still inextricably linked. Therefore, the experience of migrants cannot be understood in the absence of an exploration of the changing relationship between the two, not least because crossing the border is not an equally accessible or viable options to all. There has been significant scholarship dedicated to understanding the transformation of the border under conditions of globalisation (see, for example, Sassen 2008b; Pècoud and Gutchteneire 2006; Agnew 2005). Pècoud and Gutchteneire argue that,
from a ‘globalist’ perspective, globalisation ultimately ‘justifies the weakening of national borders’ (2006: 76). While traditional border functions were limited to inclusion and exclusion (Banerjee 2011; Franko Aas 2007), some claim that borders now also determine who benefits from the institutionalisation of the bordering process, and from the removal or opening of borders (Moraczewska 2010). This line of thought suggests that, in a globalised context, the idea of the sovereign nation-state is becoming ‘fragile and increasingly mediated by regional and global flows and processes’ (Held 2000: 396). Drawing on the example of the labour market, which is a historically informed insight, between the 1970s and 1990s borders were renegotiated and reconstituted by states, particularly in the Global North, to meet the demand for inexpensive labour, among other issues. Bolstered by an institutional and societal shift away from agrarian lifestyles in the Global South, this demand was met by an increasingly wage-dependent and highly mobile population seeking better lives in more developed countries (Hugo 2012; Wonders 2007). Driven by the growth of global capitalism, borders had to be opened to allow access to this inexpensive labour market (Wonders 2007).

The body of work that examines the implications of globalisation also attends to the relationship between the constantly changing patterns of human mobility and the border as an increasingly securitised and hardened structure, and much of this work concludes that borders are far from being extinct in contemporary state systems (see, for example, Pickering 2011; Weber and Pickering 2011; Wonders 2006). In their examination of the securitisation of borders, Gerard and Pickering (2012) argue that borders are reconstructed and reinstituted by the state to address a perceived crisis in the state’s authority, legitimacy and sovereignty under increasingly globalised conditions. This perceived crisis is arguably informed by the interpretation of uncontrolled or irregular migration as ‘an affront to sovereignty’ (Dauvergne 2004: 598) and to a nation-state’s ability to control or ‘protect’ its borders. Van Houtum and
Van Naerssn (2001) draw on the work of Bauman (1998, 2000), Urry (2000) and Smith (2000) to reiterate this, highlighting that, while calls for border ‘openness’ are typically confined to debates about economic liberalisation, the need to (re)strengthen borders to effectively claim and control access to territorial spaces plagues the debate around responses to refugees, asylum seekers and other irregular migrant populations and highlights the failure in recognising that borders produce irregular migration. Whether it is referred to as ‘selective openness’ (Van Houtum & Van Naerssn 2001) or ‘porosity’ (Wonders 2007), borders either hinder or facilitate human mobility, largely dictated by an individual’s economic and social resources and utility. Franko Aas describes refers to the ‘two contradicting impulses’ (2007: 292) of the state with regard to controlling migration: on the one hand, the desire to increasingly securitise and often militarise borders to defend against perceived threats to the nation, while on the other, creating avenues for the economically and socially privileged to participate in the new ‘world economic order’ (Franko Aas 2007: 292).

In light of the constantly changing globalised nation-state system, and the challenges that globalisation presents, Busbridge (2013) argues that sovereignty is an ambitious concept, and the ability of modern states to achieve it has largely been exposed as fiction. This, however, has not stopped nations building walls, borders and boundaries in the name of sovereignty (Busbridge 2013; Jones 2012). While some continue to question the role of sovereignty in a globalised world (Castles 2010, 2002; Agnew 2005), the construction of (some) migrants (most often those from the Global South) as criminals and a threat to the national identity (Wonders 2007) has demonstrated that sovereignty is not only resilient, but also transformative (Sassen 1996), and has an innate and persistent relationship with borders. This latter perspective is particularly evident when borders shift from physical lines to lines used
to mark difference based on socioeconomic status, language, culture, education and political affiliation (Sassen 2000). Borders no longer only exist at the state line; rather, they occur in the middle of cultural, social, economic and political spaces (Franko Aas 2007). Vukov and Sheller (2012) reiterate this, highlighting that borders are both multiplying and fractionalising, and as a result are increasingly permeating all social relationships. Similarly, Varsyani and Nevins (2007) contend they are increasingly woven throughout the nation by marking those who cross it as either an insider or an outsider (see also Weber and Bowling 2013).

As the global flows of migrants’ increase in size and expand their geographic reach, research suggests that efforts to retain sovereignty have become more formalised and, as Turner (2007) claims, rigid. Whether it is alongside, or as a result of, the revival of national identity, criminalising or marginalising discourse premised on protecting against foreign threats increasingly forms part of national security and border control (Franko Aas 2007). In the context of broader migration, Wonders explains that the paradoxical state of borders is illustrative of tensions that arise from ‘the need for cheap labour and economic migration and the need to limit [access to] rights historically associated with citizenship’ (2007: 37). Given the combined impact of the fear of terrorism globally, there has been mounting pressure to ‘build a wall around the West’ (Andreas and Snyder 2000 as cited by Wonders 2007: 37) to legitimise the state’s authority and role in protecting its citizens. While the complexity of this situation is beyond the scope of this research, it does draw attention to the bifurcation of migration, whereby the tensions arising from the distinction between economic immigrants and immigrants seeking asylum and protection have created a binary between ‘in vs. out [and/or] acceptance vs. refusal’ that continues to undermine the complexity of the drivers of different types of migration (Van Houtum & Van Naesser 2001). It is this bifurcation that not
only reinforces the paradox of borders, but also draws attention to the mechanisms that at once foster and impede the unnecessarily differentiated and categorised types of human mobility that are created in the name of maintaining and protecting the nation-state.

What this brief exploration of borders, sovereignty and globalisation demonstrates is that borders have not disappeared, rather, they are ephemeral, and constantly changing in light of the shifting relevance and nature of the nation-state. In particular, they are drawn and redrawn in response to shifts in society under conditions of globalisation and emerging patterns of mass human mobility. Borders created in the name of sovereignty were never just geographical lines – they are created via a series of processes, practices and rhetoric that function to perform and enforce the traditional notion of sovereignty. This speaks to the transformative role of the border; a nature the is defined by the constantly changing role of the border in relation to the socio-political context in which it is constructed, and the way in which it is adapted once that context changes. In line with the conceptualisation of the transformative role of the border, this chapter now examines the border as a performance of sovereignty as opposed to a territorially defined delineation of it, and explores how this affects people differentially.

3.2 Border control and the performance of sovereignty

Contemporary borders are inherently paradoxical and, as Wonders (2008) explains, semi-permeable: for some categories of people, borders are open and facilitate mobility, whereas for others the border is a place, a concept and a line that is both restrictive and, at times, violent. In an era when the bifurcation of migration categorises some people as a threat to national identity, security and sovereignty, borders are increasingly characterised by
securitisation and militarisation. This distinction between migration types informs Balibar’s (2002) argument that borders are inherently polysemic, in that they are experienced differently by different groups of people. This notion of difference is a prominent feature of a growing body of research within criminology. In Franko Aas’s analysis of world mobility and its influence on criminology, she argues that ‘globally connected and locally disconnected, global networks and flows introduce qualitatively different experiences of social ordering and exclusion’ (2007: 284). This argument underpins this thesis – the different experiences of people who interact with the border, and how those experiences are shaped by borders is important and we must attend to bordering practices in diverse contexts to understand the impact and outcome of that crossing.

3.2.1 Borders and how they are shaped by their context and history

In looking specifically at the lived experiences of irregular migrants at border crossings, Villegas argues that migrants at the border are ‘faced with an assemblage of individuals, processes and requirements that assert the sovereignty of the nation they are [trying to enter]’ (2015, p.2357). In this view, borders are not only about an expression or performance of sovereignty, they also represent the negotiation of the associated structures designed to enforce them (Villegas 2015). Therefore, to understand the nature of border crossings, any analysis must attend to both the migrant’s lived experience and the socio-political and historical context. In addition to looking at the lived experience of particular groups, the literature highlights the importance of examining the particular context around the border and how these shape the border-crossing experience. A unique feature of this study is the fact that the border in question is enforced by a communist, and arguably authoritarian, government. The scarcity of literature on the sovereign performance within such a context highlights a need to explore the questions about how a state’s regime type influences both the nature of the border, and subsequently the experience of border crossers.
The majority of the research on borders and border control comes from countries which are almost exclusively industrialised democracies with pluralist political regimes (Light 2012). Given Tibet’s geographical location, the regime type in China and the situation in Tibet, I draw on the empirical and theoretical research on borders attached to authoritarian state regimes, such as the nature of the borders of the Former Soviet Union (Light 2012), and states that are occupied, such as the occupied territory of Palestine (Azarov 2014; Busbridge 2013). The nature of these borders are explored here to ground this present study in, and build on what is already known about borders outside democratic, pluralistic nation-states.

Light (2012) examines the Former Soviet Union’s migration policies in an effort to illustrate how different regime types can influence broad patterns of human mobility via regulation. What is pertinent to the present study is how these regulations shaped borders, and what mechanisms were used to enforce them. Light’s work refers to the period between the Russian Revolution in 1917 and the Soviet Union’s dissolution in 1991. In retracing the history of the Union’s migration regulations, he explains that the key features were policies designed to minimise (and at times eliminate) emigration and immigration, the implementation of severe limits on foreign travel and the systematic bureaucratic control of internal migration. Underpinning the restrictions on movement was the need to control outside perceptions of the situation inside the Soviet Union; therefore, the emigration of dissidents was halted to prevent ‘unfavourable’ reports reaching the outside world. Efforts to contain dissidents were supported by the militarisation of the western borders, in particular, complete closure of most border crossings and the construction of surveillance systems to enforce the prohibition of emigration. While the territorial borders were being securitised,
there were also contingent and mutually reinforcing internal borders intended to control movement in and around the Soviet Union countries. This included the establishment of closed cities, wherein citizens had to be registered to live, and movement in and out of the city was controlled by ‘address bureaus’ and the popiska system (resident permits) (Light 2012; Gang and Stuart 1999). Light explains that:

As applied to migration, while physical borders and lethal violence could be deployed at the border to prevent unauthorised exit, on a routine basis what proved more important was the everyday functioning of a bureaucratic migration control apparatus comprised of … police, passports and address bureaus and other agencies, all working to deter and punish non-compliance. (2012, p. 14)

Light (2012) argues that the internal and external borders were mutually reinforcing and characterised by a ‘culture of control and surveillance’; by removing the option to leave, the state ensured that people had little choice but to comply. Compliance was largely related to the Stalinist economic program of nationalisation of businesses and the collectivisation of agriculture. When famine and economic hardship hit the Union’s population as a result, the controls and efforts targeting their mobility were tightened so that the Union could capitalise on citizen labour (Light 2012). The consequences of non-compliance were backed by criminal legislation and sanctions ranging from fines, to imprisonment and/or hard labour (Light 2012). Despite this, Light indicates that the efforts to enforce compliance were not completely effective, as people still managed to flee the country. There is evidence of bribery and corruption that undermined the mobility restrictions, and unauthorised and
undocumented internal migrants living in what were referred to as the ‘closed’ cities (see also Gang and Stuart 1999).

The Chinese hukou system draws heavily on the Soviet Union’s Stalinist approach to internal migration regulation, in particular (see Fan 2011), with household registration and restrictions on rural to urban ‘unplanned’ migration. Officially implemented in 1951 as a measure to ‘[maintain] social peace and order, safeguard people’s security and protecting their freedom of residence and movement’ (Lui 2005, p. 135), by 1955 the system had shifted its focus to controlling growing unplanned migration via household registration requirements (Lui 2005). In 1958, the ‘fully-fledged’ hukou system was adopted into legislation, providing the state with broader powers in controlling the movement of citizens around the country through a suite of permits, residency registration, and recruitment and enrolment certificates. Beyond the role of regulating population mobility, Chan and Zhiang described the system as a mechanism of much broader social control:

Unlike population registration systems in many other countries, the Chinese system was designed not merely to provide population statistics and identify personal status, but also directly to regulate population distribution and serve many other important objectives desired by the state. In fact, the hukou system is one of the major tools of social control employed by the state. (1999, p. 818)

A more flexible policy has been adopted across mainland China since the 1980s. There are now temporary registration residential cards and the blue card is available for anyone with a
legitimate business or job to travel and reside in the city and access the same benefits available to those with permanent residency status (Lui 2005). This system of temporary migration into the city is also available to students from rural areas who attend schools in the city; however, these students must pay substantially higher tuition fees than those paid by local students. Despite the flexibility of the current system, research has found that it creates and sustains ongoing inequality between rural and urban residents (Lui 2005); and while earlier studies indicated that those who illegally migrated (referred to as the ‘floating population’ by the 1980s) were not directly punished for doing so, it was very hard for them to survive outside their place of registration (Chan and Zhiang 1999). The similarities between the migration regulation system of the Former Soviet Union and the Chinese hukou system are embedded in the efforts to control the mobility of citizens inside their defined territory. While these two examples demonstrate that the way in which these internal borders are enforced has implications for the population, there is little available research that examines how, and why, people sought to cross those borders. The research explored here on the Chinese hukou system does not explicitly discuss Tibet, nor does it indicate that Tibet experienced the same form of migration control. While there is evidence that the population control efforts formed part of the early occupation and now the contemporary policy context, the research explored here does not claim to provide insight into the situation in Tibet or within similar ethnic minorities; however, it does highlight the significance of population control in the Chinese context.

To turn to a comparably complex immigration policy context, the occupation of Palestine illustrates how immigration legislation and control can be used to effectively shape and control the nature and type of borders, and therefore migration flows. Since the 1967
occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, Israel has effectively managed to identify and exclude a large proportion of the Palestinian population. It has done so through a range of legal instruments designed to control who could enter, who could leave and who could reside within the contested territory. In 1967, the Israeli Government conducted a census that informed the creation of the Palestinian population registry, which was then used as the basis to issue a series of migration- and movement-related policies intended to ‘control freedom of movement, immigration, residency and nationality of the occupied territory’s Palestinian residents’ (Azarov 2014: 329). Azarov explains that:

[A] person must be included in the population registry to obtain travel documents, which in turn enable movement both internally and abroad and determine access to a range of movement dependent rights, such as the rights to work, education and medical care. (2014: 329)

These policies included the requirement to obtain an ‘exit permit’ to be able to leave. If people did not return within the period specified on the permit, they were unable to return to their homes. In the three decades between the initial occupation and 1994, the Israeli Government excluded a total of 130,000 individuals from the registry, which meant that they could no longer enter the Palestinian territory, and were effectively denied the right to return to, and reside in, their home country permanently (Azarov 2014). The government’s justifications for refusing Palestinians the right to return were often based on ‘security considerations’ resulting from the political instability of the Palestinian territory. By 1984, successful applications to re-enter the contested Palestinian territory were limited to very
unique family reunification and humanitarian cases; and a year later, all applications, including visitor permits, were denied.

In Busbridge’s (2013) more recent examination of the performance of sovereignty in this context, she argues:

[the] ‘Separation Wall’ between Israel and Palestine is a ‘spectacle of sovereignty in the sense that [walls and borders] materially and territorially enact the claims of the sovereign state, expressing the inviolability of borders and the supremacy of the State. (2013, p. 659)

The walls, boundaries and borders examined in the Palestinian context are complicated by the Israeli occupation; the performance of borders is not enacted by Palestinians themselves, but arguably against and around them by another state. If borders are the performance of sovereignty, but the legitimacy of sovereignty is questioned, the notion of borders as legal, social and spatial performances that extend across geographical sites is further reinforced. What differentiates the example of the Former Soviet Union and the occupied territory of Palestine from other countries of origin or migration corridors is the distinct geopolitical context in which sovereignty is performed, and the reasons why it is performed. In both cases – an authoritarian regime and an occupied state – the borders functioned as more of an internal containment of an ‘other’. In the case of the Former Soviet Union, dissidents were restricted from leaving. The situation in Palestine arguably embodies both inclusion and exclusion in that Israel sought to restrict movement both into and out of the contested
territory. Importantly, however, while there are similarities between the occupied and authoritarian regimes explored here, the dissonance between the nature of the sovereign performance in each context highlights the importance of identifying the distinctions between different borders in different contexts.

The complexities of borders and border controls also draw attention to the impact that these different geopolitical constructs have on the ability of people to migrate, and the nature of that migration. However, it also raises questions about the reasons why people migrate and the meaning of that migration. If the border is a performance of sovereignty, then crossing it may undermine or disrupt that performance. The articulation of border crossing would therefore go beyond one of the various forms of migration, to become attached to notions of disruption, resistance and politicisation. The literature and examples explored in this section of the chapter lead to one of the key questions underpinning this study: how does the border performance manifest at this distinct geopolitical site?

3.2.2 Impacts of the sovereign performance – experiences of borders and border crossings

Differences in the border performance are inextricably linked to the border-crossing experience. There is a growing body of research within criminology that examines the way that the border shapes particular migratory experiences. For some, those experiences are characterised by their ability to enter the country freely, and to access the rights that come with that ability and freedom. For others, the border crossing experience is characterised by violence, irregularity and restricted access to entry, and therefore to rights (Kaneti and Assis
Mechlinski argues that understanding the way migrants, particularly illegal migrants, navigate and experience borders requires a focus on how they ‘engage with border security in a highly ritualized and scripted interaction’ (2010:97). He contends that, by examining these scripted interactions, we can see how borders are created by the various performances that constitute the everyday lives of people who encounter them. This then requires not only an examination of the social, political and legal context that informs the creation and enforcement of the border, but also the individual-level experience of actually crossing it.

In order to understand the different expressions of the border performance and experiences of it, Prokkola suggests that ‘we should look at how the structures and forms of practice have developed historically in the context of that particular border region’ (2009: 27). In Mechlinski’s (2010) analysis, he indicates that Africa’s borders have been defined by events that have occurred in the adjacent borderlands. Research on these borders reveals that traditional African notions of borders defined them as ‘zones of contact … a link, or bond between neighboring groups, as opposed to a discrete limiter of space, and that its permeability was part of its function’ (Mechlinski 2010: 98). Alternatively, Njoh argues that, during the colonisation period, the African borderlands then became characterised by ‘the application of force involving the manipulation of the built environment [including] the use of visible objects, such as fences to enclose the residential areas of Europeans, or “enframe” workers’ camps, and military barracks’ (2009:302). The border performativity thus shifted to become ‘coloured by the continent’s history of colonization where the colonial powers imposed arbitrary borders that often divided people belonging to the same tribal or ethnic group’ (Mechlinski 2010:97). This is not unique to Africa, as many borders and boundaries
are arguably a relic of pre-contemporary states or, as in the case of Thailand, industrialisation. Across the Mekong River between Thailand and Laos PDR, for example, the border performance is evident in the requirement and effort of border authorities to remove unauthorised workers, particularly from Laos PDR. The lack of job opportunities and the low wages in Laos, combined with the high demand for low-skilled, cheap labour in Thailand, has sustained relatively unregulated labour migration across the Thai–Lao border – which has historically been the Mekong River (Luanglatbandith & Leuangkhasmsing 2016; Phouxay 2010; World Bank 2006). Despite the historical trade and labour patterns and the arbitrary establishment of the border, by law Lao people in particular are supposed to be returned to Laos if found working in or entering Thailand without the required authorisation (Archavanitkul & Hall 2011; Rukumnuaykit 2009).

Seeking to understand the nature of borders via the lived experience is not unique to the present research, and there is a growing body of literature that does this. While there is a much larger body of work drawn from migration experiences from the Global North, the borders, border control and geopolitical context of nations from the Global South are of more interest to this study. In light of this interest, I first draw on a body of work that looks at border-crossing experiences in South Asia. In addition to revealing the nature of the border and the broader performance of control and sovereignty, research by scholars from India, in particular, demonstrates that not only are borders experienced differently, but they are also interpreted and therefore navigated differently by different groups of people. Banerjee and Chaudhury’s (2011) exploration of women’s experiences in various Indian borderlands illustrates what are highly contextual experiences, while also providing insight into the nature of Indian borders. They argue that South Asian borders resemble traditional
conceptualisations of the border in that their role is often one of inclusion and exclusion. Their work demonstrates that there is an inherent ambiguity associated with South Asian borders and the lands that surround them which leads to increased vulnerability, particularly for women. This is largely because of the cultural and political context at different border sites and the way in which borders are created. For example, after Bangladesh became independent, both India and Bangladesh sought to establish a formal border along the 2000-kilometre stretch of land that now separates the two countries. This led to what Mehta describes as:

India [being] increasingly focused on enacting militarised and violent border control practices along the country’s eastern border with Bangladesh. Large expenditures were being made towards expanding the number of troops, fencing the border, and establishing technologies of control and surveillance. (India PT 2013, Service IAN 2014, as cited by Mehta 2016, p. 291)

Mehta’s quote regarding the Indo-Bangladeshi border illustrates how this border was characterised by displays of militarisation and violence. In addition to this militarisation, India sought to reinforce its sovereignty by introducing legislation that prevented people from crossing the border. Regardless of the historical, cultural and economic ties between communities on either side of the Indo-Bangladeshi border and the historically permeable nature of this border area, India continually sought to establish it as impermeable. One of the primary approaches it adopted in seeking to achieve this was the introduction of legislation that effectively ‘protects state sovereignty’ (Mehta 2016, p. 292). The legislation provided the framework to identify citizens, and criminalise non-citizens, in India (see Foreigners Act...
1946), the latter of whom could be sentenced to up to five years in prison. Both Mehta’s (2016) and Banerjee and Chaudhury’s (2011) studies demonstrate how these particular border performances changed the way that people experienced the border. The participants in Mehta’s research reported not actually knowing what a border was, where the Indo-Bangladeshi border was or what it meant, and, as a result, they did not necessarily understand why they were imprisoned. Regardless, not only did crossing the border unaware result in their criminalisation, but the cultural and social impact of their imprisonment (when they could not pay their fines) also led to increased feelings of marginalisation and disempowerment (Mehta 2016).

What is pertinent for the present research is that while these two studies were conducted at different times, and in different specific border sites, both demonstrate that border performances have implications for how people interacted with or witnessed the different performances. For example, Banjee and Chaudhury (2011) drew on the experience of two writers living near the border near Char Meghnar in Bangladesh, and its enforcement, who described this border as follows:

To assert that the control of the border still belongs to them, the border security on both ends sporadically do a well-orchestrated show of national safety through aggression. It is then that one witnesses the elaborate flexing of muscles and the violent exchange of fire and mortar. (Two chroniclers, as cited by Banerjee and Chaudhury 2011:36)

Both its history (see Mehta’s quote above regard the violent and militarised border) and the
experience of witnesses of this border area highlight its militarised and violent nature. According to Banerjee and Chaudhury (2011), the lack of regulation and control or lawlessness that surrounded these borders meant that women were often the primary targets of violence and crime. Similarly, in Mehta’s (2016) study on Indian borders, she found that women who came into contact with the border following Bangladesh achieving independence, were subject to serious legal and social consequences. All the women in Mehta’s study had been imprisoned for crossing the Bangladesh-Indian border irregularly, highlighting not only the ‘androcentric, abstract’ nature of the border, but also the how the sanctions associated with crossing it effectively characterised the performance of that specific border. Further, it illustrates how there are often specific contextual borders that create particular experiences, which in these two studies are gendered in nature. The gendered border experience has been the focus of a growing body of work by criminologists seeking to introduce a voice that has previously been neglected (see for example Pickering 2011). While gender does not form a substantial part of the analysis for the present study, the aim is to draw attention to the experience of a particular group that have largely remained in the peripheries of border criminologies.

The border performance and associated negative experiences are not unique to the Global South. In 2009, the Canadian Government implemented a visa scheme for Mexican citizens to enter Canada to stem an increasing number of refugee applications (Citizenship and Immigration Canada 2009 as cited by Villegas 2015). Villegas argues that the introduction of the scheme was accompanied by ‘discursive, affective and material work to enact its sovereignty through practices of exclusion and removal’ (2015, p. 2362). In the interviews Villegas conducted with Mexican migrants with a precarious immigration status suggested
that during migration interviews, in particular, they were faced with humiliating and confronting experiences. The impact of border enforcement was also highlighted by Gerard and Pickering (2013) in their examination of refugee women’s journey from the Horn of Africa to the EU. The research highlighted the potential for both direct and structural violence during the migration process. Their research found that 11 of the 26 women interviewed had experienced direct violence during their journey across the desert towards Europe, specifically Malta (Gerard and Pickering 2013, pp. 356). This occurred against the backdrop of increased EU border securitisation targeting ‘irregular migration’ by displacing the responsibility for preventing departures from Africa towards Europe into the hands of North African states, including Libya, Tunisia and Morocco (Gerard and Pickering 2012; see also Betts 2016). These additional examples reinforce the notion that borders and the way they are enforced and performed can have detrimental impacts on people trying to cross them, particularly those attempting to cross without authorisation. Many of these migration corridors, however, have been the focus of academic research and interrogation – both in regard to the experience and outcome for migrants, and the nature of border control. This brings me to another of the key research questions for this study: what is the experience of Tibetans crossing the Tibet-Nepal border?

3.3 Technologies of control – a framework to understand the border performance and its influence on migration

The exploration of the empirical and theoretical literature above brings to the fore the research questions driving this research: how does the border performance manifest at distinct geopolitical sites, and what influence does this have on border-crossing experiences? More specifically, how are borders performed on the Tibet-Nepal border as a specific geopolitical
site, and what implications does this have for Tibetans seeking to leave Tibet? While the research on border enforcement is increasingly coming from places beyond the Global North, there is an opportunity to build on, and contribute to the way we understand the geopolitical influences on borders and their impact on migrants by examining the way they are enforced and experienced beyond the traditional sites of inquiry. In light of the assumptions made above regarding the transformative nature of the border, the way that this changes in distinct geopolitical contexts and the implications that the border performance can have for migrants is a focus of this study. To do so, I use the scholarship on ‘technologies of control’ as a way to structure the analysis and map the context in which the Tibet-Nepal border exists, against the experience of irregular Tibetan migrants.

Within criminology there is a growing body of scholarship that examines the different ‘technologies of control’ that are created and deployed in response to the perceived loss of or inability to control and protect nation-state borders. The idea of ‘technologies of control’ captures a multiplicity of practices, many of which are beyond the state apparatus of the border; it also captures the administrative systems, the ways in which welfare is accessed and provided (or not) and the social systems that either support or hinder integration. Of more relevance to this research however, are the technologies that are attached to the function of the border. These range from the political rhetoric that creates, justifies and enforces the perceived threats that some migrants pose to the nation-state (Wonders 2006), to the organisational architecture that facilitates the ‘semi-permeability’ of borders. These technologies then translate into more tangible practices that enforce border control measures designed to categorise, identify and then assess whether or not to permit the entry of migrants based on their perceived (and often proven) social and economic desirability.
For example, Dauvergne (2004) examined how immigration legislation demonstrates how the law itself can be a technology of control in that its underlying purpose is to ‘crack down’ on the threats posed to the state by globalisation and irregular migration. It is the law that legalises the detention and deportation of ‘illegal’ migrants, which draws attention to the work of Bosworth (2008) and Weber (2013), who illustrate how nation-states create ‘visible and virtual’ borders to govern and control the different types of migration. Beyond such legislation are the internal policing strategies and mechanisms and the role of victim-focused policing and rhetoric that responds to the threats associated with trafficking and other forms of transnational organised crime, such as people or migrant smuggling (Ham and Pickering, 2014; Ham, Segrave and Pickering 2013; Segrave 2009; Pickering 2004).

In Wonders’s (2006) analysis of semi-permeable borders, she argues that by examining the mechanisms of control that are adopted at borders, the underlying ideologies and anticipated outcomes become more transparent. This research draws on two distinct technologies: immigration policies and legislation, and enforcement infrastructure. Exploring these two technologies specifically in relation to this research for two reasons: The first is the historical and social significance attached the border in the Tibetan context, and the second is the overarching aim of the research to understand the border crossing experience of irregular Tibetan migrants at the individual level, and what elements of the border shaped that experience. Given that the way in which the border was controlled and enforced was not the focus of this study, the participant experiences were not examined to identify the presence of these technologies of control; rather, the literature provided a reference point to explore the nature of this border, and the way that it shaped irregular migrant experiences.
3.3.1 Immigration legislation and policies

Dauvergne (2004) argues that contemporary public and political rhetoric has given way to the expansion of immigration law as ‘the last bastion of sovereignty’ (2004: 588) and a tool to respond to the threats posed by irregular migration. This has also been recognised within the criminal justice and risk scholarship, with Simon (1997 as cited by Bosworth & Guild 2008) explaining that approaches to migration are driven by the rhetoric that assumes opportunity, deception and criminality are key characteristics of irregular migrants. This has resulted in the need to control not only migrants, but also their access to legal entitlements and rights, and the migration routes into the country. This is representative of a trend referred to as ‘governing through migration control’ (see Bosworth & Guild 2008). The scholarship on this form of control demonstrates how various national policies and legislation have been constructed in a way that limits some migrants’ access to the country, their rights while in the nation, and their ability to stay in that country once they arrive.

It would be amiss to neglect the significant contribution that the relatively recent crimmigration scholarship has made to this particular issue, as it has sought to articulate the conflation of immigration and criminal law. Stumpf explains that:

the convergence of immigration and criminal law brings to bear only the harshest elements of each area of law, and the apparatus of the state is used to expel from society those deemed criminally alien. The undesirable result is an ever-expanding population of the excluded and alienated. (2006: 378)
The implications of this conflation have been well documented, and include an increase in the number of non-citizens being detained and deported, and subject to a raft of punishments typically contained within the realms of criminal justice sanctions. This has been explored in the Australian context, for example, where Australia’s punitive immigration and detention policy has been justified via the creation of asylum seekers as criminals (the crimmigrant) (Van Berlo 2015). Van Berlo (2015) illustrates this by highlighting how the narrative around Operation Sovereign Borders creates public panic about human trafficking, people smuggling and deaths at sea to justify major policy approaches, including regional processing facilities and boat turn-backs (see also Weber 2007). It could be argued that the immigration–criminal legislation conflation was also evident in the Former Soviet Union migration regulations, where crossing either internal or external borders attracted fines, imprisonment or hard labour – sanctions that were detailed in criminal legislation (Light 2012). This scholarship on crimmigration largely focuses on the implications of crimmigration for non-citizens within a nation-state, and is important to the present research as it demonstrates how the convergence of different policy processes nationally can have international (or at least extraterritorial) consequences.

There are a range of complex intersections between domestic and international law that fall outside the scope of this thesis; however, as discussed above, the situation in Palestine goes some way towards illustrating the utility of immigration law in responding to unwanted migration, and, ultimately, unwanted presence within a specified territory. If we consider that a fundamental driver of immigration policies globally is to (re)establish sovereignty, then being able to create and control the mobility and presence of a particular population within

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8 Operation Sovereign Borders is Australia’s immigration policy, which is largely underpinned by notions of prevention and deterrence. The policy provides the legal mandate for Australia to engage in turning back asylum seeker boats, and offshore regional processing.
that territory is vital (Dauvergne 2004). Israel’s approach to immigration allowed it to effectively expand its own territorial borders to capture Palestine, control exit and entry into the now highly disputed territory, and coordinate the migration of its own citizens into the occupied territory – activities that are largely related to migration and sovereignty. Azarov reiterates this, explaining that:

> the scope and extent of Israel’s administration and regulation of immigration and nationality in the occupied territory resembles very closely … the exercise of sovereign authority to decide upon the criteria of citizenship, including the exercise of its prerogative to deprive the residents of that territory of their residency status and rights. (2014: 25)

Where much of the scholarship has looked at the way in which immigration laws are used to re-establish national sovereignty, this example builds our understanding of technologies of control by demonstrating how similar legal infrastructure were used to control and contain the mobility of the Palestinians. This is illustrative of Dauvergne’s contention that ‘migration laws are essential to the construction of such nations because in order for the nation to exist it must have both members and boundaries’ (2004: 590). While the status of Tibet remains highly contentious and unresolved, the processes deployed by China in regard to citizenship and migration are reminiscent of what is occurring in Palestine. It is not the intention to compare and contrast, yet these two examples do highlight a direction to build the understanding of the way immigration laws and policies influence and shape the lived experience of border crossings. The conceptual framing of immigration law as a technology
of control in this context both extends our understanding of borders, sovereignty and migration, and moves beyond traditional understanding of this particular technologies application.

### 3.3.2 Organisational infrastructure and border enforcement

McDowell and Wonders (2009) contend that governments use the fear of illegal migration and loss of control of the border to justify to the citizen population the institution of surveillance and border enforcement practices. In drawing on Foucauldian literature and commentary around the deployment of the banopticon, McDowell and Wonders (2009) explain how the state surveillance systems that operate on and around borders are adopted to discipline migrants, typically involving a series of performances intended to redraw and redefine moral homogeneity through the refortification of national identity against the ‘other’.

Similarly, Packer argues that the technological shift within the context of border control has been based on a shift from the ‘Foucauldian disciplinary state to a Deleuzian “control” state, in which information, tracking and algorithmic prediction are crucial’ (2008, as cited by Vukov & Sheller 2012: 228). Packer is referring here to the information systems that are increasingly prevalent across borders and the labour that is involved in deploying these systems. These systems are implemented through a raft of different institutions and infrastructure that is constantly being built on and around the territorial borders of nation-states. Weber’s work on both the ‘visible and virtual borders’ refers to this in the context of borders being made visible to justify sovereignty. In this regard, she describes:

- the risk-based visa regimes, the network of overseas liaison officers, carrier liability legislation that requires airline staff to deny boarding to inadequately documented migrants … and advanced passenger processing technology that directs these
decisions via processes of remote control and only minimal human intervention.

(2013: 668)

Whether via border control infrastructure at airports, at land crossings or within territorial waters, the surveillance and actuarial technologies are deployed to effectively pre-empt and prevent the entrance of those considered to be a threat to the nation-state. The process of establishing a criminalising rhetoric, it is argued, in turn justifies the establishment of immigration law that supports and the creation of security-focused organisations and architecture to enforce borders. Wonders explains that ‘the framing of some border crossers as illegal has legitimated the creation, financing and deployment of special forces charged with border patrol at the physical frontier, and in airports, government offices and other public spaces’ (2007: 19). Weber (2008) expands this argument to demonstrate how these practices have effectively de-territorialised the traditional territorial border as we understand it. The multiplication and movement of borders inward, and away from the territorial borders, are thought to be driven by the need to regain and enhance control over a diminishing sovereign space (Rukov & Sheller 2012). The cumulative impact of the deployment of these technologies of control has ultimately been the criminalisation, exclusion and marginalisation of irregular migrants. Wonders reiterates this, stating that ‘the nation-states create and facilitate illegal immigration by reinforcing the physical border, fostering rhetorical borders designed to criminalise and/or stigmatise border crossers and constructing regulatory regimes aimed at controlling border flows’ (2007: 37). The role of borders has arguably become more transparent in that they are now intentionally performed through rhetoric, legislation and technology to encourage some to cross borders, and to restrain others.
As the above literature demonstrates, border controls do not prevent or stop irregular migration; rather, they contribute to the continuation and expansion of irregular migration flows, with many arguing that these flows are merely shifted to more dangerous places along the border (Gerard & Pickering 2012; Weber & Pickering 2011; Wonders 2007; Schorf 2006). While Wonders (2007) does not attribute these controls as the sole cause of harms associated with border crossings, the fact that regularised and safe modes of passage are restricted via these constructs forces migrants to attempt dangerous journeys along irregular routes. A key feature of this is the emergence of people smugglers and transnational crime syndicates in the movement of migrants – used either to simply reach destination countries clandestinely or for the purposes of exploitation (Gallagher 2015; Brian & Lazcko 2014; Grewcock 2014; Pickering & Weber 2012). This is illustrated via the example of the 2015 South-East Asian migrant crisis. In May 2015, the Thai Government responded to the discovery of mass graves of Rohingya and Bangladeshi migrants on the Thai–Myanmar border with increased border controls, intensified border patrols, and the detention and subsequent deportation of migrants found on the border. The outcome was the displacement of irregular migrants – migrants simply sought the services of people smugglers and took to the Andaman Sea and the Bay of Bengal, which is an undeniably more dangerous route, resulting in thousands of migrants being stranded on boats, sold into forced labour or dying (see UNHCR 2015).

Where the focus has shifted away from addressing the causes of forced and irregular migration at the countries of origin, the response remains situated at the borders of the Global North – representing an indisputable contributing factor to the rise of migrant deaths during border crossings around the world. This literature is important for the present research for two reasons: first, it highlights the multitudes of ways that borders are enforced; and the
second, more pertinent, reason is that it draws attention to the consequences of this type of border enforcement. Be it the emergence of smuggling networks or the partaking in significantly more dangerous journeys by migrants, the infrastructure and enforcement practices shape the nature and, ultimately, the outcomes of migration experiences.

3.4 Theoretical directions and research questions

The theoretical foundations of this study are drawn from the empirical and theoretical interpretation and investigation of borders and border control. The literature examined primarily in the early section of this chapter demonstrates that borders are no longer geographical lines, and rather they manifest in different spaces and places as a performance of sovereignty. The transformative nature of borders is therefore in a constant state of change as a result of globalisation and the resultant responses to shifting trends in human mobility, particularly among those who move beyond the parameters of legally and socially acceptable pathways. The way the border is performed, however, depends on the nature of the state to which it is attached. The recognition of this via the exploration of borders in an authoritarian and occupied state highlights one of the fundamental questions of this study: how are borders created and enforced at different geopolitical sites? The consequences associated with crossing borders attached to authoritarian or occupied states draw attention to another point of inquiry for this study: if the border is in fact a performance of sovereignty, then the crossing of such a border undermines or disrupts that performance. This conclusion also speaks to the first research question about the experience of irregular Tibetan border crossings, but take it a step further in prompting a re-examination of border crossings as expressions of their resistance and therefore the meaning of crossing the border.
Recognition of the various ways the border is performed informed the exploration of research into how borders shape and impact different forms of migration. Based on research from India, in particular, it can be argued that the way the border is enforced can have negative outcomes for those who seek to cross it. Beyond that, the exploration of the border in India also highlighted the gendered nature of the experience, which, when combined with the other outcomes, prompted another research question for this thesis: how do borders shape migration experiences, and how does this differ at different geopolitical sites?

This chapter explores the nature of migration, and reiterates suggestions that research should be attuned to the context that supports or justifies the creation of the border, and how that informs the way the border is then enforced. This suggestion informed the decision to engage with the technologies of control literature. This body of work not only provides a framework with which to examine how borders are established and enforced at different and unique border sites, but its criminological underpinnings also prompt the mapping of the migrant experience against these control mechanisms. Further, it offers a way to conceptualise the experiences of different types of control that are attached to different border structures. Control, as explored throughout the analysis chapters, is both the reason for, and means of, implementing the border management and enforcement efforts that are at the centre of this study. Therefore, the analysis seeks to capture both the nature of the border and the border-crossing experience by being attuned to the way in which the control mechanisms – including actual policies and border infrastructure – manifest in individuals’ lived border-crossing experiences. By taking this approach to the analysis, this thesis will build on what we know about borders and border control, and the lived experience of border crossings.
Chapter 4: Methodology

This thesis examines the border performance and the irregular border-crossing experience of Tibetans leaving Tibet for Nepal and India. By looking at the way the border is performed via the experiences of participants, the intention is to contribute to the extant research by building a more nuanced and complex understanding of borders, border control and the associated implications for irregular migrants at a specific border site. Beyond its theoretical and empirical contributions, this thesis also documents Tibetan border-crossing experiences and therefore not only builds on what we know about this highly politicised population, but also provides insight into a largely untold part of their story – the border crossing.

Drawing on contemporary Tibetan history and the situation inside Tibet today (Chapter two) and the questions raised in regard to the nature of the border performance in a unique geopolitical context (Chapter three), this thesis aims to address the following research questions:

1. What is the border crossing experience of irregular Tibetan migrants fleeing Tibet to Nepal, and India?
2. How is the border performed in the geopolitical setting of Tibet, in relation to the unauthorized crossing of Tibetans to Nepal?
3. How does the way the border is performed shape the individual border crossing experience?
   a. What are the distinct features of the performance that shape that experience?

Beyond the empirical and theoretical contribution of this research, there are also important methodological considerations and contributions arising from undertaking research with the
highly politicised Tibetan diaspora: namely, the impact on my positionality throughout the fieldwork and research process more broadly, the challenges of identifying individual narratives from a highly politicised, historically driven and embedded collective narrative, and the realities of accessing information and accounts of traumatic events, which often, as discussed below, are never articulated aloud. To explore these issues, this chapter begins with an overview of the research design and the body of literature that underpins the decisions made with regards to the research methodology. This is followed by an account of the fieldwork and data collection, which includes a reflection on some of the associated ethical and practical challenges. The final section of the chapter provides an overview of the analytical framework and approach to analysing the interviews, including issues pertaining to silence and what is unsaid.

4.1 Research design

This study draws on primary qualitative data regarding the border-crossing experiences of irregular Tibetan migrants. It involved semi-structured interviews with Tibetans living in India who had left Tibet irregularly, with the aim of capturing the ‘lived experience’ of the border crossing (Eastmond 2007; Powell 2004). The structure of these interviews is discussed in more detail below. In addition to the interviews, I took fieldwork notes as means to capture more than just the participants story. Drawing on research that examines the utility of fieldwork notes (Maharaj 2016; Flick 2014), the notes were based on informal conversations about the community, the historical and political context in Tibet, my personal reflections on the nature of those conversations, and if there were any challenges to the assumptions that I held about the situation of Tibetans living in exile, and what was occurring in Tibet at the time. Beyond the reflections on my own perceptions, the fieldwork notes also captured my
personal reflections on the interviews, including the participants’ body language, positioning both during and after the interviews, and the overall feel of the interviews.

4.1.1 Influences on research design: a feminist approach to conducting interviews

The challenges related to conducting research on irregular migration are well documented (see Khosravi 2009; Bosworth & Guild 2008; Hudson 2007; Weber 2007; Pickering & Weber 2006; De Genova 2002), and issues such as inconsistent data collection, navigating gatekeepers, and the array of security issues facing both participants and researchers required consideration and navigation. In light of these issues, I took guidance from the body of literature examining and adapting the feminist research ethic. As Ackerly and True (2003) contend, feminist theory has made empirical work, particularly qualitative research, increasingly challenging as feminists encourage researchers to look beyond traditional methodological and ethical concerns to consider factors such as the power of epistemology, silences and the power relationships between the individual and the participant/s.

In 1990, Edwards (as cited by Haynes 2009: 224) argued that there were three principles upon which ‘feminist research’ ought to be based. The first is that it should examine women’s experiences as a marginalised but political voice. Within this, by examining an individual’s relationships and experiences within the context of their everyday life, we can begin to unbundle the nature of various social structures that determine particular experiences. Second, feminist research should be an ‘instrument for change’ and needs to consider the various relationships that shape research process. The third is that the researcher should be located intellectually and reflexively in the research. While this research did not privilege women’s voice, it did privilege the voice and experience of those whose stories are often
unheard and whose experiences offer important insights into the impact of border control practices within the context of authoritarian rule. As such, this earlier feminist scholarship laid the ground for undertaking this research in a way that sought to balance the desire to privilege the voice of participants while recognising the broader influences on their personal experiences and the role that I as a researcher played in the research process.

The scholarship that had adapted the feminist research ethic in research with politicised or marginalised populations, including research with women in different contexts, offered a roadmap for how to design this research and the key issues for consideration before, during and after the research was undertaken. While there are a range of interpretations of the feminist research ethic, and different methodological adaptations, the work of Lara and Basegla (2015) with activist women in armed conflict was particularly influential on my research. In their adaptation of a feminist approach to the oral history methodology, they argue that any feminist methodology must:

address the specificities of subjects (most of whom are people narrating illegal acts, whose identity cannot be disclosed and whom we shall refer to as experiential experts) from feminist perspectives that take into account the care, accompaniment and empowerment of the research subject and that breaks the existing power dichotomy between researcher and researched. (2015: 59; see also Yow 1997; Parr 2015 as cited by Lara & Baselga 2015)
It is important to recognise that Lara and Basegla’s (2015) research is based on an oral history methodology. This research used semi-structured interviews, so the framework has been adapted to this approach. With this in mind, I drew on Lara and Basegla’s (2015) five key stages of conducting an interview to inform my approach to the semi-structured interviews. Their approach incorporates the foundational feminist principles, and accounts for the challenges of conducting research in highly politicised research settings with vulnerable populations.

The first is about creating a safe space where the researcher and potential participants can establish a level of trust and quell any feelings of uncertainty or fear. They contend that this early stage of the interview process should involve sharing – the sharing of the researcher’s details, and personal reasons for conducting the research. This aligns with the notion that ‘there can be no intimacy without reciprocity’ (Oakley 1981, p. 49 as cited by Hayes 2010: 224). The second stage is focused on having the ‘technical discussions’ regarding the research once trust has been established, and sharing important research documents with the aim of instigating co-ownership of the research. Often this discussion is about time, and accounting for the time that it takes to establish trust. Theoretically, the trust is then enabled by the legitimacy of the research. In the case of this research, this stage included the use of explanatory statements and consent forms. However, as will be explored in more detail below, this is a highly problematic and potentially dangerous practice. Lara and Basegla’s (2015) third proposed stage involves conducting the interview. Given the context in which these authors were operating during their research with activist women, they highlight that participants’ pain can act as a barrier to the interview process, in that it can often result in memory loss and create barriers to communication. There is also the risk of reopening unhealed wounds via the discussion of painful experiences. In returning to the feminist
research ethic discussed by Ackerly and True (2003), we can see that it is in these instances that observing and capturing the silences, the body language and the emotions are important, as these emotions are an integral part of that life story. This leads to the fourth stage of the interview process, which is about the importance of the field notes and maintaining the orality of the interview, including the silences, repetition and other ‘unspoken’ elements. Finally, where there are risks to the participant, the final stage of the interview should include the encryption, destruction and modification of the data. This relates to the handling of information and addressing any issues associated with its use and publication. Where the notion or practice of extractive research is everything the feminist research approaches contest, this stage is about maintaining and understanding the participants’ expectations associated with participation, accounting for those expectations – both the researchers and the participants – in the research outcomes and, ultimately, maintaining the confidentiality and security of those who have chosen to share their story. This process informed the approach to the fieldwork in the present study.

Drawing on this framework, the methodology employed sought to allow for the inclusion of specific individual perspectives, particularly those that may differ from dominant historical expectation and narrative. The focus on individual experiences, as opposed to a much wider-reaching survey-style or quantitative research design, was adopted to ensure that the participants personal narrative is privileged over what are largely contested historical accounts and/or migration-related statistics.
4.1.2 Influences on research design: conducting interviews with politicised and political populations

Given that this research is situated within a contentious political and historical context, there were a range of considerations and challenges that had to be negotiated in regard to conducting the fieldwork. These included access to and recruitment of participants, as well as my own positionality as a non-Tibetan-speaking western foreigner. The latter was particularly challenging in that some research suggests that, because I was a non-Tibetan researcher, there was a risk of predetermined power hierarchies that could have implications not only for the conduct of the interviews, but also for the research outcomes (see Clark-Kazak 2009). This section provides an overview of the key contextual considerations that shaped the methodological approach adopted for this research, and how the methodological ideas explored above informed the way the interviews were conducted, as well as the ways in which issues of power and positionality were experienced and addressed.

For this research, there were several challenges in designing a methodological framework that could capture and accommodate the personal experiences of Tibetan migrants, as such a framework needed to recognise and document how these experiences interact with the broader Tibetan history, and how the relationship between the personal and national history may shape the research outcomes. This section explores how the historical context and its influence on the Tibetan population shaped the research design, and reviews the literature that offered guidance on how different contextual barriers and features might shape my own positionality.
It has been established that a Tibetan’s personal history and experience can be closely linked with Tibet’s national history and, as a result, personal experiences are often construed to fit within a particular historical framework (McGranahan, 2005; 2010). As Carole McGranahan illustrates, Tibetan narratives and personal experiences exist between the categories of personal history and national history:

For Tibetans living in exile, history is caught between what really happened, and the epistemic murk of historical memory, between individual and state desires to tell the struggle in local cultural terms and to fit their narratives into global structures of human rights and international law. (Daniel 1996 & Taussig 1985 as cited by McGranahan 2005: 570)

Given the continued struggle to present Tibet as a separate political and cultural group from China, the personalised history of Tibet is often suppressed by what McGranahan describes as ‘historical arrest’, which is the apprehension or detaining of particular narratives ‘in anticipation of the eventual release’ of that specific story or information (McGranahan, 2005: 370). In her exploration of Tibetan history and narration, McGranahan illustrates how the traditional practices of hiding treasured teachings by Buddhist monks have been applied to contemporary historical truths in an ‘effort to control knowledge of the past, to reproduce power structures in the present and to secure a particular future’ (McGranahan 2005, p.570). When understood in the context of research on memory recall, this interpretation is supported by the idea that the ‘individual memory should never be thought of as a purely individual affair since all memory is socially constructed’ (Halbwachs 1992 as cited by Teegen 2014: 70-71). Therefore, it is to be expected that the memory of an individual will likely include
much broader collective experiences. In her research into the collective memory and fear of
crime in South Africa, Teegan argues that:

Scholars have found that certain elements of the past are highlighted, while others are
ignored or sidelined, in order to construct particular parts [or] versions of the
collective past, often most favourable to those in power and/or aimed at promoting
group or national solidarity. (2014, p. 71)

For this research, there was a possibility of individual border-crossing experiences being
attached to a much broader national history. This attachment to the collective history could
arguably form a part of the resistance of the Tibetan state, that in many ways contradicts and
challenges the occupation from the Chinese perspective. Therefore, the approach and
structure of the research needed to account for the different influences on the personal
narrative, including the relationship between participants’ historical and personal narrative,
and the implications for my own positionality during and after the fieldwork, or how the
collective or historical narrative might shape and change the meanings attributed to the
individual border crossing.

To capture the way that historical narratives informed the personal experiences I drew on the
notion of the collective memory to help construct the interview schedules. Teegan (2014)
argues that by focusing qualitative interviews on the present rather than the past, the micro-
level processes that individuals adopt to incorporate a collective narrative can be more easily
identified. In line with this approach, the interviews commenced with a discussion of the
participants’ situation at present, including their age, family situation, and lives in India. This was repeated at the conclusion of each interview, with the intention of investigating the participants’ current situation in more depth, and of identifying what they wanted for the future. For example, did they want to return to Tibet? The aim of book-ending the interviews with a focus on the participants’ present situation was to provide a reference point that would prompt my own documentation of shifts in the participants’ focus during the interviews away from the personal, to the national experience. This was not always recognised or captured systematically, however my own reflections on the data during the analysis did capture the way that some participants stopped discussing their personal experience and diverted to a discussion on the national historical context. This was important as it provided insight into the context surrounding their border crossings, and highlighted patterns in what parts of the participants’ story were more important or significant to them, what parts were left untold, and what parts were brushed over. This was significant as I was interested in the meanings that might be attached to the border crossing given the geopolitical context.

A well-established issue often faced in research undertaken with groups considered ‘vulnerable’ concerns the need to identify how participants perceive themselves and to ensure that interview questions do not destabilise positive self-perceptions. This was raised as particularly important in D’Costa’s research, where she spoke to women who had been raped during civil unrest. In her examination of the way this issue shaped her methodology and approach to reporting, D’Costa (2006) recognised that, while the women may have considered themselves survivors, reliving the experience by participating in interviews could lead to re-victimisation and thereby potentially limit their ability to move on. It is important to note here that, while I suspected that there may have been experiences of sexual violence in the participants’ border crossing, this did not inform the recruitment process and I entered
the interview not knowing whether there had been such an experience in each case. Again, while there is minimal research into the experiences of irregular Tibetan migrants, the anecdotal evidence suggests that many have experienced forms of physical and sexual abuse, detention and repatriation (see International Campaign for Tibet 2011) which, as D’Costa highlights, can have recurring impacts on their self-perception and agency. To mitigate this, I took direction from Lara and Basegla (2015) on the importance of creating a ‘symbolic safe space’, but also of maintaining the semi-structured and conversational nature of the interviews. At the beginning of the interview, each participant was encouraged to stop the interview at any time if they became uncomfortable or distressed. I also placed an onus upon myself to be conscious of any distress on their part, and to respond by either stopping the interview or, where appropriate, just listening. By stepping back into a purely listening role, I sought to open a space during the interview for the participants’ (and myself) to make sense of what was being discussed and to work through it (Jesee 2011). This flexible approach was also intended to address concerns raised by Lara and Basegla (2015) about the impact that pain can have on memory. They highlighted that gaps in memory can lead to frustration, and in turn disempowerment. Lara and Basegla (2015) recommend changing the topic and incorporating hypothetical scenarios to prompt participants’ memory and return to the story, and I noted this as an option in the case that participants did become distressed. I do not claim that no participant experienced distress as a result of my approach to the interview; however, the approach provided the framework to ensure I was able to recognise and respond to the potential impact of sharing such stories. Further to this, I took on local advice regarding the most appropriate support services to offer information about to participants’ in case they felt at any stage in need of support, interviews were conducted at a residential NGO that I knew could provide support, and I was acutely aware of changes in the tone of the interview at
particular points when questioning might make the participants uncomfortable or raise sensitive issues.

Barnett (2010) also warns that there can be issues around participant safety and how individuals perceive their status as a research participant. There is a growing body of evidence that details the extent to which Tibetans are subject to various forms of social, religious and political oppression inside Tibet (Human Rights Watch 2016a; 2016b; 2014), and that leaving Tibet can result in arrest and repatriation back to Tibet (Wong 2016a, 2016b), which in itself presents the risk of being subject to various forms of abuse while in prison (International Campaign for Tibet 2011). In light of this, it had to be assumed that, by participating in the research and discussing their experiences, the participants in the present study could face similar consequences. This type of risk, however, is not unique to this context. For example, D’Costa (2006) explained that in her research into the use of rape as a nation-building tool in Bangladesh, women who spoke out about their ordeal could then be banished from their communities. Similarly, in research with Afghani women living in America, Miller (2004) explained that their perceived fear of what would happen if they did an interview stopped many from participating. The presence of risk to participants posed both methodological and ethical challenges for this research. For example, people may be less likely to divulge the extent of any negative experiences with authority figures through fear of reprimand. Therefore, for ethical reasons it was critical to find the right balance between ensuring the personal safety of the participants, any expectations that they may have in sharing their experiences, and the need to understand their individual experiences. How this was negotiated is examined in more detail when I turn to section 4.2 below.
Finally, the role that the politicisation of participants and their political characteristics can play in the determination of interview positionality, and the implications that this has for the research outcomes, required consideration. In research on the mass atrocities that occurred in Rwanda and Bosnia during the respective civil conflicts, Jessee (2011) recognised that, when conducting an interview, it should be anticipated that both parties will come to the table with specific agendas. For the researcher, this agenda is focused on answering specific questions; however, for the participants, the interview could be perceived as an opportunity to legitimise their own interpretation of events. Jessee refers to Robben’s notion of ‘ethnographic seduction’ to explain this:

[participants] perceive foreign researchers as the harbingers of history who would retell their stories, and through the investiture as scientists provide these with the halo of objectivity and impartiality that their academic stature entailed. (Robbin 1996: 84 as cited by Jessee 2011, p. 295)

The political context surrounding this study, combined with ongoing advocacy efforts by the Tibetan diaspora\(^9\) regarding their situation, meant that the positionality and power dynamics could shift relatively easily in favour of the participants throughout the course of the interviews. Jessee aptly points out, interviewing and sharing the experiences of political groups poses the risk that the research (and, I argue, the researcher) could ‘inadvertently become part of the machinery of propaganda’ (2011, p.300). As Tibetans constitute one of the most politically active and organised diaspora populations in the world, there was a risk

\(^9\) There are several international advocacy organisations that seek to raise awareness about the human rights situation in Tibet, including (but not limited to) Free Tibet, The International Campaign for Tibet, and Tibetan Women’s Association.
that the interviews would only capture the ‘party line’ – an assumption also informed by the notion of historical arrest (see McGranahan 2010). While semi-structured interview schedules that confine participants’ responses to a predetermined set of themes and experiences could partially mitigate this risk, in light of the missing voices of Tibetans within the migration, criminological and, inadvertently, methodological literature, I made a conscious decision to maintain the less structured approach to the interviews. Further, allowing the participants to share their experience in their own way provided the space for them and the researcher to make sense of the participants’ circumstances, experiences and beliefs about the issues raised throughout the interview (Jessee 2011). I also adopted a non-participatory approach to the research (meaning that I had the final editing control over the interviews) (see also Goodley et al 2004). While this approach can attract critique associated with being an extractive research method, the interview was interactive, and driven by the participants in that the story they shared was in relation to a particular period in their life and around some common themes (as opposed to a structured interview or survey method). Given that there is very little research into the border-crossing experiences of Tibetans, it was safe to assume that some participants may have never shared their story before. In adopting this more personalised approach to understanding a much broader social phenomenon – in this case, borders and border control – the research becomes more about the human experience and the micro-level implications that much broader issues can have on that experience.

4.2 The research process: conducting interviews with irregular Tibetan migrants in India

The challenges associated with undertaking interviews with irregular migrant and political populations are complex and have significant impacts on the outcomes of the interviews. This
section outlines the overall fieldwork and data collection process, and how the issues raised above were negotiated and addressed throughout the key stages of the research process.

4.2.1 Human research ethics approval

This research was undertaken with the approval of the Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee (MUHREC – approval number CF13/2288 – 2013001182). There were several considerations that had to be accounted for in the ethics application, namely, the influence of the researcher as someone known to the Tibetan community, participant security and status, and data security. There were two revisions to the initial application, including the recruitment approach and measures to ensure the participants’ security and anonymity. The recruitment process proposed in the first application raised concerns about undue influence or pressure to participate as a result of my history with the Tibetan community in India and advocacy groups in Australia. The proposed recruitment process involved direct contact with potential participants, including nuns and advocacy groups. I had spent time in a Tibetan settlement prior to undertaking this research and proposed discussing the research project with potential participants and offering them the opportunity to participate. From here, a snowball methodology was to be used with other migrants living in the surrounding settlement. In response to the concern raised about the proposed recruitment approach, flyers (see Appendix Four) were created and translated into Tibetan that would be posted around the community or distributed to advocacy groups via their publicly available contact details. By removing my direct contact with participants from the recruitment method, the assumed potential pressure to participate was addressed. As will be discussed in more detail below, however, this revised approach was not suitable for the context and had to be amended on arrival in the community.
The second concern raised was in regard to the participants’ security, and inadvertently anonymity. In response to risks of collecting participation details in the ethics application, there needed to be clarification and more detail provided about the way in which participants’ identity would be protected. The socio-political context surrounding Tibetan migrants meant that there were risks associated with contributing to the research; risks that amounted to participants being subject to surveillance by local authorities for engaging in what could be interpreted as an ‘anti-Chinese’ activity. To mitigate this risk, the voluntary nature of participation was emphasised at the beginning and end of the interviews. Further, individuals who agreed to participate were asked not to use their names, the names of anyone in their story or any other details that could be used to identify them, their friends or family. Where any such details were used in the interviews, they were removed and exchanged for pseudonyms in the transcription process. Interview recordings, notes and transcripts were kept on a password-protected cloud storage system. Given that there were anticipated issues with accessing the internet to upload the data immediately, all interview data was stored using numerical codes that could not be linked to participants or the locations in which the interviews were undertaken. Interviews were saved to the cloud storage system as soon as internet became available, and then deleted from the recording device.

A fundamental feature of this research is that it was undertaken within the realms of irregular migration, making participants’ status something that had to be considered and negotiated with sensitivity. All participants were legally living in India at the time of the interviews, and therefore were not breaching any laws by being in India. Where this became complicated is when participants’ experiences involved the commission of crimes, such as the irregular crossing of borders and the use of irregular facilitation methods such as people smugglers. This further emphasised the importance of de-identifying all identifiable data and ensuring
that, at any given time, the interview data was not on any recording devices accessible by others as a protection measure for myself.

As will be explored in more detail below, the reality of the fieldwork experience in India highlighted that the processes required, and in this case also proposed by, ethics committees are not always applicable or appropriate in particular contexts, and can have implications for the conduct of the fieldwork.

4.2.2 Fieldwork

Interviews were undertaken in 2014 across three different (non-identified) locations in India. As described above, the approved approach to recruiting participants was to place flyers that had been translated into Tibetan around the community, and included my and my interpreter’s contact details. On arrival at the initial destination, I was advised by local community members and my interpreter that there could be safety implications for both myself and the participants associated with this approach. Local community members and my interpreter highlighted that drawing attention to the research could put participants, their families and friends in India and Tibet at risk of harassment or increased surveillance. For me, given that the flyer included the contact details of both myself and the interpreter (available for interested people who did not speak any English), it was recommended that this not be passed around to avoid drawing unnecessary attention from the authorities to my presence and my research. It is important to note that I was legally allowed to be in the country and to speak to people; however, my interpreter continually reiterated that the research could be seen as ‘anti-Chinese’.
To mitigate this risk, the flyers were not used, and information about the research was passed on verbally via informal channels throughout each of the communities. Further, the interpreter verbally provided information about the research, as per the recruitment flyer, to friends and contacts who were then offered my contact details if they were interested in undertaking an interview. Prior to my arrival into India, however, the interpreter had informed a community group about my research, who then passed on the details to members of that community. This occurred approximately one month prior to my arrival, and I spent two weeks conducting interviews. Yet the shift in the earlier recruitment approach meant that an additional investment of time was needed to distribute information verbally. Despite this, the participants had time to consider the research, and were informed by the interpreter that they could refuse to participate or end their participation at any point during the interview. At that time, I was facing strict time constraints as I had to return to Australia in 10 days. Once contact was made by the participants or their interest in participating was shared via the interpreter, we were introduced by the interpreter who had been briefed extensively on the information initially detailed on the recruitment flyer, the explanatory statement and an overview of the types of questions I would be asking in the interview. The interpreter outlined the explanatory statement and the general nature of the questions with each participant again prior to starting the interview. Participants were asked if the interview could be voice-recorded, and the interpreter then emphasised the importance of not using identifiable information during the interview to ensure that the recordings were anonymous and that there was no way to identify the participants. This was a crucial point in the decision to participate, as many of the participants indicated that there could be consequences associated with their participation, for both them and their family.
After participants were informed about the measures in place to ensure that they would not be identified in any way, they were again given the opportunity to stop the interview process. No individuals opted not to participate at this point; however, one individual asked not to have the interview digitally recorded and notes were taken by me as a way of recording the interview. In light of the various concerns raised about participant identification while in the field, it was decided that verbal rather than written consent would be recorded, and interviews began only after the participant agreed aloud to participate and acknowledge that the information they shared would form part of a thesis and subsequent publications.

While the interviews were designed to be conversational, many participants sought direction, affirming the decision to utilise a semi-structured approach as it gave me a structure to begin and move through interviews (see schedule in Appendix One). However, as per the benefits of a semi-structured approach, participants were also encouraged at different points to expand on a particular component of their story, or diverge into a related – or often unrelated – topics. Interview length varied from 30 minutes to over three hours, amounting to 10 hours of interview data in total. If at any stage during the interview a participant seemed distressed, the interview was halted and the participant offered traditional Tibetan sweet tea, and given the opportunity to finish the interview. Tea breaks were common, even when the conversation was not distressing. The interpreter later explained that this tea was a home comfort; it was a particularly cold Indian winter and the tea added a level of comfort to the proceedings. The majority of the participants did not appear to be distressed during the interviews and did not opt to end the interview at any stage as a result of distress, with the exception of one participant who appeared distressed during the discussion of her return to Tibet. Despite this, she was intent on finishing the interview as this was the first time that anyone had asked her about her journey. All the participants emphasised that they were
willing to participate in this research because it was capturing the story of their journey and that for this reason the research was important to them personally, and to the Tibetan community more broadly.

At the conclusion of the interview, each participant was given the opportunity to ask the interviewer any questions. Many had asked me questions prior to undertaking the interview. These questions ranged from seeking more information about the purpose of the research, to how I intended to use their stories, and what benefits this research would have for the Tibetan community. These questions often diverged into conversations about the role of research in advancing advocacy efforts, the importance of evidence-based research in policy development and the importance of documenting history as experienced by everyone. I was prepared for these questions, and encouraged them as the conversations were often lively and passionate, and the participants then started the interview highly enthused. Beyond questions about the research, I was regularly asked my age, what my parents did for a living and why I loved India and the Tibetans – all questions that, again, I was prepared for and happy to answer.

At the conclusion of the interview, the participants were provided with my contact details, and the details for the in-country and Monash ethics representative, the interpreter and local support services. Where individuals did not want to take this information, there was no pressure on them to do so. As per tradition, the participants were presented with a khata\(^\text{10}\) (a Tibetan white scarf that is placed around the recipient’s neck) and an envelope with 250 INRs

\(^{10}\) A khata is a silk scarf given as a sign of the giver’s goodwill and regard for the recipient. The participants were offered this and some rupees on the advice of the interpreter, who also had significant experience in coordinating and conducting research with academics and universities.
(equivalent to AU$4.50 at the time) as a sign of my appreciation. Only two participants accepted the money, with the others refusing it and placing the *khata* around my neck.

### 4.3 Challenges and limitations in conducting research on irregular Tibetan border crossings

There were a significant number of practical and methodological issues encountered during the fieldwork that required further negotiation. These included issues associated with language and translation, privacy and safety concerns, and the sensitivity of data - each of which is discussed in turn.

#### 4.3.1 Language and translation

As Tibetan is a very complex and not widely spoken language, there were significant challenges in having the explanatory statements and other documents translated from English into Tibetan, and then during the interviews having questions translated into Tibetan and then responses translated back to me from Tibetan back into English. While the interpreter spoke English, the nature of the stories, and the difference in linguistic constructs between the two languages, meant that key features of these stories might have been lost in translation. Each interview was started with an explanation of the research in English (by me), and then in Tibetan (by the interpreter). The same approach was used to go through the consent form, including consent to record. I would ask the questions in English, and then the interpreter would ask in Tibetan, however the English versions of the questions were occasionally shorter than their Tibetan translations, suggesting that the nature of the questions may have needed further explanation or expansion, which was later confirmed in short debrief
conversations about the fieldwork process and outcome\textsuperscript{11}. Similarly, when the participants told their stories, the English translation was generally significantly shorter when explained by the interpreter.

The literature that examines the role of interpreters in research recognises that they should be accounted for as a part of the communication process that occurs during interviews (Temple 2002; Stanley 1990), and thus their assumptions, views and perspectives need to be accounted for when conducting the interview (Temple and Edwards 2002). While the use of an interpreter meant that the non-English-speaking participants could share their stories, when reflecting on the interpretation of responses during the analysis phase of the research, it became clear that there were views and perspectives of the interpreter inserted into the interview. This was most evident when the participant spoke about either the current or historical situation in Tibet, and the interpreter would often elaborate on the participants response with information drawn from the dominant historical perspective. My assumptions about the additional information provided by the interpreter was informed largely by the work of Carole McGranahan (2010; 2005), who highlighted the dominance of the historical narrative in interviews and research with Tibetans more broadly, and my own familiarity with the dominant view of the current and historical situation in Tibet. While there were inconsistencies between the length of statements provided by the participants and what was re-told by the interpreter, the importance of cross-language research is well recognised (Temple 2002, Temple and Edwards 2002, Stanley 1990) and therefore is not assumed to undermine the experiential authority and the power of their voice.

\textsuperscript{11} The fieldwork debrief was not a formal conversation, but rather a discussion and reflection about the content of the interviews, the process and outcomes. This was also an opportunity for me to clarify anything that came from the interviews or questions that I had on reflection of the interviews with the interpreter.
4.3.2 Sensitive information and responses

Given the historical and current political situation inside Tibet, the interview questions had to be posed in a way that would avoid causing the participants distress or exposing their involvement in activities that are deemed illegal in Tibet, and ensure that those still trying to leave Tibet would not be at increased risk of apprehension as a result of the information disclosed. These risks had to be balanced against the importance of gathering information about a migration corridor that is largely unexplored in contemporary research and expectations associated with sharing and promoting data that would be politically beneficial to the Tibetan cause. Achieving this balance was one of the most significant methodological challenges facing this research.

The first two challenges have been raised above; the first is the importance of posing questions that do not cause distress, or put participants, their family or others at risk of being arrested or harassed as a result of disclosing information about their time and activities in Tibet. These issues, and that way they were navigated is outlined above. The third point concerns the publication of the routes taken by refugees through the Himalayas. Given that many of the routes are still used, as well as the ways in which the participants (and as they informed me, other Tibetans) are navigating border checkpoints, the publication of these efforts potentially increases the risk of apprehension for others attempting to leave Tibet. While all the respondents who disclosed the exact route they took did so with the understanding that the information would be used for the thesis and any related publications, such disclosure raised ethical issues around the possible inadvertent impacts on others. While this research addresses several gaps in our understanding of irregular migration, in line with the aspects of the feminist research framework adopted in this research, the motives for, benefits of and potential consequences of publishing this information required consideration.
In this regard, it was decided to leave out the images drawn by the participants of the routes they took to get into India.

4.4 Analytical framework – understanding Tibetan border-crossing experiences

Each of the interviews was transcribed typically between interviews or in the evenings. The immediacy with which interviews were transcribed and the fieldnotes typed up was driven by the need to get the information off the voice recorder and into the secure cloud storage. Later, all transcripts and field notes were uploaded for analysis in QSR NVivo. The coding scheme developed sought to balance the need to maintain the integrity of the individual stories with the need to capture the thematic elements of the participants’ experiences that could shed light on border crossings and border control more broadly within this geopolitical context. To do this, the coding was undertaken in stages – first, to capture the journey of each participant; and, second, to capture the contextual factors that shaped their experiences. The first stage of coding was informed by Labov and Waletzky’s (1967 as cited by Elliot 2011: 10) structural model of narrative. They contend that a narrative has six elements: the abstract, the orientation, the complicating actions, the evaluation, the resolution and the coda. This model shapes an experience or a narrative as something that starts with a summary of the experience, which is then contextualised by the time, place, situation and details of others involved. From there, narratives have a complicating action, which is the telling of what actually happened, or how the experience played out. This is followed by the evaluation and the resolution, referring to narratives building via the meaning of that experience and how it was dealt with, respectively. Last is the coda, which returns the narrative and the participant to their present situation. Importantly, Labov and Waletzky (1967) note that not all stories have to comprise each of these elements; however, the way that these features eventuate
Within an individual’s story can provide a structure with which to begin unravelling their experiences and the context in which they occurred. Underpinning this is a focus on temporality, about which Bearman et al. argue that:

> for only when we provide a beginning and an end to the sequence of interrelated events can we understand the meaning of an event within the sequence and, by extension, the meaning of an event sequence as a whole. (1999: 503 as cited by Elliot 2011: 13)

Therefore, the coding scheme was established in a staged way, with the sequential experience or journey of the participants forming the first stage of the coding. The second stage of coding was aimed at capturing the contextual elements that shaped participant experiences. While still drawing on narrative analysis models, the secondary coding was more thematic in nature, intended to identify trends and commonalities in border construction, control efforts and enforcement mechanisms as well as themes within the socio-political context that contributed to and shaped individual border-crossing experiences. The theoretical concepts explored in Chapter Three were also important in establishing the thematic coding scheme, as many of the codes sought to identify the presence of specific technologies of controls, and borders. Based on this, Table One outlines the primary and secondary coding scheme and the stages in which the codes were captured.
Table 1: Primary and secondary coding scheme

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage of journey</th>
<th>Labov and Waletzky’s model of narrative analysis</th>
<th>Primary codes</th>
<th>Secondary codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Beginning        | Abstract Orientation                            | • Demographics  
|                  |                                                  | • Situation in Tibet  
|                  |                                                  | • Reason for leaving Tibet  
|                  | Complication action                             | • Departing Tibet  
|                  |                                                  | • Journey to the border  
|                  |                                                  | • Arrival at the border  
| End              | Evaluation Resolution Coda                      | • Feelings during the journey  
|                  |                                                  | • Arrival at destination (sub-code: arrival in Nepal/arrival in India)  
|                  |                                                  | • Experience in India  
|                  |                                                  | • Return to Tibet  
|                  |                                                  | • Interview outcomes  
|                  |                                                  | • History of Tibet  
|                  |                                                  | • Personal circumstances in Tibet  
|                  |                                                  | • Preparation for leaving  
|                  |                                                  | • Crossing the border  
|                  |                                                  | • Engagement with authorities  
|                  |                                                  | • Guides  
|                  |                                                  | • Interactions on the border  
|                  |                                                  | • Knowledge of the border or journey  
|                  |                                                  | • Types of borders (physical/non-physical)  
|                  |                                                  | • Border control efforts  
|                  |                                                  | • Human rights abuses/protections  
|                  |                                                  | • Experiences/challenges to identity  
|                  |                                                  | • Arrival in India (status/experiences)  
|                  |                                                  | • Arrival in Nepal (status/experiences)  
|                  |                                                  | • Experience at reception centres  

4.5 Representation and presentation of participant experiences

The analysis chapters are set within three distinct phases that trace the migration journey: leaving Tibet, crossing the border and the post-border-crossing experience. The tracing of the individual participant’s border-crossing journey and mapping of the distinct features of the border as they encountered them provided the platform to incorporate specific socio-political and historical information, as well as to explore current understanding of borders, border control and migration and the extent to which these dominant ideas resonate with the findings in this research. There were however, challenges in capturing the individual level border
crossing experiences, including the influence of the dominant historical narrative and the role of silence.

4.5.1 Identifying and navigating the dominant historical narrative in participants' personal experiences

The semi-structured interviews ensured that there were key topics or events that the interviews would be focused on, however it offered a level of flexibility in the interview that allowed me to either let the interview diverge where it felt like a story needed to be shared, or to return the conversation to the topic at hand. The aim of this was to provide more autonomy for each of the participants to share their story, however as it turned out, that space provided an opportunity to incorporate a much wider collective experience into their own border crossing journey.

Many of the interviews began with questions from the participants about who I was, why I was studying Tibet and what benefits the research would have for the Tibetan community. These questions were encouraged, however it has to be recognised that it was arguably representative of a particular power-dynamic; the participants’ stories were what I wanted to capture for the research, and therefore the decision to share that story was entirely (and importantly) up to them. Of all the questions asked prior to and after the interview, there was a distinct emphasis on what the benefits of it would be. Taking into account the political nature of the Tibetan population, the ongoing global advocacy campaigns and previous research on this issue - the emphasis suggested that they understood that their story was powerful, and thus wanted it shared in particular ways. There is nothing immediately wrong with this, and ideally, participants should be invested in the research (Clarke-Kazak 2009).
This was not the issue; the issue was not that the participants did not share *their* story – it was that they shared a particular type of story that arguably reflected (and therefore mobilised) the collective Tibetan worldview, often presented in the wider diaspora’s advocacy campaigns.

On reflection, the divergence away from the personal story to the collective experience during participant interviews was often mirrored by a shift in the power-dynamic between the participant and myself. The power assumed in asking questions was no longer in my hands, and on reflection, there were times when I was merely a ‘harbinger of history’ (Jessee 2011, p. 295). How this dynamic is negotiated during the interviews and in the presentation of the findings was an important consideration. I make no claims that this study was designed in a completely objective manner; it takes the position that Tibet is occupied by China, and therefore privileges the Tibetan narrative. This meant that because the fieldwork was reliant on the personal experience (which could be shaped and influenced by contemporary Tibetan politics), the view of the context and in this study, the border, would be inherently political.

The inherent politics of this research place further emphasis on the need to recognise and account for the way in which the collective narrative is adopted in participant interviews, and the being able to identify and then respond the research process accordingly. In line with this, approaching the interviews with an awareness of the socio-political and historical context in combination with the topics and issues explored in the semi-structured interviews meant that I was more attuned to the distinct *individual* features of the participant story. By examining and documenting the personal experiences in a more detailed way, this study goes some way in unbundling the lived experience from the presumptions associated with both the broader Tibetan political narrative, and irregular migration more broadly.
4.5.1 Acknowledging the importance of, and capturing silence during interviews

Silence was a common feature of the participant interviews, and thus became an important element of the story. In some instances, silence was the unspoken; evidenced through sentences being abruptly cut off, or changed. In other instances, silence was effectively the language of convention – an experience was so common or well-known that it did not warrant words. Silence was particularly evident in the interviews with the political participants; however, there were times when non-political participants also did not finish a sentence, changed the topic or simply stopped talking. Among the non-political participants, this was noticeable during conversations about whether or not they wanted to return to Tibet. For the political participants, silence was most evident during conversations about experiences of pain or trauma, most often linked to the experience of torture.

Chapter Five explores the various interpretations of silence during interviews in more detail, such as the pain associated with talking about traumatic experiences (Wajnryb 2001; Scarry 1985), the role of what McGranahan (2005) refers to as ‘historical arrest’, and the contextually and culturally specific interpretation of the acceptance of pain and suffering as being a key part of life (Sogyal 2008). While many of the interpretations examined go some way in understanding silences, as Chapter Five will demonstrate, there are details of a personal experience that we just may never know. Accepting this draws attention to the importance of looking beyond what is said, and capturing what is not being said, personal circumstances, the context and other forms of communication during interviews (see also Hett & Hett 2013).
The research design included not only the interviews, but emphasises the importance of field work notes and the need to capture the context and feel of the interview (see also Temple 2002, Temple and Edwards 2002). This included recognising and being attuned not only to the presence of silence, but where in the story they manifest. Given the presence of, and role of the dominant political and historical narrative in this study, it was interesting to note that among the political participants, the silence manifest when the story became overly personal. For the nuns, the silence was around their experience in prison. Rather, they either glanced at scars or referred to the interpreter to inform me that I should not need to ask, as I should know what happens to political activists in prison. The expectation that underlined silences in the political participant stories meant that I had to refer to my own understanding of the historical context, but also account for the way that pain (in the case of the nuns in particular) was shared.

When exploring a particular social phenomenon – such as borders – via the lived experience however, these silences arguably provided some insight into the context surrounding participants, and prompted a further investigation into the potential impacts associated with it. When the placement of silence in a story is taken into consideration, along with the parts of participant stories that lacked or innate expectations of my own knowledge, we gain insight into the context surrounding the participant, not their personal experience. As the following chapters reveal, this study offers insight into a border that sought to contain and control participants, and ultimately, prevent their border crossing in addition to the personal border crossing experience of irregular Tibetan migrants.
4.6 Conclusion

As this chapter has shown, there are significant ethical, practical and methodological challenges with which researchers are confronted in the context of research into irregular migration. This is further exacerbated when migrant experiences are labelled as irregular, which ultimately presents risks to both the researcher and the participant. Recognising this draws attention to the need to expand and adapt traditional methodological and analytical approaches drawn upon in criminology when examining complex and criminalised activities.

It was within this recognition that the two methodological contributions of the study became evident.

The first draws attention to the need to negotiate human ethics committees in institutions where they are comprised of academics from a range of disciplinary backgrounds (that go beyond social sciences). As my experience in this study has shown, this can result, at times, in guidance and requirements that have limited relevance in the field, and are often not reflective of the realities of conducting social science research with groups such as the irregular Tibetan migrants. Understanding this, and accounting for the need to ground a study in the local reality is vital for both ethical and security reasons. The second contribution is the highlighting of the importance of both recognising and capturing silence during interviews. While the chapter demonstrates that there are several frameworks for understanding the presence and meaning of silence in interviews and in the context of understanding a personal experience, it concludes that there are elements of a personal experience that may remain unknown. Further, it builds on our understanding of some of the challenges associated with conducting cross-cultural and cross-language research. In particular, it recognises the active role that interpreters play in cross-language research, and draws attention to the need to account for this in conducting interviews.
The analysis chapters (Five, Six and Seven) examine the entire border crossing and post-border-crossing experiences of the irregular Tibetan migrants who participated in an interview in January 2014, but first Chapter five offers a detailed introduction to the participants in this research.
Chapter 5: Who are Tibetan irregular migrants? Participant lives before they crossed the border

The 12 participants lived in three different Tibetan settlements\(^\text{12}\) in India and in the interviews, shared the details of their journey from their hometown in Tibet, across the Tibet–Nepal border, into Nepal, and then onto India. Each of the participants had lived in Tibet at some stage in their life, and the stories detailed here are primarily about the first border crossing – from Tibet to the Nepal. Of the 12 participants, three were men (all of whom were laypersons) and nine were women: five of whom were Buddhist nuns, and the remaining four were laywomen. The participants crossed the border out of Tibet at around 24 years old; however, their ages ranged from 14 to 38 years old. All the participants still had family living in Tibet at the time of the research, although three indicated that one or both of their parents had died. Most came from large families and had two or more siblings, with the exception of the seven participants who did not speak in any detail about their family in Tibet other than to note that they were still there.

During the fieldwork, it became evident that while there were some commonalities across participants’ individual experiences, the differences were important in that they were highly nuanced and revealed distinct characteristics of the participants that shaped how and why they left Tibet. For this research, the most notable pattern across the group was not age, sex or their status as a person of faith or layperson, but their status as either political or non-political. In this study, six participants were defined as political and six as non-political.

\(^{12}\) The name and location of settlements are excluded for privacy and safety reasons.
These categories were based on several elements of the individual’s interview: the way individuals described the lives they led prior to leaving their homes in Tibet, why they decided to leave, and the emphasis they placed on their individual activism and resistance in their stories about the period of their life spent in Tibet. While not the focus of this research, there is a body of work that examines the nature of resistance within Tibet, and research on these activities (Dorjee 2015; Goldstein, Jiao and Lhundrup 2009; Sharp 2013) indicates that the nature of political activism against the Chinese occupation continues to evolve and change. For example, during the initial occupation of Tibet, resistance manifest in violent protests and counter-attacks, whereas contemporary resistance is primarily non-violent, such as self-immolation, and ongoing circumambulation around historically significant Buddhist temples.  

Non-violent protest is now the cornerstone of Tibetan resistance against the occupation, and therefore represents a crucial element of the dominant historical, and political narrative in Tibet, and in communities in exile.

The narrative around non-violence is raised here to emphasise that the categories established in this study were not created to capture or align with this narrative of resistance, but rather were drawn from the way in which participants described their own activism. The participant descriptions evidenced efforts to overtly or explicitly undermine the Chinese occupation, and often were reflective of historical accounts of activism, however the focus of this study is the personal experience. Therefore, the categories were not about equating the activities with what is known about Tibetan activism, but rather to highlight it as a personal attribution by

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13 Circumambulation is the practice of Kora, which is a type of pilgrimage and meditative practice undertaken by Buddhists around temples, or sites of importance for Buddhists. This practice has been the beginning of several major uprisings, as it is considered a public display of anti-Chinese sentiment (see Chapter Two on major uprisings)
the participants. This ensures that the stories shared, and the subsequent analysis of those stories, is driven by, and grounded in, the personal experience of participants.

These categories do not suggest that non-political participants did not have political beliefs; rather, their reasons for leaving were not described explicitly as a political act or as being motivated by the consequences associated with their political activism, and, importantly as Chapter six reveals, the two groups had distinct experiences in relation to the support and processes to prepare to leave and to make the journey to the border region of Lhasa. The background of participants is explained below according to each group.

Table 2: Participant categories for analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Year of departure</th>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Year of departure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Political participants</strong></td>
<td><strong>Non-political participants</strong></td>
<td><strong>Political participants</strong></td>
<td><strong>Non-political participants</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenzin (<strong>M</strong>)</td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>Dachen (M)</td>
<td>1985</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Champo (M)</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Amala (F)</td>
<td>Not specified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ngawang (N)</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Chokeyi (F)</td>
<td>2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dechen (N)</td>
<td>1994</td>
<td>Tsering (F)</td>
<td>2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamyang (N)</td>
<td>Not specified</td>
<td>Pema (F)</td>
<td>Not specified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dolma (N)</td>
<td>1994</td>
<td>Chodren (F)</td>
<td>Not specified</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(**M = layman; F = laywoman; N = Buddhist nun)
5.1 Political participants

The six political participants were either ex-political prisoners or had been politically active, and all fled Tibet under the threat of imprisonment and associated human rights abuses. In this group, there were two men and four Buddhist nuns. Of the men, Tenzin was a former monk who had spent time in prison for various political activities, and Champo fled Tibet after receiving information that the authorities were targeting him for delivering anti-Chinese public lectures. The level and nature of activism among this group varied, but broadly included participation in the many uprisings that occurred in Tibet while the participant was living there, the distribution of anti-China pamphlets, publicly denouncing Chinese rule in Tibet or delivering public lectures to Tibetan youth about history and politics. All these acts are overt, in that they were conducted in public spaces within the participants’ hometowns. The Buddhist nuns had all been involved in political activities in Tibet, namely, the 1989 National Uprising, and subsequent protests that resulted in an unprecedented military crackdown across Lhasa. All the nuns had spent time in prison as a result, and two bore visible scars of their treatment at the hands of prison guards. The scars on their faces and arms were not overly prominent, and could easily be missed if attention were not drawn to them. The implications of the scars are explored in more detail in the following chapters.

While all six were politically active – working to resist the Chinese occupation of Tibet – none were violent. They had all been imprisoned for political activity specifically related to challenging the regime, rather than for interpersonal crimes. At the time of the uprising, and the subsequent Chinese effort to enforce acquiescence to its rule, there were claims that the Tibetan resistance movement had become radicalised, or was aligned with extremism, or religious fundamentalism; yet the majority of major protests in recent Tibetan history have
been largely non-violent (Tenzin 2015). The participants in this research reiterated this, with descriptions of their own personal political activism involving protests, giving public lectures and handing out anti-China pamphlets and speeches by His Holiness the Dalai Lama. I draw attention to violence as it did form a part of the political participants’ experiences. However, rather than being involved in it via committing acts of violence as part of their resistance, they were subjected to violence at different stages of their border crossings because of their identity. This finding is explored in more detail below.

5.1.1 Protestors, political activists and prisoners – political participants and life in Tibet

While Tenzin was interviewed as a layman, he spent his life in Tibet as a monk. He spoke fondly of that period in his life, explaining that he had been a monk in one of the main monasteries in Lhasa. However, Tenzin was forced to leave the monastery by the authorities, which meant that he had to abandon his identity as a monk after he was arrested and imprisoned for political activism. This is a key feature of the release conditions set by the authorities imposed on nuns and monks imprisoned for political activities in this study. In describing where he lived, Tenzin said, ‘before me, the monastery had [been a home for] 3000–4000 monks; the actual area in the monastery was really big. During my time, however, there were only about 300 to 400 monks, so it was definitely not at capacity’ (Tenzin, political migrant, departed Tibet 1993). All the Buddhist nuns interviewed had been practising nuns in Tibet, and all were living and studying in a nunnery in India at the time of the interview. Throughout their interviews, all the nuns sat cross-legged against the backdrop of the Himalayas, and spoke softly, if not sombrely. The stories about their lives in Tibet were all focused on their political activism – though each offered different levels of detail – and their experiences of control and oppression at the hands of the Chinese regime. As noted in Chapter Three, the notion of control is important, and is a fundamental feature of the
participant narratives and is examined in two ways; the first is as a reason for the establishment of borders, and the second is the actual means of enforcing the border. This is examined more in the following chapters, however at this point in the analysis, it is important to note that the experience of control is examined across these two roles – the reason, and the means of border enforcement. The nature of control at this stage of the participants’ journeys is largely about the *reason* in which borders are created, and is explored via the participant experiences of different types of control mechanisms.

Control was a pervasive issue raised throughout the participant interviews. For example, Jamyang did not speak of her time in the nunnery specifically; rather, she spoke directly to the challenges of living in Tibet:

> [My two friends and I] had been political activists, and we were put in jail for that reason. Then, our names were put on a ‘hot list’. That list is then distributed, and put in a database of the Chinese police department. Whenever our names were clicked on, a warning went out to all the police departments across Tibet that basically said, ‘this person, woman or nun is an activist and is against the Chinese … they are separatists and we have to be careful about them’. This kind of pressure made it very uncomfortable to live in our hometown. (Jamyang, Buddhist nun, departed Tibet unknown date)
The focus was predominantly on the situation in Tibet and the impact that the nature of social control had on her life. Dechen also spoke about her life in Tibet, but focused on the challenges she faced in her everyday life:

[we] did not have religious rights, and that made it not permissible to do our monastic studies in Tibet. There were so many restrictions on our monastic studies, even inside our hometown. (Dechen, Buddhist nun, departed Tibet 1994)

In addition to descriptions of control, via the experience of restrictions and oppression, the nuns all indicated that they were involved in political activism. Indeed, Ngawang, Dechen, Dolma and Jamyang all reported that they left Tibet for political reasons but all chose not to detail their political activities. They consistently explained that to speak of their political activities would put their political associates, and/or family and friends, at risk of arrest or harassment by the Chinese police in Tibet. When I asked Ngawang why she could not go into detail about these activities, she explained that:

it is very difficult to answer, because it may cause problems for the people I was involved with. They are all still involved in the activities in Tibet now, so I really can’t speak about it. There are just so many, so I cannot specify those activities. (Ngawang, Buddhist nun, departed Tibet 2004)

Similarly, Dechen said in her interview:
[...because] I have friends and family members in Tibet that are working, or even just sitting idle, but especially those that are working in Tibet, if I were to say anything about the Chinese policies, then my family can be removed from their jobs, and that leaves them hopeless. (Dechen, Buddhist nun, departed Tibet 1994)

Of the political participants, only Tenzin and Champo went into detail about their political activism in Tibet. Their descriptions of their political activities echoes what has been written previously about Tibetan resistance – it was and remains largely nonviolent, and varies in its overtness. Their descriptions were eloquent, and accompanied by passionate hand gestures and laughter; their language, and the body gestures through which they shared stories about their activities, glorified the role of resistance in their personal experiences. In his research into nonviolent resistance, Tenzin has provided a frame for this narrative, explaining that ‘people have a natural tendency to romanticise battles, glorify victories, dramatise defeats, memorialise heroes and demonise enemies. Tibetans are no exception’ (2015: 12). This was evident in the way that Champo and Tenzin described their activism. For example, Champo explained that:

In 2008, there was a mass uprising [in Tibet]. When there is any uprising, many of our Tibetan brothers and sisters lost their life [by] the Chinese. … At this time, the Chinese would claim that it is the movement infused by the Dalai Lama, and the Dalai Lama is trying to use the minority to undermine the unity of the Chinese. Since the Tibetans are considered a minority of China, they are always abused, and the use of abusive words was common, such as separatists, or [in reference to the Dalai Lama], like a donkey or wolf in monks’ robes.
So I courageously explained to the public that this is the policy of the Chinese, and that they were trying to disregard the fame of His Holiness the Dalai Lama in front of the Tibetan people who have a strong link to him; they try to make us hate the Dalai Lama.

… [silence]

I know that he [the Dalai Lama] is not behind the uprising, but it was a mass uprising of all the communities where we lost so many of our Tibetans by the Chinese gun barrels. I had to explain this publicly. (Champo, political migrant, departed Tibet 2010)

Champo was proud of his activism; he sat forward in his chair when he described it, and then at the end of the interview asked me to tell everyone who he was – he explained that it did not matter if his real name were revealed because the Chinese could not get him now.\textsuperscript{14} Tenzin was not as cavalier about his identity or being identified as a political activist, due to his position in India, but he went into the most detail about his political activism. He sat comfortably against the wall in our mutual friend’s home eating sweet rice and drinking traditional Tibetan sweet tea as he talked of his border-crossing experience, and his life in Tibet before he decided to leave. Despite identifying himself at the start of the interview as a layman, Tenzin described a life in Tibet that was focused on upholding a strong sense of Tibetan independence and the teachings of Buddhism. He recounted how he taught Buddhism and Tibetan history to and discussed Chinese policies with young Tibetans in the community,

\textsuperscript{14} In light of the other participants’ security and requests for anonymity, Champo is a pseudonym, and his real name is not used in this research.
and how he was involved in upholding traditional religious ceremonies. He explained that it was these acts that led to his imprisonment:

In 1988, on March 5, I was involved in a religious ceremony; it is done once a year – it’s called the Monlam festival. During that year’s festival, all over Tibet, particularly around Lhasa, there was that national mass uprising; it was a peaceful uprising. I was involved in the activities during that uprising, including the demonstrations. … I was shouting for complete independence [from China], religious freedom and for the long life of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Previously, all Tibetans inside Tibet were fighting for independence; however, gradually this has changed. Since 1989, the political situation was tense because most Tibetans were involved in the uprising, or some kind of demonstration. … I was put in prison on March 9th, 1988.

…

I was released in 1992, and decided to stay in Lhasa. While I was there, I was again involved in political activities. I was involved in collecting speeches, and other related documents, like political speeches from high-profile Tibetans in India, and distributing them to Tibetans around Lhasa. At the time, there were so many nuns and monks in prison, so they could not support us, so we continued. Then some of my friends were caught by police, so I was then in danger of being caught again. (Tenzin, political migrant, departed Tibet 1993)

Tenzin and Champo spoke of their political activism in a light-hearted but passionate way; they were the most forthright and went into more detail about this period in their lives, and
discussed it proudly. Comparatively, the nuns were not as forthcoming, nor were they light-hearted about their personal struggles and resistance. The difference in the ways that the two men and the nuns shared their story was stark. The energy during the interviews was also noticeably different. During the interviews with Tenzin and Champo, I was more comfortable, could join in the laughter, and felt more a part of their journey and their story. In the interviews with the nuns, while they wanted to share their story, they did so in a more reserved, if not formal manner. They answered questions directly, and the conversation never went off on a tangent. The differences between the men and nuns’ narratives raised questions about their experiences that were left untold – a feature of the interviews that is discussed in more detail below.

The socio-political context surrounding the participants was an important part of the analysis for this chapter, particularly in the case of the political participants. The period between 1987 and 1989 – during which Tenzin was living in Tibet – is known for the second major uprising, and the biggest since 1959. This period was significant in Tibet, as it signalled the end of the Cultural Revolution\textsuperscript{15}, and a supposed economic opening-up of Tibet. Smith (2009) indicates that while the famine that resulted from the Cultural Revolution eased off in the mid-1970s, political repression continued in response to the ongoing resistance among Tibetans. He explained that Tibetans were ‘required to sing praises of Mao and the fraternal Chinese for bringing freedom and prosperity to Tibet, and had to criticise the Dalai Lama, and now the Penchen Lama as well, and all aspects of Tibetan society before the Chinese liberation’ (2009: 556). Tenzin’s account of his activities during his time in Tibet is reflective of the broader narrative of resistance to the Chinese occupation at the time. He spoke of civil

\textsuperscript{15} Smith (2009) points out that full communisation was not reached until 1975 in Tibet, and the post-Maoist liberalisation did not occur in Tibet until 1979. He explains that ‘the 1970s was for most Tibetans the high point of collectivist regimentation’.
disobedience and non-cooperation, and while he was involved in the uprising, at no stage did he speak of, or mention, engaging in violence. Indeed, violence was only raised in relation to his treatment while in prison. This also reflects documented accounts of contemporary Tibetan resistance, which is characterised by a shift away from the morally charged resistance that occurred in the wake of the initial occupation, when violence on both sides was documented, towards the more strategic resistance that has used diplomacy and the preservation and promotion of culture as tools in the broader anti-Chinese movement (Tenzin 2015).

There are several synergies between the documented experiences of Tibetans during the 1980s and the experiences of the participants in this research. Both Champo and Tenzin spoke about their experiences with a pride that was arguably demonstrative of their nationalism. This is particularly evident in Tenzin’s experience, as the period in which his story took place is known as a complex political period that ultimately led to the revival of Tibetan nationalism (Smith 2009). Smith (2009) explained that in the wake of the Cultural Revolution in the early 1980s, Tibetan nationalism was thought to have been all but extinguished. As a result, there was a period of economic and social liberalisation, which for the first time since 1959 allowed for the ‘expression of shared identity and culture, including the common experience of oppression’ (Smith 2009: 562). As chapter two outlined, while the Chinese at the time presumed that this liberalisation would remove the foundations of any remaining discontent, the easing of restrictions and repression in fact provided the space for the revival of Tibetan nationalism, and there were several uprisings across the Tibetan plateau between 1987 and 1989. Following a smaller riot at a religious festival in March 1988, Chinese work teams were sent into monasteries and nunneries to find nationalist monks and
Involvement in political activities and calling for Tibetan independence or the return of the Dalai Lama were some of the many activities that the Chinese considered to be expressions of nationalism that surged in this period. The way in which Tenzin and Champo discussed political activities is reflective of the type of nationalism documented in the broader history of this period. For example, Tenzin explained, ‘whenever there was an uprising or peaceful demonstration, anyone who was Tibetan would participate. There was never any doubt that the Tibetans would be involved’ (Tenzin, political migrant, departed Tibet 1993). The
rejection of the Chinese occupation and the associated policies and practices represented not only an alignment with a nonviolent approach to resistance, but also the revival of Tibetan nationalism, and a revitalised connection to the lifestyle, culture and political systems of pre-1959 Tibet. The notion of nationalism, and the way in which it was expressed throughout the participants’ descriptions of activism and their stories about life prior to leaving Tibet, is important for this study as the historically categorised ‘nationalist’ activities formed a significant part of the participants’ narratives when discussing their lives in Tibet, albeit in different ways and with different undertones. All the political participants spoke about Tibetan history and culture directly, or key figures who were representative of that culture, in particular, His Holiness the Dalai Lama. When they diverted from their personal experiences to talk about Tibetan history, references to the Occupation of, or current situation facing Tibet were the most emotive parts of the discussion. They deprioritised their personal experiences to focus on the issues facing Tibet as a nation, and Tibetans as a population. As will be explored in more detail throughout the following chapters, the prominence of history in the participants’ narratives highlights not only the importance of understanding and grounding the analysis within the historical (as well as contemporary) context, it also draws attention to potential barriers to capturing and understanding the individual experience.

The expression of nationalism was not as prominent within the Buddhist nuns’ stories, but it was still present. The nuns spoke of their time in Tibet with less detail, and there was a level of distrust in engaging in the research and sharing their experiences. Despite living in India, these women experienced an underlying fear of repercussions for their involvement in the research, which echoed Robert Barnett’s experience in conducting research with Tibetans, where he described the interview experience as one where in a room of two people ‘China … [was] always at the table’ (Barnett 2010). Following each of the major uprisings in Tibet –
uprisings in which the Buddhist nuns in this research participated – was a major police and military crackdown. Thousands of Tibetans were detained and imprisoned, and, as a result, many were severely beaten and tortured at the hands of prison guards (Shakabpa 2010; Smith 2009; Department of Information and International Relations 2006; Marshall 2000), meaning that expressions of nationalism at that stage in time had severe consequences. All of the nuns in this research alluded to the fact that they had spent time in prison, and had been beaten or tortured while inside, indicating that there was a very real fear of consequences for themselves, and for other political activists in Tibet, of expressing opinions that counter the Chinese policies and practices in Tibet. Jamyang’s account illustrates this. In describing her experience in prison, she reveals how the reference to Tibet as an independent state resulted in her being beaten by prison guards:

I know about the old society, I know that [Tibet] was completely independent and not part of China. They tried to get my loyalty for [the Chinese] government rather than loyalty to the Tibetan society. I learnt all the Tibetan history from my grandfather and grandmother. These were the answers that they wanted, and when I did not give them the expected answer, they would beat and torture me. (Jamgyang, Buddhist nun, departed Tibet unknown date)

Despite these fears and consequences that the nuns described in their interviews, they still participated relatively openly and expressed their discontent with the Chinese occupation. Their version of nationalism is evidenced here: it is more discrete and less physical than the efforts described by Tenzin and Champo earlier in this chapter, but nonetheless, it is evident in their participation. The different ways that nationalism manifests within Tibetan
experiences is important for this thesis as it informs the exploration of why, and how Tibetans leave Tibet. This is further explored in the coming chapters in relation to its influence on different aspects and stages of the migration process.

As a result of their participation in political activities, five of the six political participants spent time in prison in Tibet. Champo was the only one who managed to avoid being arrested as he fled Tibet when he came to the attention of the authorities. While the interviews touched upon political imprisonment, individual experiences in prison were typically not forthcoming, the political participants only made passing references to their experiences of abuse or torture. For example, Tenzin did not go into detail about his time in prison, and it was not until the end of his story that he disclosed to me that he had been tortured in prison in Tibet as opposed to explaining it at the point of his journey in which it happened. In explaining his capture at the border, Tenzin subtly said, ‘when I was in the Nepal jails, I faced similar types of torture to what I received in Tibet’ (Tenzin, political migrant, departed Tibet 1993). He stopped part-way through his description and asked to use a pen and paper to draw the device that was placed on his legs while he was in prison. He explained that:

There were big, heavy bamboo sticks, that were tied together with their legs in between them. … It was actually very big bamboo, with two holes put through them and they had to put through the holes. In early times in Tibet, this kind of torture was used, and it was called dhungcha. (Tenzin, political migrant, departed Tibet 1993)
Jamyang also recounted her experience in prison. She explained that she was severely abused and beaten in her initial interrogation, but also throughout her imprisonment:

then they would beat me and all those things. During this time, I was tortured all the time, not only by the person in charge of taking me to the court – it was not only them – all of the police, whenever they would meet me, they would get frustrated and beat me, and drag me and kick me at any time. (Jamyang, Buddhist nun, departed Tibet unknown date)

Jamyang’s account of her physical abuse in prison was the most detailed of all the participants who were subject to some form of abuse. While Tenzin openly said that he was subject to torture in prison, he only described the device used. Further, he only disclosed it towards the end of his story when he was describing his capture at the Nepal border. Despite this limited detail, the participant stories were reflective of historical accounts of interrogation and torture in Tibetan prisons. The intensity of the beatings during interrogations in Tibetan prisons has been well documented, particularly in research with Tibetan women and nuns. In research on the experience of nuns in the Drapchi Prison, Choeying Gyaltsen (2000) described how she and the other nuns involved in political activities were questioned:

they removed our clothes and shocked us with electricity everywhere. They beat us with [plastic pipes] filled with sand. We were [black and] blue all over because of this. We needed the wall for support when we walked back from the questioning. All
of us were beaten like this … when they questioned me, for example, there were six or seven [prison] officials standing around me. I don’t know who beat me, but they did so until I lost consciousness. (Choeying Gyaltsen, as cited in Marshall, 2000, p. 48)

Historical accounts of Chinese prisons in Tibet, particularly during the Cultural Revolution, are well documented, in particular, regarding the practices used to extract confessions (Department of Information and International Relations 2006). Among the political participants, the nuns all made reference to their experience of torture and physical abuse at the hands of authorities, albeit not necessarily using those words. In the case of Ani Dolma16, she merely looked to the scars on her arms and touched her face without saying a word. These gestures towards her arms and constantly touching her face were not necessarily purposeful or explicit, but the gaze of her eyes did draw attention to her scars at intermittent times throughout the interview. Despite it being a cold day and us sitting outside during the interview, she never made an effort to hide the scars on her arms under her robes; they were just there, a part of her body. In conversations held leading up to this particular interview, the interpreter explained to me that Ani Dolma had been tortured badly, and that her scars would be visible during the interview. He explained that there would be no need to talk about her time in prison as the scars said all that needed to be said about her experience. The role that the non-verbal features of the interviews played were important as they highlighted an experience that was both painful and significant. By capturing these non-verbal elements of her story, the interview still was still able to partially account for a part of her life and journey that she considered important enough to allude to, even if the detail did not warrant words.

16 *Ani* is the Tibetan term for nun.
The gendered experiences became obvious in the examination of the differences between the nuns and all the other participants. Particularly their experiences of abuse and experiences with different authority figures (i.e. prison or border guards). Neither of the male political participants bore visible, physical scars, nor did they allude to having any that were not visible under their clothing. While Tenzin did not discuss his time in prison in any great detail, there is evidence of the gendered nature of abuse within the Chinese prison system (see Marshall 2000) that was also evident in the experience among nuns in this study. Marshall’s (2000) study of the experience of female political prisoners in the Drapchi Prison – one of the few reports at the time that drew on primary data – indicated that one in 27 female political prisoners in the prison died as a result of maltreatment (Marshall 2000, p. 2). In addition to severe beatings, reports suggest that electric batons were used as a form of both control and torture, with sensitive areas such as the face, body cavities and particularly female genitals regularly subject to electric shocks (Marshall 2000). This is reflective of Ani Dolma’s experience, based not on what she said, but on the physical scars on her face which were indicative of the nature of her abuse.

Notwithstanding their impact, the experiences of torture and beatings were not central to the narratives offered by political participant when they recounted their time in Tibet in interviews. Rather, they all consistently focused on their political activism and how this contributed to their decision to leave. The descriptions about the time that the political participants spent in Tibet prior to deciding to leave varied between using highly emotive, nationalistic language and a sombre, minimalist narrative. During the interviews, all the Buddhists nuns took some time to reminisce, but did not necessarily share their thoughts
when they did so. This was evidenced by the intermittent silences that were not always a stereotypical ‘awkward silence’, but rather appeared to be more of a reflection or an acceptance of the present moment and memories that had been buried for some time. Many of the political participants indicated that they had never before shared their border-crossing story, so the reflective nature of many of the interviews made sense to me at the time. In contrast for both Tenzin and Champo, this period in their life was described in a tumultuous, even in a comical fashion. They were energetic, and despite the often-dark content of their stories, they were light-hearted and the stories were occasionally interrupted by laughter. Memories of their efforts to avoid capture by the police, and, in Tenzin’s case, of time spent hiding with a royal family, were recounted with some fondness and in detail. Finally, all the interviews were interrupted by the need to refill all our cups with Tibetan sweet – or salty – tea; a warm home comfort for the cold day, and a tradition brought to India from Tibet.

As explored in the methodology chapter (Chapter Four), there is more to the participant narratives than what was said – how information and experiences are shared and, importantly, what is not said are also significant in understanding individual-level experiences. For the political participants, their lives were shaped extensively by their political beliefs and activities, which informed the way they shared their story and the emphasis they placed on their participation in uprisings, and the consequences they endured as a result. This chapter also provides a framework (via the categorisations of political and non-political) for examining the notion of resistance, and how resistance is negotiated by the participants who are overtly political and the non-political participants. The analysis of resistance is also informed by the presence of nationalism otherwise referred to as ‘loyalty’ (see quotes from Jamyang and Ngawang), in the participants’ explanations of why they engaged in different political activities. This is important at this stage as it draws attention to the role of
nationalism in the participants’ early decision-making processes, as well as during their migration experience more broadly. By exploring the different ways that nationalism manifest in participant narratives, this chapter also begins to problematize conventional assumptions associated with resistance, and the role that the notion of resistance can play in understanding the meaning of a border crossing among participants.

5.2 Non-political participants

Among the six participants placed in the non-political category, their life circumstances prior to leaving Tibet were varied but none had direct involvement with a view to being politically active. With the exception of one, all left Tibet primarily to seek education or employment opportunities not available in Tibet or, in the case of one participant, to escape poverty. Dachen, a male layperson who had been working with the Central Tibetan Administration, left Tibet with permission from the Chinese Government, and therefore is an outlier among the cohort. While he initially received permission to leave Tibet to travel to Nepal for a pilgrimage, the fact that he never returned within the specified time meant that he was no longer able to go home and, as a result, was living in India. He recalled the decision, explaining that once he got to Nepal he had no intention of going back as his father was living in India already. As a result, he became irregular and was not permitted to return to Tibet. Given that he was the only participant who had permission to leave, when the analysis refers to the broader cohort, unless otherwise specified, Dachen is excluded from this as his experience was significantly different, particularly in relation to his circumstances and experiences prior to leaving Tibet and his experience of the border crossing. Amala, who left Tibet at the age of 14, left with her younger siblings after the death of their parents some years earlier. At the time, they were living in poverty and sought the financial means to get to
Nepal (and go on to India) by begging in the streets of Lhasa. She recalled how hard her older brother worked to try to support them before she decided to leave Tibet, explaining that ‘we [were] so poor so we have no chance, and not much to eat, and our brother couldn’t provide for all of us’. At 14 years old she and her younger brothers left for India, though the specific catalyst in terms of timing for that decision was not made explicit. Tsering and Pema left Tibet in search of education and employment opportunities, while Chokeyi left as a single mother with a young child, with the intention of ensuring that her daughter would have access to better opportunities, and because she was fleeing her unhappy (and what was revealed later to be abusive) marriage.

5.2.1 Loss, poverty and opportunity – non-political participants and life in Tibet

I categorised participants as non-political if they did not explicitly describe their experiences in the period prior to leaving Tibet as politically informed or driven. Where the political participants spoke broadly about the situation in Tibet to the detriment of their own personal story, those in the non-political category shared highly personalised stories focused on the minutiae of their lives, rather than the broader social or political context. The interviews were conducted in a relatively more formal setting than that for the interviews with the political participants: we sat around a table on the rooftop of a building in which a local organisation was located. This setting was not planned in the formal research design; rather, the participants identified this as a location where they felt comfortable to speak openly about their experience.

The life circumstances of the six participants in the non-political category prior to leaving Tibet were more varied than those of the political participants; they highlighted discrimination within employment and education opportunities and poverty. This was the
case for Amala, a young laywoman who described her life in Tibet as one of poverty and loss. She explained that:

when my parents passed away, [my siblings and I] were all still at a very young age. I am from the Kham province. After my parents passed away, my elder brother was only 15, but he had to take care of the other family members. There were seven of us. To do this, we left Kham to go to Lhasa to see if he could get a job. At the time, there was no good transportation, so we had to walk, although sometimes we got on the bus without payment. The saddest memory is that we could not pay for food. … Even though my brother found a job, it was only ever paying a very little amount of money, and he hardly managed to look after us all. So to help, we sat on the footpath like a beggar, and asked for money like beggars. … We had no chance to study, or opportunity to go to school; we were so poor that we had no chance. Because of this, we had not much to eat, and our brother couldn’t provide for us all. (Amala, non-political migrant, departed Tibet unknown date)

Amala left Tibet at the age of 14 and was interviewed when she was a 28-year-old woman. She was an astute woman, and shared her story with purpose; she was not emotional, even when discussing her parents and having to leave their home. The Canada Tibet Committee (2017) indicates that over 10,000 children and youth have fled to India in pursuit of meaningful education not available in Tibet, with around 2500 Tibetans aged below 18 years arriving in 2006 alone. Not all non-political participants had stories of loss or poverty; however, almost everyone in this category highlighted the lack of opportunity in Tibet. In this vein, Tsering commented that:
In Tibet, there is no proper education or proper jobs available, so for that reason I came to India. In India, at least if I don’t have a job, there will be someone to look after me, like the Central Tibetan Administration, or His Holiness the Dalai Lama. (Tsering, non-political migrant, departed Tibet 2006)

Some argue that there is a level of inequality and discrimination in the job market that restricts Tibetans in gaining meaningful employment, particularly in Lhasa (Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 2015; Society for Threatened Peoples’ 2009). This has become increasingly evident in Tibet as the Han Chinese now make up the majority of skilled employees in Tibet, including public servants. Some argue that this is not a result of systematic discrimination, but rather that it is the high levels of illiteracy among Tibetans, and low skill levels and understanding of the labour market as it currently operates, that prevent Tibetans from gaining skilled positions (Hillman 2008; Hasmath and Hsu 2007). Yet others dispute this claim, arguing that many skilled and public positions are reserved for the migrating Han Chinese (Society of Threatened Peoples 2009). However, as Hsu points out that there have been improvements in health, education and employment opportunities across the TAR since the late 1950s and particularly into the 1980s (Hsu 2007). Two of the non-political participants – Amala and Tsering – had a noticeable resentment of the Chinese presence, and the impact they understood this presence had on their access to education and employment opportunities. Amala expressed this resentment, explaining how difficult it would be for her or her brother to gain employment:

if I was to stay in Tibet, it would be very difficult, to run or to sustain a family for good because it is very difficult to get the jobs inside Tibet, because the jobs are taken
over by the Chinese people and even my brother is working in a very low salary job, and he has to look after the six members of our family. (Amala, non-political migrant, departed Tibet 2000)

Amala mentioned at the conclusion of her interview that not only did she need employment, but she also wanted her brothers to receive the education she never had in Tibet. The lack of opportunity highlighted by the participants in this category aligns with the existing research, which indicates that there are multiple factors that contribute to the high levels of unemployment among Tibetans. Outside Lhasa, land reform policies mean that Tibetans who traditionally existed as nomads and farmers have been forced to live in peri-urban cement compounds with little access to employment opportunities, or the ability to continue their traditional self-sustaining livelihoods (Human Rights Watch, 2013). Further to this, despite Chinese political rhetoric suggesting that the new compounds have health clinics, schools and community facilities, there is little evidence that these services are available, and where they are provided, such services are largely under-resourced or non-operational (Human Rights Watch, 2013).

Like Amala, Chokeyi highlighted that she too wanted the education for her daughter that she never received. Chokeyi’s story of life in Tibet was the most tumultuous. As a young 24 year old, she and a group of friends left their hometowns with plans to undertake further education in India. She explained that:
I was in Lhasa, and discussed with friends that we should all go to India and get a blessing from His Holiness the Dalai Lama, and get a proper education. We all thought it was a good idea. So we left with a group of monks and tried to walk across the Himalayan mountains. Before we even got to the border we ran out of food and did not have enough to eat. (Chokeyi, non-political participant, departed Tibet 2007)

After returning to Tibet, Chokeyi went home. She explained that, in Tibetan tradition, when women reach the age of 24 or 25 years old they are expected to get married:

So, I was married with another family, from another province and life just goes on. Since then, I was a farmer … all of our family members were farmers. We kept some domestic animals … some goats. We also did some land cultivation and it is necessary to have some goats for that. (Chokeyi, non-political migrant, departed Tibet 2007)

Chokeyi described her life as a farmer. After she was married, she had seven children, including one daughter. Part-way through explaining her life in Tibet, her tone changed, and the story started to lose its detail. Chokeyi explained that her marriage started to break down:

When I married my husband, for a moment, it was ok. But then later on, there were some... [silence] misunderstandings and the relationship kept getting worse. (Chokeyi, non-political migrant, departed Tibet 2007)
That is where her story about her life in Tibet ended, and Chokeyi moved on to describe how she and her daughter left Tibet. This was the only time that Chokeyi stopped speaking to silently reflect on her story. The silence was not long, and not uncomfortable, but it was there. Chokeyi shifted in her seat, and told me that when she left she had to make the decision to leave her other six children with her husband. Then, in 2013 (after arriving in India with her daughter), she was told that her eldest son had passed away, and it she explained that it took her some time to ‘adjust’. She explained that she was unable to return to attend his funeral – and the silence throughout this part of her interview suggested that this was something that was still very painful, and something she was still trying to come to terms with. Depending on the topic of conversation, the nature of participant stories occasionally shifted; their tone changed, their body language altered in different ways. For some, like Chokeyi, when the conversation became particularly emotional or difficult, the accounts became less detailed. After Chokeyi described life with her husband, the loss of her son, and explained that she was unable to return to Tibet, the conversation stopped and she changed the topic. While such shifts in mood and tone of the interview did not occur in all of the interviews, when they did, it added a layer of complexity in interpreting and understanding participant experiences. On reflection, this complexity, while a challenge to capture, was important to account for as it added another layer of detail, and insight into the significant features of the story; the presence of emotion meant that the significance need not be articulated.

Not all participants had stories of loss, poverty or lack of opportunity. Neither Dachen nor Pema expressed concerns about their access to education or employment, or conveyed an experience of loss; rather, they only articulated that they wanted to go to India. Pema was
born into a nomadic family, and requested permission from her parents to go live with her sister and brother who had already moved to India:

My family are nomadic farmers; they do land cultivation and have so many domestic animals to look after. I was young at the time I told my family I wanted to leave Tibet, but again, it wasn’t for political reasons. For one, I had an elder brother and an elder sister in India, so I wanted to go live with them. My family was not in a position to send me to India, but I insisted, and told them I wanted to leave Tibet. (Pema, non-political migrant, departed Tibet 2006)

Pema did not raise any specific challenges in relation to her life in Tibet; it was instead the draw of her siblings that underpinned her desire to leave. She was nonchalant in offering her descriptions of life in Tibet, occasionally shrugging her shoulders when I probed her about her life prior to leaving, and the reasons she decided to leave. While Pema was categorised as a non-political participant, she was aware of the political situation inside Tibet. She admitted however, that it was not until she reached India that she became fully aware of the issues Tibetans were facing. The only detail she offered about her lack of awareness of the political situation is that she thought her parents did not want to encourage her to be involved in anything political, so they never discussed it. She explained,

[T]hey actually don’t discuss the political activities or the political situation inside Tibet with their children. If they tell them, the children might go and speak out in the town, and if the Chinese government or police or official bearers know that the
children have been influenced by the parents about the situation, it would put the whole family in trouble, or in prison. So, for that reason, I did not have any knowledge about the situation. I came to know about it only when I came to India. (Pema, non-political migrant, departed Tibet 2006)

Pema’s reasoning here reinforces the earlier point – it is not that the non-political participants did not have political awareness or motivations for leaving, it is that they were not involved in overt political activities. In Pema’s case however, she was not aware of the situation prior to leaving Tibet, which makes her distinctly non-political prior to leaving Tibet. The way this shaped her experience is examined more in the following chapters.

Finally, Dachen was an outlier in the participant cohort, and had a distinct experience prior to leaving as a result. As explained in the first part of this chapter, Dachen was the only participant who received permission to leave Tibet. He explained that he was from a nomadic family, with 11 others in his family, five of whom were still children when he left and could not work. In 1985, he was granted permission to go on a pilgrimage to Nepal. When he arrived in Nepal, he continued on to India, where he met with his family who had already settled there. He was a softly spoken man, who discussed his family and time in Tibet fondly. He missed Tibet, which he reiterated throughout his interview.

This group were also more interested in the outcomes and benefits of the research project – where the political participants placed importance on and emphasised their past, the non-political participants were interested in their future. At the conclusion of the interview I
always asked what was next for them, or what they wanted to do in the future. For the political participants, the response was typically that they wished to return to Tibet and continue their activism. Alternatively, for the non-political participants the focus was on their individual futures. Some, like Pema, wanted to travel to Australia; others wanted a better job in India, or to continue their education. The participants’ views on their future and plans are discussed in the final analysis chapter; but what is important to note here is the focus on the individual versus the collective within the narratives offered by the two categories of participant. The implications of this are discussed in more detail in the following section.

5.3 Documenting and understanding the participants’ narratives

As detailed in Chapter Four (Methodology), there are several characteristics about the way participants shared their story that required consideration. As this section will demonstrate, while they could be considered a barrier or a challenge, they also offer another layer of detail to the participants personal experience. The first characteristic is the presence of silence, particularly within descriptions of hardship, loss or abuse. This silence also manifest as a lack of detail in some stories, and was generally indicative of two things: a confronting or distressing experience, or an expectation that the interviewer should have known what they were about to say. The second involves the convergence of personal experience and the historical or collective narrative throughout the participants’ personal stories. This was more common in the accounts of the political participants, and was largely confined to the stories of how and why they were politically active while living in Tibet. Finally, there were gendered experiences identified during the analysis, although it was largely dismissed by participants as an influential factor in their individual experiences. Gender was explored
during the analysis, as it formed some of the early considerations for the research. Therefore, the laywomen and nuns were asked specifically whether they thought they had a different experience from that of men during the interviews\textsuperscript{17}. As the following discussion shows, gender manifest more as a distinction between the laywomen and nuns as opposed to between men and women. While these characteristics made the interpretation of personal experiences more complex, they also provided insight into different features of both the participants’ lives and the context surrounding them. The remainder of this chapter examines these characteristics, and their implications for interpreting and understanding the participants’ border-crossing experiences.

5.3.1 Silence in the participant narratives and interpreting the experiences that are left unsaid

Silence, both words and sentences not spoken, left unfinished or lacking significant detail and simply unanswered questions, was a relatively small but powerful and unanticipated element of a number of interviews; during all the interviews with women and nuns, as well as with Tenzin, I encountered some form of silence. In conducting this research, silence became a space where a question was not fully answered and something was deliberately left unsaid. It was clear to me that the participant had something to say but was choosing not to share an experience and/or to not offer more detail after referring broadly to an experience. It was most often something I was aware of in interviews with the six political participants; however, there were times when non-political participants also did not finish a sentence, changed the topic or simply stopped talking. Among the non-political participants, this was

\textsuperscript{17} Male participants were not asked this question. This was not necessarily intentional, rather that the nature of the interviews with the men did not move towards a discussion of gender differences. As a result, I made the decision not to prompt or intentionally ask that question to allow the men’s story to emphasis the features that they considered important. This decision was also informed by the lack of attention paid to gendered differences among female participants as well.
noticeable during conversations about whether or not they wanted to return to Tibet. For example, while Pema was talking about her new job, there was a distinct quiver in her voice, and suddenly the story finished. The question that followed was met with a hollow silence; ‘You said you wanted to go back to Tibet?’ The interview was stopped, as Pema became visibly upset, and did not say anything for a moment. A few minutes later, she responded through the interpreter; she had already been back to Tibet since first arriving in India. After receiving news that her mother had passed away and her father was unwell, she sought permission from the Chinese Embassy in India to return, but was denied a visa. Despite not receiving the visa, Pema returned to Tibet irregularly via the same route she had taken to travel to India. When she arrived in Tibet, her father convinced her to inform the authorities that she was home to visit him, and to seek permission to stay. This was Pema’s second irregular border crossing, as she had managed to leave Tibet successfully before returning. As a result however, when Pema reported her return to the authorities she was imprisoned for six months for her initial illegal migration to and from India. She said: ‘I faced a lot of problems in jail’ (Pema, non-political migrant, departed Tibet unknown date) but then said no more. While Pema later told me that she was not subject to torture whilst in jail, she said:

[upon her release from prison] I went to stay with my father, but after what I was feeling, and what I experienced … I was supposed to make my father happy that I had come back to Tibet, but instead I created so many problems for my family, and that is my sole regret. (Pema, non-political migrant, departed Tibet unknown date)

While Pema did not claim that she had been tortured while in prison, the impact of her imprisonment was clearly traumatic, which made it difficult for her to talk about. Her
experience is unique among the participants as she managed to cross the Tibet-Nepal border irregularly twice. While this experience is not a part of her first border crossing journey, it was part of the much longer, ongoing journey that involved multiple border crossings, and the silence presented at this stage in her story shed light on the impact that this had on her personally, physically and emotionally. While she made no reference to this explicitly, it would be deficient to consider her experience of imprisonment as not traumatic or marked by abuse simply because she did not refer to it.

Silence can be indicative of past pain and suffering that cannot be spoken; however at times silence seemed to be a result of the participant expecting that I had knowledge of what had occurred in relation to physical and emotional abuse in Tibetan prisons, and that detailing personal accounts of this was not required beyond noting their period of imprisonment. This is illustrated via Ngawang’s explanation as to why she decided to leave Tibet:

If I stay [in Tibet] more, I will be put in prison again, and if I stay [in Tibet] my loyalty, and my faith and frustrations will make me join in more political activities again, and I will be put in jail … then maybe, I will be caught, and this time, it will be very difficult inside jail. (Ngawang, political migrant, departed Tibet 2004)

Ngawang did not go into any further detail regarding what would make returning to prison ‘very difficult’. In response to the ambiguity, I also became silent in anticipation of more detail about the factors that would make her experience more difficult. My silence was met with a glance from Ngawang to the interpreter and a prompt to move the interview on. My
interpretation of this was there was an implicit expectation that the interviewer would be aware of these risks – namely, that those who are politically active are more likely to be subject to severe beatings and torture upon being arrested in Tibet; a point well documented in the available literature (see Marshall 2000 for example) and the political narrative underpinning the Tibetan independence campaign (see Free Tibet for example). I remember asking the interpreter after the interview about Ngawang’s experience in prison, and he just looked at me for a moment, and told me that because I had been studying Tibet I should know what happened. While it was not discussed during the interviews, informal conversations and observations at two of the three interview sites reiterated the common understanding of what individuals could expect from being imprisoned in Tibet. Further to this, while the nun participants did not disclose their experiences with the same level of detail as has been shared in other studies (see Drapchi Nuns Prison Study above by Marshall 2000), there was evidence in their silence and scars that suggested that they, too, were subjected to these types of abuses, and as a result were aware of the consequences of being caught trying to cross the border. In response to a question about the risks of crossing the border as a woman, Ani Dechen specifically noted that, despite her knowledge of the potential risks for women crossing into Nepal, the fear of being imprisoned again for continued political activities was enough to make her ignore such risks. And that fear was informed by risks so well known that they did not warrant further discussion.

Ngawang’s experience above draws attention to two issues: the ambiguity that emerged from her story, and the internal compromise she was forced to navigate in choosing between the need to engage in activism and self-preservation. The ambiguity left around the conversation about the difficulty she would face if she were to be put back in prison was signified by an uncomfortable silence between Ngawang and the interpreter, both of whom stopped short of
explaining what would make a second prison experience worse. Given the language barriers between the interpreter and myself, it is to be expected that some details would be lost in translation. Despite this, the silences marked a mutual recognition of a clearly understood if not articulated potential harm. In this regard, it is important to note that there were times when the interpreter suggested that something did not need to be explained in detail. For example, in her interview, Ani Dolma drew attention to the scars resulting from her time in prison, and the interpreter simply explained that she had been tortured, and that there was no need to discuss it. On reflection, this makes sense; there was no need to discuss the details of her experience in prison inside Tibet as it was not directly related to her border-crossing experience, and the issue was not pursued in the interview. Yet this scenario does draw attention to the role of the interpreter, who was also Tibetan, as a mediator in this research setting, effectively offering a layer of protection to the participants. It is often suggested that interpreters are responsible for missing detail and richness in narratives when things are ‘lost in translation’; however, in this case, he was potentially able to read into the cultural or linguistic cues about which I was oblivious. This is an important methodological point, and contributes to the growing body of work that highlights the role of the interpreter or interpreter as an active part of an interview that needs to be accounted for throughout that process (Xian 2008; Temple and Young 2004; Temple 2002)

Yet, the above is not the only interpretation of such silences. As Wajnryb explains in her research with children of Holocaust survivors, ‘there is something about the experience of trauma that defies communicability, that constrains the person involved in the trauma from using language to give a voice to the experience’ (Wajnryb 2001, p. 84). Thus, as evident in many of the participant narratives in this research, this incommunicability can manifest as uncomfortable silences, cut-off sentences or the adoption of euphemistic alternatives to
explain the experience of abuse. Wajnryb (2001) argues that this type of communication or narrative is common among survivors of abuse, and more broadly in everyday language when referring to uncomfortable issues or facts, such as exchanging the word ‘died’ for ‘passed away’. Offering some information, such as the adoption of euphemisms also offers insight into an experience, albeit, not the entire experience. In Chokeyi’s story about life before leaving Tibet, she referred to her marriage as merely ‘having some problems’ with her husband, and that because of these problems she had to leave with her daughter. Similarly, in Ani Dolma’s account of her time in prison, she simply stated that her experience was ‘bad’, and that, as a result, she sustained lifelong injuries to her kidneys and eyesight without explicitly detailing how these injuries were sustained.

Pain is difficult for many to discuss. Despite attempts to objectify pain through what Elaine Scarry refers to as ‘fragmented means of communication’ – whereby people adopt different, and at times inconsistent forms of communication – the inexpressibility of pain often means that it does not receive the same level of attention as other clearly visible social harms such as those that leave physical scars or occur in public spaces. This inexpressibility, or invisibility in some cases, may also have political consequences (Scarry 1985). In research conducted by well-known advocacy organisations, there is significantly more detail in the accounts of torture compared to those provided in this research, though this reflects in part that this research was not seeking to detail experiences of torture. Arguably, this information could be useful for the politics of the much broader Tibetan advocacy movement. This reinforces the existence of what McGranahan (2005) refers to as ‘historical arrest’, whereby some Tibetans may hold onto particular experiences or stories until they are most useful, with the intent of shaping a particular outcome or future. It is this complexity of what is said and not said that
informed the attention paid the individual experience in this study, and the presence and placement of silences as it offers a layer of detail that may otherwise go undocumented.

A further understanding of the silences that occurred in some interviews can be connected to spiritual belief: Tibetans as Buddhists, and particularly Buddhist monks and nuns, accept pain and suffering as a part of life, and share an understanding that overcoming pain is fundamental to reaching enlightenment. Tibetan Buddhists believe that we exist in the realm of *samsara* – a ceaseless cycle of birth and death – and that the only way out is through liberation, and enlightenment (Sogyal 2008). The acceptance of pain and suffering is one of the fundamental steps towards enlightenment, and to continue on the path towards enlightenment, one must suffer for one’s wrongdoings in previous lives (Sogyal 2008). The nuns who were interviewed all noted that, in that present moment, they were not in any pain as a result of their suffering in Tibet, and that, while their experience drove them from Tibet, they were still happy. This acceptance of pain and suffering was further illustrated by the participants’ efforts to diminish the severity of their experiences (particularly torture), through acknowledging or suggesting that the experience of others, particularly the Dalai Lama, was worse. For example, Ngawang noted that:

> I am just an ordinary human being. … When I remember His Holiness the Dalai Lama, I think about him and the hardship that he has faced, and my problems are very, very small. … So many other Tibetans have much more hardship, so I think of this and my problems become much lower. (Ngawang, nun, 2014)
The way that nuns shifted the conversation about the severity of their experience towards a focus on others reflects, arguably, a specific cultural coping mechanism, largely influenced by the practice of Buddhism. The silences may then just be part of the way that participants dealt with their experience; through their religious practices they are less likely to dwell on the past, and painful experiences are best left in the past. This then, again reiterates the importance of capturing the non-verbal features and allowing this to form part of their story.

5.3.2 Separating the personal from the collective: understanding the conflation of personal and historical experiences

In many of the interviews with ex-political prisoners, the participants often chose not to go into explicit detail about their abuse, especially those who were tortured during interrogation in prison, opting instead to focus on the situation in Tibet – the collective narrative. The interchange between the individual and the collective narrative was a common feature among the stories of the political participants. However, if they detailed their experience of more severe abuses – such as being beaten or tortured in prison – the narrative, while often lacking much detail, remained individualised. The severity of the abuse often dictated the level of detail provided. Restrictions on religious practice, political activities and/or movement, and the lack of employment and education opportunities, were described in detail.

In Champo’s description of his political activities above, the shifting between his individual story and the broader collective narrative was evident in the way he continually switched between broader descriptions of the situation in Tibet, and his personal experience of and views on that situation. He said, for example:
I know that he [the Dalai Lama] is not behind the uprising, but it was a mass uprising of all the communities where we lost so many of our Tibetans by the Chinese gun barrels. I had to explain this publicly. (Champo, political migrant, departed Tibet 2014)

In the early stages of his interview, Champo discussed his personal activities – what he did and how he did it. He then shifts to a description of context, including the political rhetoric coming from the Chinese authorities at the time of the uprising. His personal story became intertwined with that of the broader historical and collective narrative.

The quote above was one of the most poignant sentences in this part of his story, with the adoption of the loss of other Tibetans as his own. He brought the death of other Tibetans during of the biggest uprisings in Tibetan history into his personal story; it was part of his personal experience and therefore part of his grief. Champo’s articulation of the death of other Tibetans illuminates the complex interconnected relationship between the historical and the personal, which was most evident in the stories of political participants. This relationship shaped the way they interpreted their experiences in Tibet and described their lives in Tibet. Alternatively, the contemporary context was more relevant to the non-political participants, and their reflections on Tibet were more about lack of opportunity, poverty or loss. This reiterates the importance of grounding the analysis within both the historical and contemporary context; for political participants, by understanding that the much broader – if not collective – surge in nationalism in the lead-up to major uprisings was reflective of their personal experiences, we get a more nuanced view of how that context influenced and shaped individuals’ experiences.
What also emerged in the interviews was that the relationship between the participants and
the state is also important, and evidenced in the way in which individuals chose to share their
stories. The political participants discussed their life and activities in Tibet (and subsequent
decisions to leave) with undertones of nationalism. This is illustrated by the stories of
activism provided by Tenzin and Champo. The State – the political entity – in this situation
was Tibet, which was their home country and the driver of their activism. Alternatively, for
the nuns, the state in their stories was China, which acted as a barrier to the way in which
they shared their stories. The potential consequences of sharing their stories – an act they
believed could be interpreted as overly political – meant that they often did not go into detail
about their experiences, particularly in relation to their political activities. After questioning
me about whether I was a spy, they maintained a level of suspicion. Yet they explained why:
there were not only risks for themselves, there were also risks for friends and family still
participating in political activities in Tibet. The consequences associated with sharing their
border crossing experiences were articulated with reference to their relationship to the nation-
state of China and their status as ex-political prisoners.

5.3.3 Gendering the experience of resistance and the border crossing: exploring the
intersection of gender and religion between Buddhist nuns and laywomen

The original research design, as detailed in Chapter Four, was focused on women’s and
Buddhist nuns’ experiences of irregular migration. This was informed by the growing body of
research that investigates gendered experiences of migration (Pickering 2011; Pittway &
Bartolomei 2001; Charlesworth & Chinken 1991), and emerging evidence that Tibetan
women, and particularly nuns, experience various forms of targeted abuse on their journey to
Nepal (Dolma el al. 2006). In his work on Tibetan women’s resistance during the 1950s and 1960s, Robert Barnett identified a gendered experience of violence at the hands of Chinese guards. He argued that:

Prison interrogators in Tibet appear to have developed special forms of abuse for these women that were not recorded by the male prisoners. In particular, although there are few if any reports of rape in Tibetan prisons or police stations, the guards in Gutsa developed a practice during interrogation sessions between 1988 and 1990 of sexually violating the women prisoners with electric batons. As for the beatings, it was not that the ones the men received were necessarily less vicious, but the women seem to have been subjected to them for even more trivial reasons, as if the guards were frustrated by the lack of violence or by the imaginativeness of the women’s provocations. (Barnett 2006: 348)

The difference in the experience of male and female migrants was therefore a point of interest in this analysis. As men were included in the interviews there was an opportunity to explore gendered differences, yet gender did not manifest as a point of distinction between participants’ experiences. Dechen, for example, reflected that women sometimes face more risks when crossing the border; however, when prompted about what those risks were, she was dismissive, did not go into detail and then changed the subject. Amala spoke of the difference between men and women, yet explained that it did not matter if you were a man or a woman, life inside Tibet was the same, and therefore the risks you faced trying to leave were the same. She said:
Inside Tibet there is no freedom of religion, no freedom for jobs or even political activities, and there are definitely no political freedoms. [Leaving] is out of desperation, and I see no difference between men and women crossing the border. (Amala, non-political migrant, departed Tibet 2000)

In this vein, gender was either dismissed or simply not raised as an issue by the participants. This aligns with assumptions about the impact of the broader collective narrative on individual stories explored above. Makley reiterates this, suggesting that, 

The exigencies of an anti-state nationalism have meant for Tibetan activists that women’s issues are secondary to a united struggle against a common enemy. 

…

Chinese State violence is constructed as levelling Tibetan gender relations – Tibetan men and women are equally badly treated in Tibet through torture, imprisonment, forced reforms and discriminatory treatment (1997: 9; see also Devine 1993).

While the differences between men and women were not raised as being significant, there were culturally – and religiously – specific nuances that led to particular experiences for laywomen and Buddhist nuns that were only revealed after the initial analysis. The way that women’s experiences has arguably been absorbed or overshadowed by the experience of all Tibetans collectively, prompted an exploration of the differences between all participants (as opposed to just the men and women). This line of inquiry highlighted that while there were
no differences raised between the men and women, the differences between the laywomen and nuns offered a contribution to the literature on both gender and women in Tibet.

The main difference between the laywomen and nuns was in the way that they were treated on the border. Ani Dolma explained that when she first tried to flee Tibet, she was caught on the border, badly beaten and imprisoned for four years. After she was released, she dressed as a laywoman who was grazing her animals near the border and in that way managed to cross the border into Nepal. While she was captured again on entering Nepal, she managed to escape Tibet proper dressed as a laywoman, as opposed to a nun. This draws attention to the influence of nun-hood, and the implications that this title has on the border-crossing experience within this context. The nuns did not speak about differences between themselves and other women, or the difference between themselves and monks; however, the conscious decision to adopt the appearance of a laywoman reveals the differences in the way that nuns are perceived and treated at the border.

The fact that all the nuns were politically active, and had all spent time in prison as a result of those activities, suggests that they embodied and represented the broader Tibetan resistance, and therefore were more heavily policed, both inside Tibet and on the border. Comparatively, the only laywoman arrested and imprisoned was Pema, who explained that she was not beaten or subject to torture during her time in prison. While this comparison is drawn from a limited number of people, it highlights a variety of historical, social and personal influences – such as religious identity, and the control mechanisms that one experiences as a result of that identity for example – that shape not only the individual experience (in this case at the border), but also to the way that women and nuns are perceived and represented in the
In the context of borders and border control, that perception is one of risk. While they still faced challenges as a result of their decision to leave Tibet irregularly, the laywomen were not perceived as being a risk or threat in the same way. By examining gender as a point of analysis, this study has revealed another layer of discrimination faced by the nuns; discrimination based not only their political identity, but also their religious identity. While gender is not explored via the differences between men and women, the use of gender as an analytical focus has highlighted the experience of nuns in particular, and their comparatively unique experience in relation to other political, and non-political participants in this study.

The literature on Tibet women and nuns highlights two key points; the first is that the experience of Tibetan women has been absorbed by the much broader Tibetan nationalist narrative (Makley 1997; Devine 1993; Havenevik 1989) and that even when there have been efforts to examine women’s experiences in more specific realms of Tibetan society (i.e. within traditionally patriarchal structures of Buddhism), they are still based on a comparison with their male counterparts (Makley 1997). In the context of the resistance against the Chinese state, Makley suggests that ‘when writers turn to representing Tibetan women’s resistance, the focus is on these highly visible laywomen and nun dissidents, as counterparts to male actors’ (1997: 10). By accounting for the individual level experience of female participants, this study offers a contribution to research on Tibetan women and gender by adding a layer of complexity to our understanding of Tibetan women, which is often accounted for through representations being of either ‘extraordinarily liberated or shockingly oppressed’ (Makley 1997: 6). Rather, this study reveals a variety of experiences, with different influences and outcomes; a revelation that offers another of layer depth and
complexity to both the experience of women more broadly, but also women’s border crossing experiences.

5.4 Conclusion

The focus of this chapter has been on the individual participants; who they are, where they came from, and how they shared their stories. Understanding the individuals, and the context and background from which they came, and how this shaped their story, is important both methodologically and practically. The way in which participants described their life prior to departing Tibet was critical in informing the categorisation of the participant cohort as either political or non-political, which provided a comparative framework for examining the similarities and differences between participants. This categorisation is not meant to suggest that those in the non-political category did not have political beliefs, but rather was useful in revealing how the participants who emphasised their political activities prior to leaving had a different experience in the early stages of their border crossing. The categories also revealed differences in the way that the participants’ stories were shared, or not shared. This highlighted the importance of taking note of things that are left unsaid, and how this can unbundle individual and personal experiences from preconceived ideas associated with irregular migration, trauma and gender. The manifestation of gender was a particularly interesting, and unexpected difference, as the nuns had an arguably gendered experience that contributes to a much wider interrogation of the understanding of women in Tibet. When examined in comparison with those of laywomen, the nuns’ stories revealed a more targeted form of control by the authorities, and highlighted evidence of different forms of resistance. While questions regarding gender were not considered important by the participants, being attuned to their individual experiences offered insight into what was essentially a culturally
gendered experience that might otherwise have been left untold. Beyond this, the embodiment of resistance by the nuns had implications for this early stage of their border crossing – implications that are examined in more detail in the following chapter.
Chapter 6: The creation of borders inside Tibet to control, contain and change

This chapter shifts the focus to the border crossing experience, specifically the decision to leave Tibet, the processes involved in preparing to cross the border, and the personal and contextual factors that shaped that experience. By following the journey of the participants in the period before they left Tibet, this chapter first looks at the different ways in which borders are identified and constructed within Tibet. It explores this through a consideration of how the different control measures are experienced and perceived by the participants at various points in their journey, particularly in relation to their individual mobility, and how that is controlled through a variety of different policies and practices. Based on this, the chapter then moves to examine the relationship between the key characteristics and actions of the participants and their experiences of control, how these relationships were identified and linked to the border by participants, and how they impacted the early stages of the participants’ journey to the border. The relationship between the participants’ gender and religious identity emerged in a more distinct way in this chapter, which, as the analysis will show, often transcends the divide between political and non-political. From there, the analysis draws on the participants’ experiences to conceptualise the idea of ‘sites of control’, which is used as a heuristic device to examine the spaces and practices identified by the participants as impacting their mobility; spaces that manifest as internal borders created to determine and influence how, when and where people can move inside the territorial borders of Tibet. The ‘sites of control’ concept draws on both the literature on various technologies of control (McDowell and Wonders 2009; Bosworth 2008; Weber 2007; Pickering and Weber 2006, Dauvergne 2004) and the notion of the ‘confine’ (Mezzadra 2005 as cited by Garcés-Mascareñas 2015) to begin to make sense of the role and nature of the Tibetan border in pre-
territorial border-crossing experiences. The chapter then turns to map and explore the ways that these sites of control were perceived and navigated by the participants by drawing on their narratives of resistance. It explores how resistance manifest in either explicit and conscious, or implicit and unconscious ways, and how this approach to the analysis can build on our understanding of early border crossing processes. Ultimately, this chapter engages the personal and lived experiences of participants to establish a nuanced view of the ways that borders can and do shape different stages of their border crossing.

6.1 Understanding measures of control, containment and change in the participants’ pre-border-crossing narratives

As the discussion in Chapter Five recognises, the participants’ experience of controls varied, including primarily between the political and non-political categories of participants. Based on the participants’ descriptions, control is conceptualised as a border, and this chapter illustrates that each participant was faced with internal or external/territorial borders at different stages of their migration. This conceptualisation was also informed by the notion of a ‘confine’, which is defined by Mezzadra as the ‘[lines] of division and protection of constituted and consolidated political, social and symbolic spaces’ (2012, p. 112 as cited by Garcés-Mascareñas 2015, p.129). Drawing on this notion in addition to the participant experiences with control, this chapter engages the idea of ‘sites of control’ to map and understand the participants interactions with the border. As noted above, a site of control is an analytical construct that accounts for the specific places, people and information sources that are targeted by bordering practices (both internal and external); practices that seeks to control or contain, and change. A ‘site of control’ extends the notion of a confine however, as
it moves beyond the actual space to include the processes that are implemented to create and sustain it, and its role in shaping the early phases of migration.

One of the most prominent themes in the participants’ stories about life prior to leaving Tibet was the experience of control, with 10 of the 12 participants identifying the role that the Chinese authorities played in implementing different measures aimed at restricting their physical, social and political mobility. These experiences differed between the political and non-political participants; however, the role of the Chinese authorities was constant for all. The nature of control experienced by the ex-political prisoners (as is the case for political migrants more broadly) generally manifest as intense surveillance and strict reporting conditions aimed at controlling their movements. For example, the participants who were ex-political prisoners explained that when they were released from prison strict reporting requirements were imposed on them to restrict their mobility. Dechen commented:

> Even inside Tibet, we had to get permission to go to any district from the Chinese police department, and if you didn’t get permission, you were considered an illegal traveller and you were put in prison. This is even during 1994, the whole political situation was just like this. (Dechen, Buddhist nun, departed Tibet 1994)

Jamyang similarly commented:

> I was in jail for three years after participating in events around the uprising. When I was released from prison the police told me, ‘You are not allowed to go anywhere,
you have to stay inside your hometown’. I was warned that if I participated in any events for the anniversary of the uprising I would be put back in jail. If I want to go on a pilgrimage, even a short one to the monastery, I had to get permission from the police department. (Jamyang, Buddhist nun, departed Tibet unknown date)

Jamyang’s and Dechen’s accounts of the strict reporting conditions and restrictions on their movement suggest that the aim of those conditions was not only to control their physical mobility, but also to contain any influence on other individuals and on the broader political movement through participation in other political activities. Therefore, both their physical body and influence were contained within their home town, or the immediate community in which they lived.

The idea that the post-release conditions were also intended to contain the potential influence that Jamyang and Dechen may have on other Tibetans is supported by the way in which political activists are discussed in Chinese political rhetoric, and dealt with under Chinese law – both of which label political activities that question or challenge Chinese presence or activities in Tibet as ‘splittist’ or ‘separatist’ actions which are considered a form of terrorism. The idea of containing political activities is also evident in the local ‘stability maintenance policies’, which are ‘marked by an increase in state control over daily life, increasing criminalisation of non-violent forms of protest, and at times disproportionate responses to local protests’ (Human Rights Watch 2016b), including imprisonment. The most

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18 Separatism is defined under the Shanghai Convention on Combating Terrorism, Separatism, and Extremism as follows: ‘“separatism” means any act intended to violate territorial integrity of a State including by annexation of any part of its territory or to disintegrate a State, committed in a violent manner, as well as planning and preparing, and abetting such act, and subject to criminal prosecuting in accordance with the national laws of the Parties’. The Convention’s definition is used as separatism is not defined as a distinct crime in national legislation; however, it is recognised in different instruments at the local level. Further, the National Library of Congress (2014) indicates that it largely applies to ethnic minorities, including those in Tibet.
recent effort to ‘single out activities deemed to be precursors to unrest’ resulted in activities not previously considered political being put under scrutiny via intensive surveillance practices across Tibet (Human Rights Watch 2016a; 2016b). A Human Rights Watch report on the implications of these stability measures indicated that, from 2013 to 2015, both lay and religious community leaders thought to be inciting dissent or unrest ‘received unusually heavy sentences for expressions of dissent’ (Human Rights Watch 2016b), with the average prison sentence being 5.7 years, often for participating in peaceful protests. The focus on those considered to be political activists by the authorities is important as it not only contextualises the experiences of control detailed by Jamyang and some of the other political participants, but also highlights how the nature of control within Tibet is often about the restriction of mobility – be it physical mobility, or the mobility of ideas, influence or information. Human Rights Watch reiterates this by highlighting the restrictions on the flow of information regarding the imprisonment of political activists in Tibet, drawing attention to the ‘stringent limitations on access to Tibet and on information flows out of Tibet’ (2016b).

By removing those willing and ready to engage in political activism, or stemming the flow of information and ideas about political activism, the drivers or individuals that influence a more vocal form of dissent are controlled. The assertion that the control efforts were also about containing the participants’ political influence is also supported by the way in which Jamyang in particular, described her interrogation. The guards immediately presumed that there were external influences on her involvement in an uprising, and that she had been encouraged by others to participate in an uprising.
The main question they would ask is ‘You do not know about the old Tibet, so why are you doing these things? You must have some influence from the outside!’. I knew that when they were referring to the outside, they were referring to the [Central Tibetan Administration] and His Holiness the Dalai Lama … they wanted me to confess that I was being influenced by some religious teachers in my own monastery, or maybe my parents. (Jamyang, Buddhist nun, departed Tibet unknown date)

This ‘outside’ influence is arguably referring to not only the Dalai Lama, but the wider exiled Tibetan community as well – a population that continues to be politicised by the Chinese authorities based on allegations of inciting splittism inside Tibet. Jamyang’s post-imprisonment experience illustrates how the control mechanisms imposed on her were there to contain her influence, as the conditions sought to prevent her access and/or re-entry to what would be considered influential sites, such as monasteries or political rallies and protests. She explained:

Actually, [I] was released after three years, but my political freedom was taken away, to go anywhere around Tibet I needed permission; to go to another monastery I needed permission. (Jamyang, Buddhist nun, departed Tibet unknown date)

Jamyang’s focus during this part of her interview was on the nature of the control she experienced as a result of her imprisonment, which revealed that the post-release conditions were largely aimed at controlling her physical mobility and influence as a political activist. As will be explored in more detail below, the restrictions on visiting the monastery or
nunnery suggest that China’s effort to contain dissent is not only about preventing influential people from entering certain spaces, but also about keeping them out. Dechen’s and Tenzin’s experiences similarly illustrate this as they were both forcibly removed from the nunnery and monastery, respectively, as a result of their political activities. This draws attention to the significance that is placed on the influence of religious figures and institutions in Tibet, which are seen by the authorities to warrant strict control and monitoring.

At this point in the discussion, the significance of religion and religious institutions in shaping the experience of control of the Buddhist nuns’ highlights the contextually nuanced experience when compared with the laywomen participants, and then with the male political participants. The religious identity linked to, and embodied by the nuns in this study is the fundamental feature that differentiates them from the laywomen, and as this chapter will illustrate, also draws a distinction between them and the male political participants. Where the previous chapter identified this difference between laywomen and nuns, further exploration of the experiences of participants prior to leaving Tibet, revealed a more explicit distinction. The laywomen spoke about control as a broader aspect of social control and the broader situation in Tibet, such as the perceived experiences of discrimination. In contrast, the nuns spoke of control in a far more personalised manner when discussing their pre-border-crossing experiences; they were personally subjected to control as opposed to being aware of it, or it being a part of the broader society in which they were living. This difference reveals some of the nuances of the experience of the two groups, which relates to the proximity of control mechanisms in which they were subject to, and why. The question of why immediately brings religion to the fore as the most visible distinction between the laywomen and nuns; however, the impact of the nuns’ religious identity or nun-hood was also shaped by the fact that they were also ex-political prisoners. All the nuns stated that there
were restrictions on their mobility after they were released from prison – such as the requirements to report to police about any of their movements for example – whereas no laywomen identified encountering restrictions until they reached the territorial border between Tibet and Nepal. As the previous chapter described, Ani Dolma was arrested before getting to the territorial border when she tried to flee the first time, and yet, when she returned to the border dressed as a laywoman, she was successful in getting out. While there is no way to directly attribute the way she dressed to her success in crossing the border, it does draw attention to the role of her religious identity; when her situation prior to leaving and what we know about post-release conditions for ex–political prisoners in Tibet are taken into consideration, we see that before she even made it to the territorial border she first had to navigate a series of control mechanisms. These controls were thus closer to her and more immediately experienced. All the laywomen interviewed fell into the non-political category, and none spoke about being subjected controls beyond the fact that leaving Tibet without permission is illegal.

The differences explored here bring to light an intersection between control, gender and religion. This intersection is important as it stresses the significance of contextual characteristics, such as religion and politics, in informing understanding of border crossings in Tibet, as well as how these characteristics can be embodied in different ways, for different reasons, and at different stages of migration. Further, it highlights a connection between the participants’ religious and political identities, and that the way this is perceived by both the participants and by the authorities has implications for their border-crossing journey. The nature of control experienced by the nuns specifically raises a point about the way that identities are politicised prior to reaching the border, and then the way that participants then navigate the barriers or challenges associated with that identity. As Ani Dolma’s experience
demonstrates, she specifically diverted her identity away from a more masculine appearance (in that nuns dress the same as monks), to that of a laywoman in an effort to successfully cross the border. This analysis makes two contributions; the first is that that there is arguably a challenge to assumptions regarding the impact of gender on the border (Pickering 2011; Pittway & Bartolomei 2001; Charlesworth & Chinken 1991). While outside the scope of this study to examine this question in more depth, the conscious decision to adopt a more feminine identity to increase the chances of crossing the border warrants further attention. The second contribution is to the literature on the experiences of Tibetan women. The differences between laywomen and nuns adds another layer of complexity in the different ways that they are perceived in different settings (i.e. inside Tibet compared to at the border) and offers a way to problematise homogenizing depictions of Tibetan women more broadly (Makley 1997; Devine 1993).

When the differences between the men and women participants (including the Buddhist nuns) are examined, the proximity of control to the participants is more aligned with the extent of their engagement in political activities, which reinforces the distinction between political and non-political categories established for this analysis. Thus, the experience of control was felt differently by the political and non-political participants. For the non-political participants, control was not discussed as explicitly or directly compared to the accounts of the Buddhist nuns and other political participants; however, it was evident in the way in which they explained their reasons for deciding to leave Tibet. For non-political participants, the control manifest in relation to their social mobility, such as accessing jobs and education. Amala explained that she and her family had to leave Tibet:
[because] it would be very difficult to run or to sustain [our] family for good because it is very difficult to get jobs inside Tibet because the jobs are taken over by the Chinese people. (Amala, non-political migrant, departed Tibet 2000)

The challenges of accessing the labour market or education opportunities in Tibet have long been recognised as a consequence of social control (Leckie 1995). Previous research by Human Rights Watch into the population transfer and housing policies in Tibet has reiterated this, demonstrating how the forcible relocation of traditionally agrarian and nomadic communities has left them desolate, without any means of accessing the skilled labour market (Human Rights Watch 2013). Such policies, combined with the ongoing influx of the Han Chinese population into central Tibet, have meant that Tibetans are often restricted to low-skilled, low-paying employment (No author 2015). Tsering raised the challenges around accessing education and employment opportunities, stating that ‘in Tibet, there is no proper education or proper jobs available there, so for that reason I came to India’ (Tsering, non-political migrant, departed Tibet 2006).

Non-political participants did not generally speak about control unless in reference to the territorial border. The territorial border between Tibet and Nepal was therefore the most prominent control structure shaping the non-political participants’ experiences. This includes Dachen, who, despite leaving Tibet with permission, was ultimately prevented from returning legally as he did not return as per his visa:
If I were to go back, and [the authorities] found my previous visa documents that gave me legal permission to go to Nepal, they would know I never came back – if they found this problem, they would definitely detain me in prison, even if I had permission. The permission is very, very difficult to get. (Dachen, non-political migrant, departed Tibet 1985)

Dachen’s experience is an outlier as he was the only participant to leave Tibet with permission. However, I include his example here to reiterate the significance of the border as more than just a territorial demarcation. Chapter Three argued that borders can no longer be conceptualised as territorial demarcations, and rather they are transformative constructs that exist in and around a nation-state. In this chapter, the nature of control described by participants is largely linked to restrictions on social, political and physical mobility. Therefore, in light of the argument from Chapter Three regarding the articulation of borders as a performance of sovereignty, then the right to control mobility in and around the nation’s territory is arguably via the construction of different internal borders. Therefore, the different mechanisms of control described by participants can be conceptualised as borders, particularly given the fact that many of the controls are in place to restrict participants’ mobility. That is, both internal and external or territorial borders were constructed around the participants, particular towns or communities, or even specific institutions in order to enforce control over their mobility. The conceptualisation of the controls experienced by the participants as borders provides a more concrete heuristic framework for examining the features that shaped the participants’ experience prior to crossing the Tibetan territorial border. Prior to that however, types of internal border experienced by the participants could also be mapped. As the participant experiences have illustrated in this chapter so far, the nature of, and proximity of the internal borders to participants was largely dependent on the
level of their politicisation: the more politicised the participant, the closer or more immediate was the border; and for the least politicised, the first border encountered was typically the territorial border around Tibet. Therefore, the fundamental difference between the experiences of Amal and Jamyang, for example, was the proximity of the borders created to control them.

By examining the processes aimed at controlling and containing the physical and political mobility of participants as different types of borders, we get an indication of the nature and impact borders and border control in this specific context. This approach to the analysis – namely examining different types of borders via the lived experience of them – suggests that in the Tibetan context, borders operate on two levels: the first is controlling and containing physical mobility; and the second is through controlling and containing the influence that certain Tibetan people, and their religion and political experiences, have on the Tibetan community more broadly. This marks a partial departure in the way we conceptualise borders within the (border-focused) technologies of control literature, which argues that control measures are generally deployed in specific ways to control the entry of those considered as ‘outsiders’ – the focus is primarily (although not exclusively) on the external borders. As the experiences of the participants suggest, the way controls were implemented were not based on the assumption of a binary distinction or categorisation between insiders and outsiders; rather, the distinction was dependent on more nuanced personal and contextual characteristics, such as religion, religious and/or political identity, and the relationship between these identities.
The participants’ experiences reinforce the body of literature that calls for a more intersectional understanding of the impact of borders and the operation of sovereign powers (Basham and Vaughn-Williams 2013; Masters 2009; Coleman and Grove 2008; Ackerly and True 2008). In the context of this study, the distinction between participants suggests that our understanding of the way that borders function needs to go beyond looking at individuals or particular categories of people as either insiders or outsiders; instead, there needs to be a contextually grounded examination of the way that migrants are perceived, how they perceive themselves, and the resultant implications this has for their migration. This speaks to what Bashman and Vaughn-Williams argue:

‘[T]here are some bordering practices [that] are indeed made possible by certain operating logics that are always already both highly gendered and racialized, and are structured by economic conditions of (im)possibility. By this we mean that particular regimes of mobility and immobility are only imaginable, implementable and sustainable because they tap into and reify prior assumptions about gender, race, class and their interconnectivity in contemporary political life.’ (2013: 510)

This argument informs their key point – it is no longer sufficient to merely look at increasing mobility, but rather there needs to be an examination of how the characteristics of gender, race and class (for example) intersect to ‘permit, legitimise and further necessitate the sovereign striation of global space’ (Basham and Vaughn-Williams 2013: 510) and effectively produce and reproduce different identities associated with mobility or immobility. Recognising that the role of religion and gender create particular experiences and understanding the way the border is implemented in this study suggests that the
insider/outsider distinction may be less useful in examining border crossing experiences. For the purposes of this study, it also suggests that the political and non-political categories are not static or binary, as the role of the border in shaping the participants’ identities and experiences arguably blurs the distinction between the two. Therefore, each participant’s experience is mapped individually to capture the influence that the different aspects of their identity has on different stages of the border crossing.

6.2 A framework for mapping border crossing experiences among the participants

As mentioned earlier, understanding the participants’ lived experience of different forms of control is important as it provides insight into the factors that shaped their initial decision to migrate and their preparatory processes. The nature of control in their stories manifest as both a reason for, and means of creating and enforcing borders, and ultimately sovereign control over Tibetans and Tibet. Therefore, the analysis of participant interactions with the border ultimately had to account for the way in which control manifest in these two roles. However, the differences between the political and non-political participants make it difficult to apply current frameworks to understand how the experiences of control may influence or force migration-related decisions. This is not to say that there are no contemporary theoretical or conceptual models to assist in mapping the experience of Tibetan migrants; rather, the experience of the participants in this research highlights a diversion from current predominant understandings of the role of borders, and the ways in which they are controlled and enforced (see Wonders 2007, Franko Aas 2007; Bosworth 2008; Sassen 2008b; Castle 2010). Despite attempts to generalise border theory, the emergent perspective is that ‘the meaning of one border is not always compatible for another’ (Newman 2006: 144), or, as Brunett-Jailly
argues, ‘each border is unique and no taxonomy of the border is conceptually feasible because there are too many types of borders’ (2005: 10). With the exception of Dachen, for the participants in the present research borders appear to be constructed to control and contain them, either within the territorial borders, or internal borders created around their home or township. Therefore, in this research borders are more about keeping people in, as opposed to keeping people out.

In an effort to provide a framework to begin to make sense of Tibetan border crossings, for the purposes of this analysis, the creation and enforcement of borders will be conceptualised as a ‘site of control’, which is detailed at the beginning of this chapter. Such a site is basically a place, social, religious or cultural institution, or influential person and their ideas, at which targeted control efforts are aimed that seek to stem any associated mobility. This analytical construct will be used to examine the way that forms of control were established through different bordering practices and how borders were constructed between and around the participants in this study, and why. Further, it assists in mapping the impact that borders and bordering had on the migration-related decisions of the participants by incorporating factors that have already been identified as influential – namely, gender, religion, control and, as will be explored more below, resistance.

6.2.1 Mapping how the participants navigated the internal and external borders of Tibet

As this chapter has begun to illustrate, the political participants experienced borders that were more immediately encountered in that they were built around them to restrict their personal physical mobility. Alternatively, borders for the non-political participants were described and
experienced as restrictions on their social mobility. This section examines the differences in the experiences of the political and non-political groups in regard to the decisions they made to progress through the different borders until they reached the territorial border of Tibet. The focus on this stage of the participants’ journey reiterates that there are circumstances and events that can happen prior to the physical border crossing that have implications for the rest of the journey (Gerard and Pickering 2013).

The establishment of a site of control seeks to control and contain the flow of people, ideas and information within a particular space; for the political participants in this research, this generally occurred within the confines of the area in which they resided. Dechen’s experience demonstrates how the role of the borders created around the participants and the associated institutions shaped her decision-making in the early stage of her border-crossing journey. Dechen was expelled from her nunnery as a result of being arrested and imprisoned for her political activism. Consequently, both her physical mobility and the mobility of her political ideas or activism were targeted:

In 1994, I came from Tibet [to India], because I was involved in the political demonstration in Tibet and, as a result, I was removed from the [nunnery] from the pressure of the Chinese Government. Even during that time, in that situation, there was no freedom from religion, and I could not be involved in political activities, and there was no proper education, so I came to India to continue my education in the [nunnery]. (Dechen, Buddhist nun, departed Tibet 1994)
Her expulsion from the nunnery arguably removed any potential influence that Dechen may have had on other nuns, particularly in relation to becoming politically active. In her case, the borders were operating at different sites for different purposes; keeping Dechen both in and out of different spaces concurrently. Multiple sites of control surrounded both Dechen as a political activist and the associated institutions that aligned with her activism and her identity as a nun. Jamyang had a similar experience. She explained that, following her release from prison, the Chinese authorities required the expulsion of her younger sisters who were also undertaking their education at the same nunnery:

> [W]hen my guru asked me to resign, they also had to ask my younger sisters and my friend’s younger sisters – six in total, two were mine. They were told to discontinue [our] studies, and it is because of the Chinese Government. Because of this, [all of us] could not complete our studies, or undertake a pilgrimage or make religious offerings to other monasteries, like the Sera Monastery. (Jamyang, Buddhist nun, departed Tibet unknown date)

At this point in their journeys, the targeted control efforts experienced by Jamyang and Dechen manifest at the intersection of their political and religious identity – an identity that is arguably conflated among the Buddhist nuns in this research. Jamyang’s experience is particularly illustrative of this. She explained that, as a result of her involvement in political activities, she was removed from the nunnery, and imprisoned:
I was removed from my nunnery when I was arrested and imprisoned for three years. Even though I was released from prison, and my religious teacher was willing to readmit me and two others from the nunnery, the Chinese threatened the nunnery, stating that ‘if you let them back in, we will close your [nunnery], and seal it and will not let you continue your monastic education at this campus’. It was these kinds of pressures coming from the Chinese Government that forced my guru to ask us to formally resign. (Jamyang, Buddhist nun, departed Tibet unknown date)

Thus, Jamyang’s experience, in particular, speaks to the consequences associated with the conflation of politics and religion among the cohort of nuns. This conflation is evident in the similarities in their experiences as a cohort in this research, but also in the distinction between the nuns’ experience, on the one hand, and that of the political participants and laywomen, on the other. The removal of political activists from spaces that are considered influential is illustrative of the way in which sites of control are created and maintained. The restrictions on their access to religious institutions, however, also had implications for the decisions the participants made in regard to their departure from Tibet. As Dechen demonstrates above, the conflation of her identities not only resulted in restrictions on her personal mobility, but also removed her from her livelihood through expulsion from the nunnery. The borders created around both her and the institutions with which she was associated thus simultaneously informed her decision to leave and shaped her ability to do so.

The conflation of religion and political activism was not only evident in the Buddhist nuns’ stories. Tenzin, while he participated in the research as a layman, had been a monk in Tibet
prior to being imprisoned. He explained that removal from one’s monastery or nunnery was often a condition of release from prison.

[O]nce any of the nuns or monks are caught by the Chinese police [they are removed from the monastery]. So when I was caught in 1988, I was no longer a monk. It is often part of the condition of release that we do not return to being a nun or monk. The other conditions are things like being involved in political activities. (Tenzin, political participant, departed Tibet 1993)

Tenzin’s experience also illustrates a link between religion and control, and how the borders around the political participants were not only targeted at their physical mobility, but also at their potential influence over others. Given that this conflation was not present in the stories shared by Champo (the other male political participant), the role of gender appears to be largely inconsequential in determining the differences between participant experiences at this stage of their journey, and reiterates the relationship between religion and control. Importantly, this conflation had implications for the political participants as it often meant that both they and their religious institution became sites of control. For the participants, the site of control was established to contain and control them; whereas, when the institution became a site of control, the borders adopted a more traditional function – to keep the participants out. This is important as it offers another layer of insight into how borders are experienced in this context.
The way that the political participants explained the situation in Tibet prior to their departure suggested that there was more to the notion of control of mobility that warranted greater attention. Further, the initial conceptualisation of a site of control emphasised the control and containment of people and information. However, the link between religion and control evident in the experiences of Tenzin, Dechen and Jamyang indicates that the institutions with which they were associated were also subjected to different types of control, which in turn had implications for the decisions made by the participants to leave Tibet, and their ability to do so. The recognition of relationship between politics and religion (see Kolas 1996; Burman 1979) also draws attention to the systematic targeting of the associated religious institutions. Tenzin, Jamyang and Dechen were all removed from their religious orders and subject to various post-release conditions that sought to stem their physical and political mobility, ultimately aimed at preventing their outward mobility. However, the fact that they were unable to return to their respective religious institutions suggests that when these institutions were concurrently made sites of control, the role of the border adopted a more traditional function of keeping people out. In the context of border studies, this is arguably demonstrative of the risk mentality currently underpinning border control efforts globally. In this regard, the various border control policies and practices essentially demarcate legitimate and illegitimate border crossings based on their threat to a particular society (Wilson and Weber 2008).

Tenzin’s experience as a monk prior to his imprisonment provides additional insight into the way in which religious institutions in Tibet have been controlled. In Tenzin’s reflection on his time as a monk, he described in detail the constant presence of the Chinese police force within the monastery compound. They were not merely present, but actively impacted on what happened within the monastery. He witnessed, for example, police removing monks
from their studies to participate in ‘re-education’ lectures delivered by the officers. This experience highlights that monasteries were considered highly influential within Tibetan society, and therefore had to be controlled and contained, but also changed. While Tenzin did not explain the motivations underpinning these re-education campaigns in great detail, the historical narrative around the latter years of the Chinese occupation is reflective of Tenzin’s descriptions (Department of Information and International Relations 2006; Smith 2009). Smith (2009), for example, outlined how nunneries and monasteries in Tibet were, and continue to be (Wong 2017) targeted for political and social reform – a practice that has been well documented during the initial occupation, as well as in the following decades (Department of Information and International Relations 2006; Smith 2009). The re-education lectures were largely focused on undermining the political and religious authority of the Dalai Lama in Tibet, and on reinforcing acceptance of China’s socialist policies and practices (Department of Information and International Relations, 2006: 30), suggesting that the mechanisms used to control and contain religious institutions were also aimed at broader change.

During his interview, Tenzin spoke the most about the situation in Tibet, providing an insight into the nature of the internal borders and, inadvertently, the implications of the link between religion and control for his decision and ability to leave Tibet. As previously noted in Chapter Five, Tenzin explained that:

[B]ecause they are monks, they should have been involved in their religious education, and studying their own policies, but the Chinese would force the other education. They would also call meetings and force the monks to study the [Chinese]
policies, which did not support their religious activities and education. (Tenzin, political migrant, departed Tibet 1993)

The nature of the bordering efforts around influential social, political and particularly religious institutions and people suggests that in addition to the role of controlling and containing, there is a desire for change or reform that underpins the establishment of different sites of control. This is not unheard of, and, as Zolberg argues in the context of nation building, minority groups are considered obstacles to state sovereignty and legitimacy. He contends that, ‘in order for the nation to come into being, the population must be transformed into individuals who visibly share a common nationality’ (1983, p. 35). In this regard, understanding the different ways in which these sites were created, and why, is important in that the very fact that they targeted specific, yet fundamental features of the participants’ lives had a range of consequences for the decision-making processes associated with their individual border crossings.

While it is argued above that borders are created in the Tibetan context generally to contain people, ideas and information, one reason the participants’ narratives of control are important is that they provide insight into the factors and structures that shape (or force) the decisions and preparatory processes leading to the early stages of each participant’s migration. In Tenzin’s description of a high-transit township located en route to the Tibet–Nepal border, he illustrates how the internal bordering practices that create sites of control influenced the participants’ decisions, preparation and, ultimately, experiences. He provides an account of what occurs in the township of Shigatse, a town noted by seven participants as one of the main destinations en route to the territorial border:
In Shigatse, many Tibetans are caught by the police as it is the most commonly used area for Tibetans trying to get across the border, even for Tibetans from the Kham and Amdo areas. Because of this, it is also a very sensitive area so we didn’t stay there long. Further, many Tibetans are spies for the Chinese and are well connected to the Chinese police department. (Tenzin, political migrant, departed Tibet 1993)

The situation in Shigatse is exemplary of the convergence of the internal bordering practices that create specific sites of control. In addition to the police presence, there is a level of informal surveillance that supports efforts to contain those trying to flee the country. In her analysis of the carceral qualities of national territories, Coutin (2010) argues that a person’s illegalised status can be transmitted onto their physical location, making the space they occupy eligible for the application of a distinct legal regime. In Shigatse, as a known high-transit community, monasteries and nunneries are interpreted as inter-territorial spaces that warrant distinct forms of control as a result of their social and political influence on the identity and dissonance of Tibetans more broadly. By examining this space as a particular site of control, it can be seen as a distinct construct shaping the journey of the participants, thereby providing a frame of reference for breaking down and understanding the implications for the overall border crossing.

In acknowledging the way in which particular places and institutions in Tibet are controlled, we gain an insight into some of the features that inadvertently shaped the experience of the non-political migrants as well. While the quote below is taken from conversations with Tenzin (a political participant), he described a situation facing the general business
population that highlights the prevalence of control in the everyday lives of all Tibetans. It is important to note that the control mechanisms did not only target political participants, or their activities or status. Rather, the participant narratives as a whole demonstrate that non-political participants, and the community more broadly, experienced different forms of control, and at different stages of their border-crossing preparations. Tenzin explained how he witnessed the pervasive nature of control:

When I remember when I was about to leave Tibet, there was an uprising by businessmen who were living in Lhasa. They were asking for a tax reduction on their trade, and although this was not a political activity, [the authorities] thought it was an uprising. Following the revolt, restrictions in the region were increased, particularly where I was living and hiding, so it became even more difficult for me to leave. All the way around the city, the Chinese police were on guard. Because of the uprising, it was very hard to get out of Lhasa. (Tenzin, political migrant, departed Tibet 1993)

The assertion of state control here clearly had implications for Tenzin; however, his reference to the presence of police all around the city illustrates a more visible and pervasive form of control, the difference being the proximity of control to the non-political participants. The controls described by the non-political participants were about much broader social control. While these participants may not have been personally subjected to explicit forms of control, they were aware that there were efforts to restrict and control particular practices and activities in Tibet. While Pema was not acutely aware of the political situation in Tibet prior to her departure, as explained in Chapter Five (see page 141), her later awareness of why the
situation was not discussed reiterates the widespread understanding of the presence of social controls. She explained:

We didn’t discuss political activities, or the political situation inside Tibet with [our parents]. If they were to tell us, they feared that [we] might go and speak out in the town, and if we did they Chinese Government, or the Chinese police, would know that we were influenced by our parents, and that would get our family in trouble, or get them put into prison. (Pema, non-political migrant, departed Tibet 2000)

This speaks to a level of awareness of control, as opposed to being subjected to it personally. Further, it demonstrates an active decision not to participate in overt political activities as a result of that awareness. Therefore, for the non-political participants, the borders were constructed in the social spaces around them, as opposed to being imposed directly on them. They manifest as a lack of opportunities resulting from the various social controls in place. This is how Amala viewed her situation in relation the lack of access to education and employment opportunities:

This is the 21st century, and people around the world are educated and I want to be educated like those other people, so for that reason I left Tibet. It was out of desperation and being fed up with the Chinese policies, so I travelled to India; I walked to the border. (Amala, non-political migrant, departed Tibet 2000)
As the above quote shows, the social controls – which, for the purposes of this analysis, are the internal borders – clearly informed Amala’s decision to leave Tibet. It also demonstrates that the non-political participants did not encounter sites of control in the same way as the political participants. The internal borders manifest in broadly enforced social development and control policies, particularly through the labour market and education reform (No author, 2015). These sites of control thus surround all non-political Tibetan citizens. As I have argued earlier, the nature of the control experienced by the participants largely depended on their proximity to the internal border. For the non-political participants, these borders existed in the structures of society, and, despite their diversity, they were experienced in very similar ways – from a distance. Rather than a specific effort to contain certain individuals, for the non-political cohort, the borders were established to control and change this ethnic population as a whole. It was not until they made the decision to resist these borders that the purpose of the various borders became one of containment. Therefore, the impacts of the borders were different for the different participants, and at different times.

By examining the ways that the participants spoke (either explicitly or inadvertently) about the control they experienced during this early stage of their border-crossing journey, we can see that broadly there are a range of personal and contextual features that shaped their migration-related decisions and actions. Through analysis of the interviews, this chapter begins to map the ways in which the participants progressed through their border crossing, namely by conceptualising these forms of controls as internal borders. By mapping the nature of borders around participants, and the institutions and places to which they were associated, we can not only see how they progressed through their migration, but also gain insight into some of the factors that shaped their decisions. For the political participants, the nature of borders was more personalised and immediate, as opposed to the non-political participants...
whose descriptions of control manifest as socially constructed borders that were embodied in the government policies on education and employment. This approach to mapping the participants’ experiences of control at this early stage of their border crossing also revealed a complex intersection between religion, gender and control – an intersection that manifest differently for the political and non-political participants to some degree, but more between the participants with a religious identity and those without. Each of these revelations has assisted in making sense of the experience of participants and their border crossings, as well as providing a way forward in examining the next stage of their border crossing – the final decision to leave, and the act of leaving, Tibet.

6.3 Preparing to cross the border: the role of resistance

While the efforts to resist State repression do not necessarily act as a direct or standalone driver of migration in this study, they are fundamental to understanding the initial stages of the border-crossing experience and journey in Tibet. Where the first section of this chapter examined the participants’ perception and experience of control through the analytical construct of sites of control, this section examines how the bordering practices that created the sites were interpreted and navigated by the participants.

There are multiple processes involved in preparing to leave the country – a distinct phase in the overall migration journey. In some cases, it can be argued that this phase starts with the anticipation of events (see Kunz 1973) or when decisions are made about taking the next step – the planning (Benezer and Zetter 2014). This phase of the journey is informed, at least in part, by the presence of various control measures, and the decision to resist or challenge those controls that manifest as borders. In this research, the differences between the political and
non-political migrants observed at this stage of the border-crossing journey were largely associated with the way the participants described their decisions to leave, and the level of support they had in doing so.

For the political migrants, preparation was minimal and urgent as a result of the intensity or proximity of the controls to which they were subjected, but this was not to the detriment of their decision-making process. Indeed, among this cohort there were clearly articulated decisions that suggest a high level of agency in navigating the borders at the beginning of and throughout the migration journey. This urgency was driven by efforts to avoid capture and being returned to prison (or in for Champo imprisoned for the first time), where it was well established that they would likely face severe reprisals for their recidivism. As Jamyang explained:

> Just to warn the other people in Tibet [about participating in political activities], they telecast my court verdict to warn people. They put me in handcuffs and shackles, to show everyone that ‘you will get caught’ and to warn people. (Jamyang, Buddhist nun, departed Tibet unknown date)

The proximity of the controls and borders to the political prisoners influenced the urgency with which they needed to leave Tibet. Both Tenzin and Champo recalled this urgency, as both were notified by friends that they were being targeted by the Chinese authorities for their involvement in political activities. Champo explained that, as a result of his political activism in the period leading up to his departure, a notice was sent around the community by
the Chinese High Commanding Office indicating that he was integral to an uprising; he was labelled a separatist and was to be arrested. He was informed of this by his friend, who also highlighted how dangerous it now was for him to remain in Tibet, which sent Champo into hiding. Shortly after, he decided to leave Tibet. He explained his decision, stating:

I was completely decided that it was time to leave Tibet, [because] I will either face the death penalty or I will face 10 years of my life in prison for the Tibetan cause. So to save my life, without any doubt, I just left to the border area. (Champo, political migrant, departed Tibet 2010)

Champo’s decision to flee Tibet was influenced by the different borders and control structures that were placed around him as a result of his political identity and, ultimately, his decision to resist and challenge the borders created to contain him. Prior to explaining his decision to leave, Champo spoke of his risk of being arrested. In the face of the anti-splittist, or anti–Dalai Lama rhetoric, he resisted by establishing a public counter-narrative:

I know that he [the Dalai Lama] is not behind the uprising, but it was a mass uprising of all the communities where we lost so many of our Tibetans by the Chinese gun barrels. I had to explain this publicly. (Champo, political migrant, departed Tibet 2010)

Here it is evident that Champo’s decision to engage in an activity that was well known to attract the attention of the authorities was well considered and calculated. The previous quote
also illustrates the calculations that underpinned his decisions to engage in political activity, as he was aware of the consequences associated with this type of activism. Similarly, all the other political migrants were engaged in political activities prior to their departure; thus, it was critical for all of them that their exit be swift and unnoticed (particularly by the authorities). Dechen and Champo both spoke of the immediacy of their departure:

I didn’t have time to bring all the documents and things [from my home]. (Dechen, Buddhist nun, departed Tibet 1994)

I couldn’t make any arrangements to have any of my stuff to take with me. I was in a hurry and in an exciting and tense time, I didn’t think about my stuff or my money. It was all a secret [that I was leaving], so I didn’t take anything. (Champo, political migrant, departed Tibet in 2010)

The sense of urgency experienced by Dechen and Champo was arguably related to the potential consequences of their decision to challenge and resist the borders that had been built around them. It is well documented that resistance in Tibet has been typically met by military oppression (see Department of Information and International Relations 2006), landing those who choose to resist in prison. These risks are well known, not only through experience sharing, but also through the regularly distributed public announcements about the penalties associated with splittism (Department of Information and International Relations 2006).

Unsurprisingly, the level of urgency described by the participants dictated the nature of their preparation, albeit in unexpected ways. There were two key differences in the preparatory
processes undertaken by the political and non-political participants: first, there was no sense of urgency to flee the country for the non-political participants; and, second, none of the non-political participants had the level of resources or support available to the political migrants. However, what was consistent across both groups was the opportunistic nature of their departure, combined with a level of secrecy about their decision. In the case of the political participants, there was a degree of unpreparedness as a direct result of the urgency of the need to leave, yet their departure was still opportunistic in that it was enabled by the different support systems that facilitated their journey to the border. Tenzin stayed in hiding with the royal family to avoid capture, and until a guide could be arranged to get him across the border. He explained:

I told my whole story to the royal family, and since they were good friends, and Tibetan, there was no risk that the police would find out where I was, or that I was staying with them. (Tenzin, ex-political prisoner, departed Tibet 1993)

Alternatively, in her description of her preparations to leave Tibet, Amala – a non-political participant – explained that while her brother found a job to save some money for their journey, ‘we sat on the footpath like beggars and asked for money like beggars’ (Amala, non-political migrant, departed Tibet 2000). Despite also being classified as political participants, no nuns referred directly to accessing a support network at this stage of their migration journey. However, they did all note that they had little time to prepare for their journey to Nepal (and then to India) given the intensity of the surveillance they were under following their release from prison, and that they had a guide to facilitate their escape. In light of the
limited detail offered about the networks in which the nuns were involved, there is no way to determine (or rule out) the presence of such a support network for this group.

An important feature of the participant narratives is reflective of migrants everywhere; it takes effort to leave, and this effort is demonstrated in way in which they demonstrate high levels of agency, particularly during this early stage of preparations to leave Tibet. While this agency conveyed in the interviews is largely synonymous with the participants’ resistance, it highlights a way to reimagine the experience of migrants within our understanding of forced and irregular migration. Current literature often represents migrants as vulnerable (Huijusmans 2012), or as ‘victims’ (Anderson 2008; Ma Augustin 2003), however, in the present research the participants’ active decisions to resist particular control structures suggest otherwise, especially given that the consequences were well known. As discussed in the previous chapter, those released from prison were required to report to the authorities about any movements outside a prescribed area. This monitoring meant that they needed to seek permission to move between towns and monasteries, and to submit documentation about their post-release conditions. Tenzin described the calculated thought process he engaged in to ensure that he was not caught by the authorities:

I kept my [release conditions] document with me, in case the police inquired about it. If I was caught by the police, I would just say, ‘I didn’t know that I was supposed to submit this document, so I have just kept it with me’. I would pretend that I didn’t know it had to be submitted. (Tenzin, ex-political prisoner, departed Tibet 1993)
In the above quote, Tenzin speaks again to the presence of controls, and his blatant decision to resist them. His resistance here is manifest as a choice not to abide by the post-prison conditions; therefore, it marks the first stage in what is to become a much longer, and more complicated journey.

This agency also transpired into the decision, for many of the participants, to flee the country without informing anyone of their impending departure. It was well known among the political participants that their families could be the subject of harassment and intense surveillance as a result of their political activities. This varied from the participants and their family members being removed from monastic education to the authorities arriving at the family home unannounced to question family members about the participants’ whereabouts and activities. For example, Ngawang explained her departure and its impact on her family:

I didn’t inform anyone [I was leaving], including my parents. So when I left, the police department worked it out. At that time, I was still a nun and had just left the nunnery, and the next day the police department went to my parents’ house to ask where I was. My parents did not know where I was and just said to the police, ‘You have already taken my daughter to prison, how can we know where she is?’ It was only at that point they knew I had left Tibet – before that, they knew nothing. (Ngawang, Buddhist nun, departed Tibet 2004)

The increased surveillance of politically active participants and their families not only transpires into a reason for leaving Tibet, but also forms part of the actual process of leaving
in that they have to prepare to do so in a way that minimises the risk to themselves and those around them. Jamyang explained that:

Since I was a political activist, my father was always called on by the police, again and again. They questioned him all the time, again and again, and this was a big problem. It was a problem that I created for my father, and I didn’t want that. It is this reason that I left Tibet. (Jamyang, political migrant, departed Tibet unknown date)

Jamyang’s decision not to inform family or friends about her departure reflects a calculated decision to seek to protect them, thus highlighting a more nuanced feature of the process of leaving. Similar to the political participants, the non-political participants also made the decision not to inform their family about leaving Tibet. While the reason for leaving was not specifically noted by all the non-political participants during the interviews, many stated that they were not aware of the political situation, undermining any suggestion that there may have been political factors driving their decision. Tsering, sounding almost amiss about her decision, commented:

I didn’t discuss leaving with my parents, and before I left Tibet I worked in a restaurant as a waitress. Then, after that, without any information to my parents, I just left. I didn’t take any advice from my parents and left voluntarily from Tibet. (Tsering, non-political migrant, departed Tibet 2006)
The reasons for the non-political participants not informing anyone of their departure were not clear in this research; however, it could be assumed that knowledge of the risks associated with leaving the country irregularly constituted sufficient reason for these participants to also want to leave without being detected.

As a result of the irregularity of their departure and the intensity of Chinese control, particularly for the political participants, simply making it to the border was plagued with challenges, including overcoming the measures in place to restrict their physical mobility. For the ex-political prisoners specifically, this was characterised by paper-based permission requirements and administrative systems imposed in relation to moving between townships and provinces. Jamyang explained that when she was released from jail, the police said to her, ‘You are not allowed to go anywhere, you have to stay inside your hometown’ (Jamyang, political migrant, departed Tibet unknown date). During the national uprising, she was warned again about leaving her hometown or participating in any political activities at the risk of being returned to jail if she were found to be involved. Jamyang detailed how she navigated the internal border structures:

As there was already pressure from the Chinese Government in my hometown, I needed special permission to do any kind of activities, or travel. So I made an excuse that I wanted to go on a pilgrimage for 10 days and sought permission to go to Lhasa for 10 days. I was given permission for that 10 days and this is how I fooled the police department. I kept the information that I was not going on a pilgrimage a secret from everyone, including my family. I knew that when the 10 days was over the police department would be asking my family, ‘why has she not come back yet? Did you ask
her to go to the wrong places?’ and would create problems for my family. So I had to
fool the police and not tell my family. If I said I just wanted to visit Lhasa, they would
not have allowed me to go. So at the end of the 10 days in Lhasa, I left Tibet. I went
from Lhasa to the Tibetan border area. (Jamyang, political migrant, departed Tibet
unknown date)

Unlike Jamyang, despite being an ex-political prisoner and former monk, Tenzin did not seek
permission to move around. While explaining how he left his township, his tone changed and
he laughed, saying that ‘I simply didn’t submit [my release documents to the police], so I did
not have to get permission [to move around]’ (Tenzin, political participant, departed Tibet
1993). Dachen told of how he sought permission from the government to visit Nepal, with the
intention of then travelling to India without the required documentation. He recounted how,
when he approached the authorities, they asked, ‘Why are you going to Nepal?’ and he
simply responded that he was going to meet relatives to go on a pilgrimage for two months.
He finished this story by saying that ‘I wanted to go on a pilgrimage, and to see my relatives,
so I told them everything I was feeling, so there was no artificial story’ (Dachen, non-
political migrant, departed Tibet 1985). The participant narratives thus demonstrate that
clearly articulated decisions were made in relation to the preparation to leave Tibet that speak
to the impact of control in the lives of participants. The decision to avoid seeking permission
to leave flouts those control mechanisms, thereby becoming an act of resistance.

In addition, Dachen’s quote above also draws attention to the nature of the performance of the
border, and the role that migrants themselves play in that performance. Here, Dachen
explicitly noted that he did not make up a story in an effort to cross the border, whereas other
participants did. For example, Chokeyi adopted the identity of a business women, or trader when she paid for a fraudulent business permit that allowed her to enter a particular border area. Similarly, Ani Dolma dressed as a laywoman when she attempted to cross the border the second time. The way that migrants engage in the performance of the border is increasingly a topic of interest. In research undertaken by Pehrson (2003) on Tibetan border crossings, the identity is the most vital and complex variable for successful migration into either Nepal or India. This is also evident in this study based on the challenges faced by nuns, who hold a particularly politicised identity that attracted more intensive and personal controls. In his exploration of women in contemporary Tibetan politics, Barnett illustrates how the importance of identity manifests on the border:

… she stands accused of fabricating her claim to have lived in Tibet, or even to be Tibetan; if her story is found false she faces deportation. Apart from her memories and her papers, it is only her body that now remains to represent what is Tibetan about her, and it is not believed. She resists the accusation of deception by what we might call ‘performing her nation’, in this case by presenting a narrative that establishes her as part of the extended Tibetan politic and identifies her within a history of nationality oppression and resistance (2005:285).

While this depiction is premised on the experience of a woman on the US border, the role that identity plays in determining her experience at the border is really being determined by the contestation of Chinese sovereignty over Tibet. Here, in what Barnett (2006) refers to as performing her nation (Tibet), this woman is concurrently undermining the sovereign performance of China in that she is maintaining her Tibetan identity. As will be explored in
more detail below and in the coming chapter, the way in which participants crossed the border inadvertently both constructs and deconstructs the border.

The nature of the performance of sovereignty at Tibetan borders is illustrated by the expansive and intensive control measures that enforce both the internal and as will be explored below, the territorial borders. Therefore, to cross the borders – internal and territorial - there were challenges that required preparation by participants. Further, the participants’ knowledge of the consequences associated with engaging in political activities would have been enough to warrant a level of preparedness to leave Tibet, even if not to the extent of packing their personal belongings. While the non-political migrants did not have the same level of urgency motivating their departure, it was still a culmination of factors that led to an opportunity to leave. As noted above, Amala fled Tibet with no financial resources to support her and her family’s journey to India. She described her circumstances prior to leaving:

When my parents passed away, all my siblings were still very young. We are from the Kham province. My brother was only 15 years old at the time our parents passed away and he took care of all seven of us siblings. We all left Kham and came to Lhasa so my brother could find a job. At that time, there was no good transportation, and we didn’t have enough money to pay for the transportation and for that reason we had to walk. Sometimes, we took a bus without paying for it, but the saddest part is that we couldn’t pay for food. (Amala, non-political migrant, departed Tibet 2000)
Thus, Amala’s life circumstances were a driver of migration and shaped the preparation process required for her journey, with that process largely involving financing the journey to India. For Amala, the journey to the border was emerged from an opportunity to obtain free transport. For Chokeyi, she had to use her life savings to leave with her daughter. With the cost of transportation high – an issue that many blame on the massive influx of Han Chinese to the Tibetan urban areas (Human Rights Watch 2014) – Chokeyi had to save all the money she could from 1998 through to 2008 to pay for her transport to Lhasa. She described how she took a bus from her hometown in the province of Amdo – not far from the Chinese border – to Lhasa, and then ran out of money. The financial circumstances facing the non-political migrants, and their efforts to change those circumstances, are micro-processes that speak to both the messiness of border crossings, and the significance of the exilic phase of irregular and forced migration.

The levels of urgency and preparedness were also indicative of the configuration of the number and nature of people with whom the participants fled. The political participants typically left their hometown with between one and three others, who were also political activists – except for Champo who fled Tibet alone, noting that it was too dangerous to take anyone with him. Alternatively, Tenzin left his hometown with a group of 15 other people whom he did not know, and one whom he did know – a layman who had been in prison with him. Once they had escaped their hometown, Tenzin and his former prison companion left the group, knowing that their presence would put the others in danger of being captured. The decision to leave with a group and then separate once they were out of Lhasa suggests that there was an awareness of the consequences of leaving Tibet, and of being associated with political activists. Tenzin made it explicit that he and his companion left the group to ensure that they would not be at increased risk of being captured by the authorities, particularly
given that he was listed on a ‘watch list’ and the authorities were actively looking for him. The nuns fled in small groups; however, there was no specific reference to the number or type of individuals who made up these groups, or how they came to be travelling together. The group configuration among the non-political migrants varied, with some leaving with family members and others in random groups.

Between 2007 and 2008, concerns about irregular refugee flows through Nepal instigated an intensified ‘law and order’ approach to border control, with security efforts heightened on both the Tibet and Nepal sides of the border (International Campaign for Tibet 2008). The International Campaign for Tibet (2008) identified that throughout 2007 there were multiple repatriations to China by the Nepal authorities, and reports of several groups of Tibetans attempting to flee into Nepal never making it to Kathmandu. Those participants who attempted to cross the border around 2007 were particularly high risk. Chokeyi, who left Tibet in 2007, described how, in order to get across the border safely, she had to pretend to be a business women operating in the border areas:

The main Tibetan border area is called Dram in Tibetan, and if you want to go there you need to get paper permission that explains what you are doing there. I had to pay about 100 to 200 yuen at the time for these papers. Yes, this is the illegal way, but this is because the legal is impossible … I have to come all the way from Amdo, which is right near the border of China … for that reason, I was prepared to the fake papers because otherwise it would be very difficult trying to cross the border.

…
The businessmen use this paper so they can do their business in the *Dram* area. They go there and there is a barter system to exchange goods. To do this, I needed the paper and *tooshede* [Chinese goods]. So I took the paper as if I were a businessman. (Chokeyi, non-political migrant, departed Tibet 2007)

The border control regime described by Chokeyi here, and others in this research is not entirely unique to Tibet. It is well established that a ‘law and order’ approach has informed the increasing securitisation of borders globally, particularly throughout the Global North (Wonders 2017, 2009, 2006; Wilson and Weber 2008, Weber 2007; Franko Aas 2007; Pickering and Weber 2006). In the Tibetan context, efforts to address irregular migration are reminiscent of what is happening in the rest of the world, particularly in relation to immigration control. It also echoes what has been documented at borders in and around non-democratic government territories, particularly those in mainland China (Lui 2005). An important distinction to be drawn here is that, while this flow of migrants out of Tibet is largely driven by Chinese interests in Tibet (namely, their interest in sovereign control), the drivers of migration from Tibet do not necessarily align with the globalisation thesis commonly presented to describe the situation occurring on other borders. Therefore, attempting to *leave the country* using fraudulent business papers involved a high risk of arrest, and given the systematic targeting of irregular migration at the time, also presented the risk of becoming politicised, regardless of why the migrant left in the first place.

The processes undertaken by the political and non-political participants in this preparatory phase of their journey were not significantly different; both groups engaged in a decision-making process that was highly attuned to the different ways that sites of control have been
established and enforced in this context. When examined as a process, the enforcement of these sites led to the participants resisting in various ways, which in this research in turn led to the decision and preparation to leave Tibet. While the political participants’ preparation was urgent, clandestine and well supported, for the non-political migrants who had access to financial resources, the limited access to legal channels of migration meant that they, too, ended up engaging in various processes of irregular migration. With the exception of Dachen, all the participants in this research left the country irregularly. This meant that, as soon as the decision to leave Tibet was made, regardless of the reason for leaving, the participants were politicised and essentially criminalised. The fact that Dachen understood that if he were to return to Tibet following his breach of his initial permission conditions he would face imprisonment reiterates this. Therefore, it is at this point in the analysis that the categorisation of participants as political or non-political becomes almost void, as their resistance to the borders via their decision and preparation to leave the country meant that they were all effectively politicised. The nuanced differences between the political and non-political migrants reiterate the initial argument of this chapter: that interrogating the border via the lived experience of the people crossing the border, and the processes in which they engage in to do so (as opposed to looking at what happens at either end), is vital to understanding the nature and experience of irregular migration.

6.4 Conclusion

This chapter has examined how the decision and preparatory processes that underpin migration from Tibet are influenced, shaped and often forced by a multiplicity of bordering practices and actual borders operating within the Tibetan territorial borders. The participants’ personal responses to internal bordering practices demonstrate how migrants – particularly
irregular migrants – can adapt to the context in which they exist, and the structures that they must navigate. Within Tibet, the participants’ experiences reveal that there are a range of bordering practices that establish sites of control around highly influential spaces. These sites are created in an effort to contain information, ideas and people within Tibet, and are enforced by both internal borders and the external or territorial borders around Tibet. While the control mechanisms (and sites of control) are not specifically referred to as a ‘border’ by the participants, the configuration of borders in this context is premised on the consistent reference to control in the participant narratives regarding their experience in Tibet leading up to their decision to leave, preparation and actual act of leaving Tibet. By creating an analytical construct to map the way places, spaces and people are controlled, and the practices, processes and activities that are implemented to enforce and maintain that control, we have a distinct reference point from which to map the different influences and forces that shape Tibetan migrants’ border-crossing journey.

The multiple manifestations of borders and the execution of a range of bordering practices have created a complex array of physical and non-physical structures and spaces to navigate. The participants, both political and non-political, were considered representative of the information, ideas and people that warranted control and containment in the eyes of the authorities. As evidenced through their experiences, these sites of control transpired into a space of, and avenue for, resistance. In the case of the political participants, this resistance was grounded in their involvement in political activism; whereas, for the non-political participants, the very act of preparing to leave Tibet was representative of a form of resistance to the society that the Chinese occupation has sought to create. Based on this interpretation, resistance to the creation of these sites of control became the first step in deciding, and preparing, to leave Tibet. It is at this point in the analysis that the categorisation
of participants as either political or non-political becomes less important as all the participants who sought to leave the country were criminalised, and subjected to a new suite of control mechanisms. While the efforts to resist the internal bordering practices that enforce the sites of control are not conceptualised here as a driver of migration, they are fundamental to understanding the initial stages of the participants’ border-crossing journeys.
Chapter 7: Crossing the Roof of the World – Border Crossings from Tibet into Nepal

The focus of this chapter is the next stage of the participants’ journeys – travelling to, and crossing over, the territorial Tibetan border. The previous chapter demonstrated that, once the participants’ decided to leave Tibet and the various processes they engaged in to do so were considered, the distinction between political and non-political migrants had less merit. As a result of the politicisation of all participants that occurred once they engaged with the border, all were subject to strict control mechanisms, regardless of their reason for leaving. This chapter provides insight into the way that the border effectively politicised, and criminalised, all of the participants, and how they then navigated their subsequent irregular status. It examines what Benezer and Zetter (2014, p. 299) refer to as the ‘actual exilic process’, which refers to the medium that connects to two ends of a migration journey. Thus the chapter follows the participants’ experiences as they left their homes for Lhasa, arriving at the border, and then actually crossing it. Through these experiences, it will examine the socio-political and historical milieu in Tibet, the connection between the two, and how this reality creates an inextricable relationship between participants and the internal and external borders established to control and change them. The very nature of this relationship is integral to understanding the participants’ movements from their initial decision to leave, preparation, getting to the border to actually crossing it – all of which are distinct yet related phases of migration.

This chapter builds on the current understanding of borders and border crossings from the contemporary work of border criminologists, and the impact of the enforcement structures in Tibet for the participants’ migration. Based on the previous chapters’ analysis of control and
resistance, and their impact on the preparation for and beginning of the participants’ border-crossing journey, this chapter provides a detailed examination of the border crossing. The first section of this chapter maps the processes in which the participants engaged to leave their hometown to travel to Lhasa, and from there to leave Tibet. The chapter then follows what are essentially the linear narratives of the participants’ border crossing, where the physicality and risks associated with the Himalayan mountain range are examined alongside the various political enforcement and control structures. It is at this stage in the journey – the actual encounter with the territorial border – that the politicisation of irregular migrants, whether politically active or not, becomes highly evident. The final component of this chapter examines the participants’ post-border crossing experiences in Nepal and then in India as way to begin to unravel the implications that the border crossing had on their lives.

7.1 Leaving home: journey to the Tibet–Nepal border

All the participants, with the exception of Champo (who went to a different border location), travelled to Lhasa from their hometowns prior to departing for the border. For Tenzin, Chokeyi and Jamyang, for example, this translated into a 500-kilometre journey from their home province of Amdo. While most of the participants did not specify where their hometown was, they all suggested that their border-crossing journey really started in Lhasa. As the capital city of Tibet, Lhasa is the central point from which to take any available public transport around, and out of the country. While the political participants typically spent less time in Lhasa in an effort to reduce the risk of being arrested by the authorities, time spent in Lhasa among the non-political participants was a critical part of the pre-border-crossing journey. This is largely because they had to earn and save enough money to enable them to move on. The time spent in Lhasa ranged from three weeks to over 12 months, depending on
each participant’s personal situation. By the time the participants decided to leave they were all effectively politicised, however there were still some interesting points of contrast in the way that the political and non-political participants described this stage of their journey. As the previous chapter demonstrated, the key difference between the political and non-political participants during the decision-making and preparatory phases of leaving their home was their access to support networks and money. For example, Chokeyi explained that:

I waited for one and a half years [in Lhasa] to earn the cost of transportation. I tried while I was in Lhasa to find friends with transport to get to Tashi Lumpo and then to the Tibetan border area for less money. I did manage to find some friends who allowed me to go on their transport for less cost. (Chokeyi, non-political participant, departed Tibet 2007)

While some participants, such as Chokeyi, opted to take transport to the border, many alternated between various forms of transport and walking. Again, this was often dependent on their access to money to pay for transport. When the participants did not have the required money, they walked. After Amala’s parents died and she was left with her younger brothers, she had no access to money:

I didn’t have any money when I left Tibet. From Tibet to try cross into Nepal. I came some friends and some other family members, but without payment and without money. So we walked all the way from the Himalayan foothill area. (Amala, non-political migrant, departed Tibet 2000)
Dachen, who left Tibet with permission, explained that sometimes he walked; however, after his shoes eventually fell apart he travelled by bus:

At the time [I left home], there was heavy snowfall, so I had to walk in the snow. For some of the time, I had to walk with no shoes. Then I had one shoe, because I had no change of shoes, and they became torn. So one day I walked, and then after that I travelled by bus. (Dachen, non-political participant, departed Tibet 1985)

Dachen’s experience was largely shaped by his access to the money needed to pay for transport – although apparently not for shoes. Early in his interview, however, he explained what generally happened if someone had no money when they reached the border. While the quotes above talk about obtaining transport from Lhasa, access to money – or lack thereof – had implications for their journey beyond the ability to take public transport. Dachen recounted how:

In 1985, when I first came from Tibet, I had very, very less amount of money, [I knew] I couldn’t pay the amount [to the police]. If I were stopped at the border area [with no money], despite having permissions and a valid passport, if they didn’t allow me to go past then I would have no option than to go back to Tibet. At the time, I had no money at all – I was very poor, so I could not afford to give that money to the police at the border, especially the border area. (Dachen, non-political participant, departed Tibet 1985)
Dachen’s above account highlights the importance of money for the journey; it was a highly influential factor in determining whether the participants could leave the country. Dachen’s description does allude to border police corruption via the need to pay a fee to *leave* the country, as no one indicated that there were formal departure fees or taxes. When I asked him explicitly whether everyone had to pay the police at the border, he simply replied, ‘Yes, yes’ (Dachen, non-political participant, departed Tibet 1985). I asked if a lot of money was required, and he just said, ‘Yes, yes’. Unfortunately, the conversation moved on quickly and he did not indicate exactly how much this might be, despite my prompts. Dachen was not the only participant to suggest that paying the authorities was an issue they had to navigate upon reaching the border. Tenzin inadvertently suggested this, explaining that he had to hide his money to get across the border. He said that if you met with guards, they ‘might not detain you, but they will charge you a lot of money, then [if you can’t pay], they will detain and deport you’ (Tenzin, political participant, departed Tibet 1993). He smiled when he described his ingenuity at hiding his money, recalling:

> To avoid giving [the guards] money, we put our money inside our shoes. We would take the stitching out, put the money in and then stitch it back up again. Not only under the soles of the shoes, but between the sole and where your foot goes. (Tenzin, political participant, departed Tibet 1993)

Tenzin’s and Dachen’s experiences here reinforce the previous chapters’ conceptualisation of the border as a distinct form of control, and provides insight into how some of the more territorial or external borders are enforced. Tenzin – a political participant – was only in
Lhasa for a short time while all the arrangements to leave were organised for him. Apart from his discussion about how he hid his money, money did not form a significant part of his account of this stage in his journey. When money was considered in relation to the non-political participants, particularly Chokeyi and Amala, their financial situation determined how long they spent in Lhasa; effectively in limbo, waiting to leave. The combined experience of the political and non-political participants arguably draws attention back to another form of control. Where the previous chapter illustrated how controls were experienced differently and at different proximities, the impact of access to money (or lack thereof) as the participants moved towards the border not only represents how the different borders were enforced, but also reinforces the invalidation of the political/non-political dichotomy. Both Dachen and Tenzin – a non-political and a political participant, respectively – recognised that, without money, for various reasons (not least of which was the need to pay the authorities) the journey out of Tibet would be difficult. Thus, the length of time spent in Lhasa was dependent on how much money they had to facilitate the next stage of their journey. As will be examined later in this chapter, access to money also had implications for other components of the journey to the border.

I also asked the participants about how they left Tibet – not simply in relation to the form of transport taken, but also the actual process and experience of leaving. Again, while the decision to leave Tibet effectively unravels the significance of the two participant categories, there were still differences between the political and non-political participants prior to reaching the territorial border. As mentioned in Chapter Six, one of the main differences was in the configuration of the group with whom the participant travelled at the time of departure from Lhasa. This configuration was largely dependent on the urgency of the departure and the participant’s preparedness prior to departing. While the non-political participants – with
the exception of Tsering – stayed with their group for the entire journey. The political participants all noted that they started with a larger group and then at some point left the group to continue the journey on their own; partly of their own volition and partly in response to the political risks they posed for others in the group. Tenzin indicated that he and one other companion – also an ex-political prisoner – left a group of seven others in a community just before reaching the border in order to protect both the group and themselves from being caught:

We were all staying in the guesthouse, we had booked for seven people but we had to fool the others in the group because they did not know about our background; they did not know we had been political prisoners. It was ok for the rest of the group, they all had good excuses to be in Shigatse, but we did not. So we paid for all the accommodation for the group, and then made an excuse so we could leave. [My companion and I] said we were going to go see some relatives, and then we left.

(Tenzin, political migrant, departed Tibet 1993)

The consequences of travelling with ex-political prisoners were thus thought to be too great for the rest of the group, all of whom were laypeople going on a pilgrimage to India. While they did not specify whether anyone else in the group had permission to leave Tibet, the fact that the authorities were searching for Tenzin and his companion meant that they posed a risk to the others. Pema noted that she left with a group of only two others from the same township, while Tsering left on her own, and crossed the border with only a guide as a companion. Champo also made the journey to the border on his own, taking a completely
different route into India; however, he was eventually caught and detained by the Indian border army.

The journey from various parts of Tibet to the border zone involved departing from their home, arriving in Lhasa, and then navigating the various controls and check points along the route between Lhasa and the Nepal border, including the presence of police and border guards. The political participants suggested that, while still within the Tibetan territorial borders, an encounter with the authorities was of more concern than it would be for the non-political group. Yet, such encounters were not always problematic. Tenzin’s experience on the way to the main township before the Tibetan border illustrates this:

[W]hen we were trying to leave Shigatse, we met one of the jail officers. He was riding a bicycle and we both got into an accident. … Most of the prisoners I was in jail with considered this official as a religious person, he was a friendly and kind-hearted prison official. When we collided, he pretended he did not recognise me. (Tenzin, political migrant, departed Tibet 1993)

As a wanted ex-political prisoner, Tenzin had reason to fear any encounter with the authorities. This experience described above was unique among the participants as no other participant had a favourable experience with any authorities at this stage of their journey. It also reiterates the differences in the proximity of the internal controls; at no stage did any of the non-political participants suggest that there would be a risk of being detained if they had an encounter with the authorities prior to reaching the territorial border. The more Tenzin
described this stage of his journey, the more evident was the nature of control, and the implications of the proximity of that control for him and political participants alike. Further on in their journey, Tenzin described how, in the space of one day, he and his companion were both helped and hindered by an authority (an authority figure, at least) on their way to the border:

A man on a tractor drove us about 20 to 30 kilometres before we had to stop. From there, we walked into the mountains, and at the end of that day we reached a small house with a family. The family lived on the hill and had a herd of sheep. They took us in and provided us with food and a place to stay. We stayed there for the night. We reached another small town late the next night. Some of the town leaders and people in the community were known to have a good relationship with the Chinese police department, and were paid good money to tell police when Tibetans arrived. When we arrived, a group of people put torches in our face and tried to tell us, ‘You have to stay here’. They shouted at us, but thankfully, we had big knives so they did not come too close to us. We didn’t listen to the group, and we knew that they would get a bonus from the police if they caught people trying to get across the border, particularly because we were political prisoners. So we continued our journey in the night. (Tenzin, political participant, departed Tibet 1993)

Tenzin’s experience provides insight into yet another form of border enforcement. In addition to highlighting the impact of access to money on the ability to leave the country, Tenzin’s account suggests that the internal borders are also enforced by community members who are paid to report to the police any Tibetans moving towards the border. This informal
enforcement of border control was relatively well known among the participants. Indeed, while recounting her arrival in Nepal, Dechen referred to the ‘Chinese spies’ who listen to the stories of Tibetans and report back to the authorities. The experience with, or knowledge of the existence of, these informal border controls provides a nuanced insight into the way that borders are controlled and enforced on the Tibet–Nepal border. Further, it reiterates previous arguments that borders exist as internal constructs that, in this context, seek to contain Tibetans inside Tibet.

Beyond the nature of border control and enforcement, Tenzin’s experience also highlights the sheer unpredictability of border crossings, and reiterates the importance of examining the processes that occur prior to, during and after the border crossing in a more individualised way. Arguably, the encounter with various authorities, and the different (and unexpected) experiences with them, is still indicative of Tenzin as a site of control; at this point in his journey he was still navigating internal borders in an effort to get out of the country. This was also illustrated in Dechen’s story of avoiding an encounter with the authorities:

We were all very scared about getting caught by the Chinese police. When we walked during the night, we had to walk straight past patrolling Chinese police, as they were staying very near. So we prayed, and threw some religious beads – very small, small beads [in front of us as we walked]. You can find them in the monasteries … and the beads are blessed from various Lamas and high incarnate Lamas. So we threw these beads on the route, and maybe because of this, the patrolling police couldn’t see us. There are lots of prayers, and beads and some mantras. We managed to [get past the police]. (Dechen, Buddhist nun, departed Tibet 1994)
Such encounters with the authorities and others along the way are integral to understanding the participants’ overall experiences in a more nuanced and contextualised way. The accounts of Tenzin and Dechen reiterate both the precariousness and significance of the experiences that precede the physical border crossing. This stage of the journey demonstrates that the process of crossing a border is neither a clearly structured nor temporally constrained event. Rather, it involves a series of unpredictable processes and experiences that can expand from a week to over a year, and shift between success and failure or danger and safety.

Current research demonstrates that there is potential for life-altering experiences to occur in the period that precedes the actual border crossing that would undoubtedly have an impact on the post-border crossing experience. For example, Gerard and Pickering’s (2013) examination of refugee women’s journeys from the Horn of Africa to the EU highlights the variability and unpredictability of the journey, and the potential for both direct and structural violence during the migration process. Indeed, their research found that 11 of the 26 women interviewed had experienced direct violence during their journey across the desert (Gerard and Pickering 2013, 356). These experiences occurred before the women reached the borders of the EU, reiterating that the journey to the border constitutes a significant component of the overall migration process. While in the present research violence was not discussed to the extent that it was by the participants in Gerard and Pickering’s study, there were still some violent encounters with various authorities that had a negative impact on the participants’ overall experience. This is not to say that there was no violence, and Dolma’s experience in the period prior to crossing the border is reflective of Pickering and Gerard’s analysis. After Dolma was released from prison she tried to flee to India:
I travelled straight from home to Shigatse on the border, but I was captured. I was captured, arrested and severely beaten by the police. Afterwards, I was detained on the border for another year. I do not know what happened to the people that I travelled with this first time, but I know that they were beaten as well. They also took all my money. (Dolma, Buddhist nun, departed Tibet unknown date)

These experiences and individual circumstances contributed to this messiness in that factors such as access to money, transport or simply a support network to facilitate departure led to what was often a complicated pathway to leaving Tibet. Generally, it was not until the non-political participants reached the territorial border that their mobility was subject to similar controls to those imposed on the political participants. This is examined more below.

While this chapter suggests that the participants’ journeys were linear, their experiences demonstrate that a border crossing cannot be viewed as a sequence of predictable or explainable events or moments in time. Rather, it entails a complex and messy process that is highly dependent on the individual’s circumstances and characteristics, as well as the social, political and historical narrative that plays out at a particular border site. Further, there is more to a border crossing than actually crossing a territorial, physically demarcated border. In reiterating the conceptualisation of the border via the experience of control as outlined in the previous chapter, this section provides insight into how the borders are at once created and enforced, and how this enforcement (for example, by requiring significant payment at the border) can shape an individual journey. This speaks to the importance of examining not only the crossing itself, but also the different exilic processes that precede it.
7.2 Crossing the Himalayas and the physical border crossing

Reaching the border constitutes the beginning of a new phase in the migration journey. In addition to internal borders, and the different encounters the participants had to navigate on the way to the border, the participants also had to consider the physicality of the border crossing. The urgency with which political migrants fled typically meant that they were often unprepared for the journey across the Himalayas – a journey that, according to the participants, could take anywhere from two weeks to 12 months depending on one’s access to financial resources and community support. The preparedness or lack thereof determined the speed with which the participants had to leave, and while many had been considering leaving for a while, the discreet way in which they all had to leave meant that there was often only a moment’s notice – as soon as the opportunity arose, they left. This is important given that the journey across the border into Nepal presents significant physical risks associated with landslides, glaciers and frostbite, and is therefore a journey for which adequate preparation is generally critical to one’s very survival. The border region where many Tibetans cross into Nepal is approximately 7,500 feet above sea level, and the Nangpa La pass – an ancient trade route between Nepal and Tibet that is now rarely used – is over 19,000 feet above sea level. The participants consistently described navigating the Himalayan terrain as one of the more challenging parts of their journey to Nepal. Dechen spoke of the physical challenges she faced during her border crossing:

I was in jail for two years [in Tibet], and I was tortured badly. My whole body was physically unstable and I have problems with my kidneys. When we [the guide and her companion] were travelling – walking – it was hard to adjust to the high altitude.
There were people in the group who were walking very fast, but we were so physically unstable and had trouble walking and lagged behind. Then we realised at that high altitude that we were still only at the starting point. (Dechen, Buddhist nun, departed Tibet 1994)

While not referring to himself, Tenzin similarly highlighted that the physical and climatic environment presented significant risks:

Many Tibetans who cross the mountains have to cut off their fingers because of the frostbite. The frostbite [can also] start in their toes, and then go up through their whole leg. It did not happen to me, but it certainly happened to a number of others who crossed from Tibet. (Tenzin, political participant, departed Tibet 1993)

The participants recalled having to cross rivers and glaciers, noting that they were aware of other Tibetans who got lost along the way, perhaps falling into glaciers or rivers. In his description, Tenzin noted that:

We walked over the snow for about eight hours [a day]. During the day we had to monitor and understand the snow so that we could walk over it at night time. Before us, there were people who fell into the cracks in the snow, and it is impossible to get them out … no one can save them. We always tried to walk the most dangerous parts during the day. (Tenzin, political participant, left Tibet 1993)
Despite the migrants being aware of the risks of crossing into Nepal, the duration of the journey was still relatively unpredictable, in that different encounters and experiences along the way could add time, or change the direction. This meant that preparing and ensuring that there were adequate supplies was a challenge. Jamyang’s experience illustrates this:

Crossing the border is almost like sacrificing your life, and that was a very difficult thing [to think about] when going all the way from Tibet to Nepal. We could not walk on a hungry stomach, but because we could not carry lots on our backs because our bodies were so bad, and our fitness [so low], we were always hungry. All the food had to be very light, and then in the middle of the journey, when we had finished all our food, we took off our boots and sold them so we could buy food. We just started selling all our other stuff for food. First we sold some t-shirts and then the upper layers of clothing to households for the sake of food. (Jamyang, Buddhist nun, departed Tibet unknown date)

Border crossings globally present significant physical dangers to irregular migrants. Whether crossing the Sahara Desert (Gerard and Pickering, 2014), razor wire fences across the EU, the emerging route through the Arctic or the Black Sea (McHugh and Tomkiw 2015), or the turbulent Bay of Bengal in cargo ships (UNHCR 2015), the physical risks associated with border crossings – particularly those that are driven away from the regularised, legal sites – are similar around the globe. Weber and Pickering reiterate this, explaining that ‘men, women and children die from hypothermia while attempting to cross the border between Greece and Turkey, of dehydration in the Moroccan desert, or while trying to swim across rivers and bays’ (2012, p. 1). In this regard, the Tibet–Nepal border is no exception:
when you cross the rivers, the water is fast and strong and if the water takes you, no one can save you … there are also snowslides when you are walking through the low areas. You can always see the snowslides, and while people say don’t shout, you are constantly praying that you don’t get caught in the snowslides. (Jamyang, Buddhist nun, left Tibet 1990)

In addition to the physical risks highlighted by the participants, navigating the terrain of the Himalayas was exacerbated by the presence of border police and the intermittently intensified surveillance practices targeting irregular migrants and refugees attempting to cross the border. Weber and Pickering (2012) argue that these risks, particularly the risk of death on borders all around the world, are a result of the way in which borders are controlled. Where the previous section discussed the role that internal borders played in shaping the participants’ approach to the territorial border, this section considers how, once they made it to the territorial border, all participants were faced with a raft of surveillance mechanisms in place to prevent them from leaving.

The presence of the authorities at or near the common border crossing points meant that it was often riskier to attempt to cross there. As a result, the participants made one of two choices: either risk the well-known routes, or opt for different, more dangerous routes. By this stage of the journey, it no longer mattered if the participant were considered political or not, as any attempt to cross the territorial border would be met with considerable efforts to prevent them from leaving. Thus, it was important for all the participants to avoid the authorities. When Pema arrived at the original planned border crossing site, the guide realised
that it was being heavily monitored by both Nepali and Chinese police, forcing them to take her to a ‘secret’ route where she paid additional money to local Nepali people to take her to a river crossing. She explained:

we had to cross the river by joining two bamboo sticks together on the other side. Then the guide tied the rope around my waist and we had to walk across the river, but the force of the river made it the most difficult crossing; it is a dangerous crossing.

(Pema, non-political participant, departed Tibet unknown date)

The presence of border police was not the only mechanism in place to prevent people from leaving. Tenzin highlighted this in his explanation of the different bordering practices he encountered along the way:

We always had to be careful when crossing the check post because at every point there were blocked roads and pathways. To make sure that the guards can always hear when there are people coming to cross the border, they put out what looks like small tins on the side of the road and when people try to cross the tin makes noise and lets the police know that someone is there … it is just two sticks that are hidden on the ground and when you stand on them it makes a lot of noise. I remember we hit one by accident and it sounded so we had to run like anything. While the guards may not have detained us [first], they would have charged us a lot of money, and then because we couldn’t pay the money we would have been detained or deported. (Tenzin, political migrant, left Tibet 1994)
Tenzin’s experience illustrates the presence of financial enforcement mechanisms, as well as a suite of more tangible practices aimed at preventing people from crossing the border into Nepal. As mentioned previously, by this stage, it did not matter why the participants were leaving – the very act of doing so meant that they were politicised and at risk of being caught and either detained or sent back to Tibet. As Chapter Six illustrated, the borders experienced by the non-political participants were generally contextual; however, as the experience of Pema shows, once she reached the territorial border it was securitised and enforced regardless of her lack of political identity. This draws attention to a departure in our understanding of technologies of control and the role these play in the categorisation or labelling of ‘good and bad’ migrants. The borders here, particularly the territorial border, are enforced in a way to prevent individuals – arguably based on their ethnicity – from leaving. The implications of this departure for our understanding of borders and border enforcement are further examined in the following chapter.

By continuing the use if the sites of control construct to map the participant experiences, the analysis of their progress towards the border had to consider the context, and particularly the shifts in political context. The restrictions on border crossings into Nepal changed throughout the years in which participants in this study sought to cross the border, which created highly contextualised influences on the different participants’ journeys. These restrictions, as discussed in Chapter Two, highlight that the reception of Tibetans in Nepal has progressively become less welcoming. This, in turn, has had an impact on the way that the border has been monitored and controlled. As Tsering explained:
I left Tibet in 2006 and fortunately during that time there were not many restrictions on the border area, or the crossing area … so there were fewer patrols and fewer restrictions. Then, after 2008 there were so many restrictions because of the uprising and people had to be very careful. (Tsering, non-political participant, departed Tibet 2006)

What is important to note here is that, regardless of the fact that Tsering did not have an overtly political identity, she was still aware of the implications of the shift in political context in Nepal and Tibet for the border. Between 2007 and 2008, concerns about irregular migrant and refugee flows through Nepal instigated an intensified ‘law and order’ approach to border control, with security efforts increased on both the Tibet and Nepal sides of the border (International Campaign for Tibet 2008). The International Campaign for Tibet (2008) indicated that throughout 2007 there were multiple repatriations to China by the Nepalese authorities, and reports of several groups of Tibetans attempting to flee into Nepal never making it to Kathmandu. The participants’ efforts to cross the border at this time were therefore particularly high risk. As discussed illustrated in Chapter Five, when Chokeyi left Tibet in 2007, in order to cross the border safely she had to pretend to be a businessman, and obtained fraudulent papers to do so. The political categorisation of irregular migrants (and irregular migration) more broadly in the Tibetan context does not differ greatly from other border sites around the world; however, as the previous chapters demonstrate, the role of borders is fundamentally different. In contrast with other border zones, such as Australia’s maritime borders or many of the European land borders, in Tibet the justifications for securitising (and politicising) borders is associated with containing Tibetans within Tibet, as opposed to keeping people out. Therefore, the surveillance practices and militarisation of
immigration and border controls experienced by the participants illustrate a highly nuanced departure from how we examine technologies of control in other contexts.

The efforts to control movement at and across the border zones between Tibet and Nepal are largely reliant on an extensive network of military checkpoints. As noted earlier in the chapter, the placement of these control mechanisms, particularly the physical presence of border guards and checkpoints, resulted in the participants attempting to take different, and often more dangerous routes across the border. Tenzin encountered multiple checkpoints during his journey, which was particularly risky as he was a known ex-political prisoner and on an official watch list. He explained that:

the police were looking for me, but they had an old photo from when I was a monk, so my identification from jail and what I looked like then did not match. Before I reached Shigatse, there was a checkpoint and the police came inside the bus to look for suspicious people; I was one of them. (Tenzin, political migrant, departed Tibet 1993)

Tenzin managed to avoid detection at that stage, only to encounter another checkpoint later. This avoidance involved changing transport from buses, to walking, to a farmer’s tractor and then a truck to take he and his companion across the border:

[T]here are usually a lot of police and checkpoints in the Lhaitse area. There was one big checkpoint so the truck driver and one of his friends got inside the back of the
truck [with us] to load their things. Fortunately, during that time at the border area most of the police were away on training so we crossed straight through the checkpoint on the border.

...

I remember that Lhaitse is a very dangerous area, so the truck driver said to us that they needed to stay in the area to exchange the goods in their truck but told us not to stay in the area. As it wasn’t possible for the driver to keep going, we went ahead on foot. As we were walking we came across a man with a small tractor, so we paid him 40 rupees each and took [the tractor]. From there, we came across the police who were coming back from training. Because there are a lot of labourers and farmers along the road they did not think we were fleeing. At this point, we had a puncture and the police even stopped to help and then left us alone to keep going. (Tenzin, political participant, left Tibet 1994)

As explored in relation to the period prior to reaching the territorial border, the role that the authorities played in the border-crossing experience of the participants is significant, but differed between the political and non-political participants. Yet, by the time all the participants reached the border, their political identity did not matter. While the authorities were present among all the participants’ actual border crossings, their experiences differed, which had different implications for the way they each crossed the border. For example, some engaged the network of businessmen and guides to help them cross the border and get past the initial border checkpoints. In this regard, Ngawang provided a detailed description of her experience at the border checkpoints:
There were 13 of us, the [truck owners and guides] put us in the truck, all with heavy loads. We had masks on our faces, and we were put inside the loads in the backs of the truck. When we got to the check post, the Chinese came and checked the truck and would ask the driver, ‘Do you have any Tibetans in your truck?’ [We could hear the] driver say, ‘No, we don’t have’, but still the Chinese would try find out. They would try by hitting a big bamboo stick on the loads. We were hit on our heads, on our hands … but still, we had to keep as silent as possible because if we shouted out in pain the police would know and would take us back [to Tibet]. There were some monks and very young children in the truck with us and we feared that if the police hit the children they would shout and we would get caught. Fortunately, the children did not shout when they were hit on the back with the bamboo or the butt of the gun; they just kept quiet to avoid being caught. (Ngawang, Buddhist nun, departed Tibet 2004)

Despite being in possession of the fraudulent business registration documents that were supposed to get her into the main border-crossing area, Chokeyi and her daughter had to travel through some of the checkpoints undetected:

[T]here are three check posts where they check the [registration documents], and so I had to show my papers. If they see that, they let you past the three checkpoints. When we finally reached Dhum in the middle of the night, a truck came and the truck driver had a good connection with [our] guide. (Chokeyi, non-political participant, departed Tibet 2007)
All these experiences at the border checkpoints reiterate that once the participants reached the territorial border they were all considered political, and therefore subject to the same controls. Beyond that, these accounts also draw attention to individualised experiences, and how examining borders via the lived experience offers a nuanced insight into the nature of borders more broadly. The two experiences described above by Chokeyi and Ngawang alone paint an image of highly securitised formal borders; however, via the lived experience of the participants we can see that the borders are enforced in various ways, and for a range of reasons.

There are some similarities in the way in which the Tibet–Nepal border is enforced and the experiences of the participants with other documented border crossings globally. One of the most commonly used pathways to India has been the Nangpa La pass; however, in 2005 the authorities shot and killed Kelsang Namsto, a Buddhist nun attempting to flee to India via this route (International Campaign for Tibet 2008). Jamyang (a Buddhist nun) referred to this incident, indicating that, as a result of the killing, few Tibetans now attempt to use that pass. The shift away from popular routes did not go unnoticed by the authorities, with most participants noting that they either saw or encountered border authorities or police regardless of the route they took. The impact that border control, immigration or even crime prevention policies have on shifting migration channels is also not unique to this border region. In 2015, Southeast Asia witnessed an unprecedented number of irregular migrants and refugees from Bangladesh and Myanmar fleeing across the Bay of Bengal towards Malaysia and Indonesia, many en route to Australia (Newland 2015). In May 2015, the Thai Government responded to the discovery of mass graves of Rohingya and Bangladeshi migrants on the Thai–Myanmar border with an anti-trafficking campaign that focused primarily on the securitisation of the land borders, ultimately displacing irregular migrants away from the border crossings out into
the Bay of Bengal and the Andaman Sea (Newland 2015). Similarly, the shooting of Kelsang Namsto under the guise of border control (International Campaign for Tibet 2008) supports Jamyang’s mention of the fact that that route is now rarely ever used as a result.

This is illustrative of the earlier argument that, despite being a linear journey, the border-crossing experience of the participants was not straightforward or characterised by a predictable sequence of events or decisions; the presence of authorities and the physicality of the journey create challenges that often changed the nature of the journey. The participants’ progression was regularly delayed, and their direction often changed. The border guards played a significant role in this, with four participants explicitly noting how their presence changed their journey, both in regard to the time it took to actually cross the border, as well as the direction they took. Jamyang reiterated this, noting that:

when we were crossing over the Shakambo passes, we reached the top of the hill in the late night or early morning and just stayed there for a while. We could see the Chinese police or army camp from there, so we stayed in hiding at the top of the hill to watch; we slept through the day and did not move [until the night]. (Jamyang, non-political participant, departed Tibet unknown date)

Despite taking a completely different route into India, Champo also encountered border authorities on the Indian side of the border. He recalled the encounter, saying that:
I didn’t cross the border in Nepal, I went toward Aranchal Pradesh, which China now claims as being part of China. Most people go through Nepal, but I crossed on the [other] border. … [When I arrived] I didn’t think the Indian police would do anything to me; however, I had to surrender to them because I was out of options [for crossing the border]. If I went back to India I would be put in prison, but I had no food to eat anymore as I had stayed in the forest [along the border] for five days. I had no way to survive so I just went to the police. (Champo, political migrant, left Tibet 2010)

Of all the participants, only Dolma reported being caught while trying to cross the Tibetan border. She recalled travelling straight from her hometown after being released from prison, to Shigatse and then to the border where she was caught and arrested. As explained earlier, Dolma was severely beaten by the police and detained on the border for about a year. When she was released, she attempted to flee again, this time dressed as a laywoman grazing animals near the border. Despite reaching Nepal, she was caught by the Nepali police and detained for another four years. She noted that, while they did not beat her, they took all her money.

This analysis highlights the importance of examining the actual border-crossing phase of the migration journey as a distinct array of experiences. As a result of the way that the physical territorial border is enforced, regardless of migrants’ reasons for leaving, it is a site that is characterised by both physical (or environmental) dangers and risks associated with being arrested and imprisoned for attempting to leave the country. While this is not a significant departure from our understanding of the border-crossing experiences of irregular migrants globally, the participant experiences at the territorial border in this research do prompt a
reflection on our current understanding of borders and border control. As stated previously, in this context, borders are established and enforced to keep people in, rather than keep them out. The technologies of control – be it the community members paid to report Tibetans trying to leave, or the border checkpoints – are less about identifying and responding to different categories of people, or the ‘other’, and more about securing any form of irregular migration across the border.

7.3 The Buddhist people smuggler: the use of guides to cross into Nepal

The physicality of this border combined with the political environment created a range of complexities for the participants attempting to leave Tibet. As a consequence, a high level of skill and experience was required to navigate both the physical Himalayan terrain and the various control measures in place to contain Tibetans. Whether it is the lack of information about border crossings, or the limited access to legal (or regularised) migration channels, the barriers to mobility are significant drivers of the emergence of a ‘smuggling market’ and the associated humanitarian issues (Sanchez 2014). As evident in other highly securitised border zones, this led the participants to seek the services of guides to help them cross into Nepal. While this research was not specifically focused on the role of those who assist in the border crossing, it emerged as a significant component of the journey which adds to the broader analysis of border crossings and those who assist irregular migrants to cross.

All the participants spoke of the guides who facilitated their journey into Nepal. By definition, the ‘guides’ were engaged in people smuggling. According to the Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air (2000):
[the] smuggling of migrants shall mean the procurement, in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit, of the illegal entry of a person into a State Party of which the person is not a national or permanent resident.

Given the nature of the relationship between the participants and guides, I was hesitant to employ the term ‘people smuggler’ in examining the role of the guides in the participants’ journeys. My resistance to this term was informed largely by my opposition to representations of smugglers as ‘single-handedly responsible for the deaths of thousands of migrants and asylum-seekers along global frontiers’ (Weber and Pickering 2011, as cited by Sanchez 2014, p. 22), and the ‘quintessential villain in a time of failed attempts at border control’ (Sanchez 2014, p. 22). Further, the experience of the participants in relation to their guides did not always align with the required elements of the international definition – namely, the financial or other material benefit and the fact that the relationship between the guides and participants was based on mutual need. As will be explored further below, while there was an element of financial gain for the guides, their presence provided a vital layer of protection against both the physical and political challenges presented at this border site. Second, where the guide facilitated a respondent’s journey for no cost, it can be argued that there are unexplored nationalistic influences that motivate the network of guides on this border that warrant further attention. The benefits for those engaged as guides, and the subsequent relationship with the participants, contribute to a growing body of research that argues against some of the normative stereotypes present in the current smuggling literature (Sanchez 2017, 2014; Tamura 2010; van Liempt 2007; Zhang 2007; van Liempt and Doomernik 2006).
With the exception of Champo, during the interviews all the participants either explicitly or inadvertently highlighted the need for a guide. Among those who were explicit, the need for a guide was informed by a comprehension of the physical challenges presented by this border, and the limited information about how to cross it. Amala’s approach was typical of the participants. She explained that:

I knew nothing … I did not know the way to Nepal or India. Many people go through the mountains, so you just give money to [a guide] and they take you. (Amala, non-political participant, departed Tibet 2000)

The lack of knowledge regarding the border crossing was consistent among all the participants:

No one discussed [how to get to the border], and no one shared their experiences so we have to rely on a guide. They can take us anywhere and everywhere. Sometimes the guide himself may take the wrong route. We just had to go blindly along their own routes. We just never discussed it, and we never had the opportunity to speak about how to get to the border area. (Dechen, Buddhist nun, left Tibet 1994)

This lack of information meant that most had to spend additional time in transit in Lhasa to arrange and save money for a guide. This section speaks further to the messiness of the participants’ experiences and reiterates the significance of the processes involved in actually crossing the border. The time spent arranging a guide, or finding the money to do so, meant
that many participants spent a period of their journey in limbo – a period when they had started their journey to India, but did not have the means to continue in a linear or predictable manner.

By examining the role of the guides and their relationship to the participants and the broader context, the analysis revealed another layer of nuance in understanding the nature of border crossings in this region, and the experience of the participants. There is a continually growing body of literature that investigates the role of smugglers and the migration outcomes associated with their involvement (Tinti and Reitano 2016; Sanchez 2016, 2015; Achilli 2015). In exploring the role of the guides as smugglers, this research offers a contribution to what is an increasingly strong evidence base that challenges the preconceived assumptions made about smugglers and migrants and their relationship.

One of the main issues discussed in relation to the participants’ guides was money. Research conducted by Amri (2015) on people smuggling in Southeast Asia suggests that payments to smugglers are generally made via instalments, with a deposit provided in advance, followed by periodical payments throughout the journey. The participants in this research suggested that, where money was exchanged for the guides’ services, it was often paid on arrival at the destination. Pema explained that:

[the guides] do take care of us, but not because they are sympathetic, or they take pity on us, but because they do not get the money before. Once we crossed the border, then he will get the money, otherwise he does not get the money. So, he very carefully
and tactfully takes care of us while crossing the rivers to the other side [of the border]. Then once we arrive in Nepal safely, they will get the money. That is the only reason they take care of us. (Pema, non-political participant, departed Tibet unknown date)

There are also circumstances where no money is paid at all. The notion of exploitative people smugglers is largely (although not exclusively) reliant on the presence of monetary or material gain; a notion that is challenged by the experience of Amala. In Amala’s case, who left Tibet with no money, the guide she contacted at first refused her request to take her and her family to Nepal as she had no money to pay him:

I didn’t have any money when I left Tibet. I came with some friends and family, and without payment and without money we walked all the way from our home. The guide said if I don’t pay the money then he would not take me to the Nepal border, so I just said, ‘Please, please, I have no money and I want to go to Nepal and I want to see His Holiness the Dalai Lama in India and receive his blessing’. The guide felt sympathetic and helped us without payment. (Amala, non-political participant, departed Tibet 2000)

Amala’s experience highlights the potential non-monetary or material benefits that result from the relationship between the guide and the participants. As will be explored below, based on the nature of the Tibetan community and their dedication to maintaining their distinct national culture, the facilitation of Tibetans out of Tibet into communities that support their cultural and religious practices presents an opportunity for the guides to support
the continuity of the Tibetans as a distinct cultural and ethnic group. Clearly this represents another motivation for guides other than financial or material gain.

For those participants who did pay for a guide, the costs varied depending on the years in which they left Tibet and their own personal circumstances. In 1994, it cost Dechen between 600 and 700 Chinese yen to cross the border. By 2008, the average cost had increased to between 1800 and 2000 Chinese yen, which covered the entire journey including accommodation and transportation costs. Outside this, depending on the approach to crossing the border, there were additional costs such as for the provision of fraudulent business documentation. Chokeyi explained, ‘If you want to go through the Dram area, you need the paper permissions to explain why you are going. So I had to pay around 100 to 200 Chinese yen at the time’ (Chokeyi, non-political migrant, departed Tibet 2007). As Chokeyi also had her daughter, she paid 7000 Chinese yen for the two of them to cross the border in 2008, which included the entire journey to Nepal. The participants also incurred costs for accommodation, which was generally inexpensive at 2–3 rupees. The costs described by the participants were generally per person, and most participants reported travelling with one or two companions or a larger group.

Despite this, the participants’ narratives around their guides highlighted that there is more to the relationship than just money. Similarly, in Sanchez’s research on people smuggling on the US–Mexico border, she discovered that the smugglers themselves were often viewed as a layer of protection for irregular migrants (Sanchez 2015; see also, Spener 2009; Zhang 2007). Van Liempt and Doomerhik (2006) also identified that a complex relationship is often established between the smuggler and the migrant, largely based on protection mechanisms.
This level of protection was also noted by the participants in this research. As Ngawang recounted:

The two people who help guide us to the Nepal reception centre had done a remarkable job and helped us a lot. During the time of our journey, we were taken care of very well. Most of us couldn’t walk properly, and had a lot to carry so the guides helped us. Then when we stopped to take a rest, the guide voluntarily tried to make us food. When we arrived at the reception centre, and the guides went to leave us, we paid some money as a token of our appreciation. We said, ‘the two of you are very kind, and you haven’t fooled us this whole journey and you have taken good care of us so in our appreciation we would like to give you some amount of money as a gift for your hard work and your kindness. (Ngawang, Buddhist nun, departed Tibet 2004)

While the above example refers to a post–border crossing experience, it represents a contribution to the emerging body of literature that seeks to ‘demystify’ people smuggling (Sanchez 2014) and argues against normative policy approaches aimed at criminalising people smuggling as a form of transnational organised crime (Doomernik 2013; Bilger, Hofmann and Jandl 2006). While research into people smuggling in this region of the world is limited, research by Zhang and Chin (2002) into the Chinese ‘snakeheads’ demonstrates that the preconceived notion that all people smugglers are linked to transnational organised crime groups may be flawed – a finding that is supported by the pre–border crossing narratives of the participants in this research. Zhang and Chin (2002) discovered that people smugglers in China were generally local community members, whose social networks alone
provide access to connection to facilitate border crossings. In this vein, in explaining the nature of her journey to the Nepal border, Chokeyi noted that:

I had a good friend in Nepal who was in contact with the guides and she said to me, ‘Do not worry, you are safe with them’. [The guides] were from the same province. I remember [my friend] saying, ‘do not worry, they will take you to the right place’.

(Chokeyi, non-political participant, departed Tibet 2007)

Sanchez’s research also found that there were strong community ties among smuggling networks, explaining that ‘all smuggling operations, regardless of their size, seem to have originated and grown from groups operating on these community-based terms, largely dependent on trust, and kin and friendship ties’ (2015, p. 280). Tenzin reiterated this, describing how his guide was also a refugee who had completed his schooling while in exile in India, and then returned to the Tibetan borderlands to become a guide. When Tenzin left Tibet in 1993, his guide had made the journey 26 times.

To navigate the combined risks of the physical environment and border authorities, both the political and non-political participants indicated that their guides made them walk during the night and hide during the day:

We walked all night, and in the morning we couldn’t walk anymore because we were too close to the border and we had to be very careful not to be caught by the police. So in the day, we hid in safe places and took rest, then at night we kept going. The
guide could only see the stars and the moon at night, so it was hard to work out which direction we should be going. So the guide used a small bamboo stick, with fire at the end and then walked with it facing toward the ground. We followed the guide over the snow for about eight hours at a time. (Tenzin, political participant, departed Tibet 1994)

While the terrain of the Himalayan mountains is undeniably dangerous, some other border zones are comparable in terms of such risks. However, the combined challenges created by the terrain and the political atmosphere in this region have established what many refer to as a ‘market’ for migrant smugglers (Amri 2015; Tamura 2010; Gathmann 2008). Gathmann identified such a market on the US–Mexico border, explaining that ‘[s]mugglers, known as coyotes, are experts and have better information about how to cross the border without getting detected by the border patrol’ (2008, p. 1927). This was similarly demonstrated by Chokeyi:

When I reached the border area, I had to get a guide because I could not cross the official border area, I couldn’t cross the bridge. So I took a guide from there. There are three check posts that checked our papers. …When I reached the area at night, the guide put me and my daughter in the truck, and the truck driver had good networks with the guides. When we got in, they put a blindfold over our head so we couldn’t see – it was from our head down to our neck like a mask. I remember being very afraid when they put the mask over my face, and at the time my daughter was only six years old. The guide that put us in there said, ‘Don’t worry, they will take you to the Nepal reception centre’. In the late night, they still had the masks on our faces and we
were put into the truck and we did not know anything about where we were going, or where we were going to end up. There were two trucks and two truck drivers and when we left at sunset the only thing they said is ‘don’t worry we are about to reach the border’. Then, we were told not to make any noise, not to speak a word. So we stayed very silent as the guides were also in danger. When they told us to be silent, they sounded very commanding, they had a very high voice – almost yelling. My friend in Nepal was already in contact with the guides, and she said to me ‘do not worry, you are safe with them as they are from the same province’. Still, I was not sure, and I was worried about unwanted acts or behaviour to my daughter, I was very worried. (Chokeyi, non-political participant, left Tibet 2007)

Van Liempt and Sersli (2013) argue that there is an increasing emphasis on the role of people smugglers in refugee and asylum seeker journeys, and how they facilitate irregular migration as opposed to why. The continually strengthened – albeit partially flawed – association with transnational organised crime means that criminalising people smuggling through the securitisation of borders is politically justified (Gallagher 2015). Gallagher argues that it is this approach that ‘[pushes] individual[s] who want or need to cross international borders into the hands of smugglers’ (2015, p. 66). Yet our knowledge of what happens once that relationship between the smuggler and migrant is established remains incomplete and plagued by criminalising rhetoric around exploitation and vulnerability. Maintaining the status quo underpinned by the relatively well-accepted economic model of migrant smuggling (see Salt and Stien 1997) means that migrants are continually projected as passive actors recruited by smugglers (Van Liempt and Doomernik 2006), which denies the two-way relationships that are formed based on protection, support and, in this research, I argue a level of nationalism. As evidence continues to emerge about the protectionist role of people
smugglers in the irregular migration journey (Sanchez 2014; Van Liempt and Serli 2013), the current framework used to understand the phenomenon is becoming increasingly limited at conceptualising why and how smuggling manifests at different border sites. By moving beyond the state-centric, criminalised categories imposed on irregular migrants and people smugglers alike, a more nuanced and socially accepted processes involved in people smuggling globally is evident. In thus shifting the focus, the structures underpinning the policy responses to irregular migration both in Tibet and globally begin to dissolve.

7.4 Post–border crossing experiences – reflections on the participants’ arrival in Nepal and lives in India

The processes involved in and experiences of successfully crossing the Nepali border highlight the messiness of irregular migration and border crossings. Following their crossing of the border, the participants recognised that this was not the end of their journey, but merely the next stage. There were new challenges and contexts to navigate. As Chapter Two outlines, the political shifts in Nepal in relation to supporting Tibetans trying to flee Tibet have, unsurprisingly, had a range of implications for Tibetans trying to get to India – implications that were clearly evidenced by the participants’ experiences once they crossed the border. One of the most significant features for this stage of the journey was the Tibetan reception centre, as not only a destination but also a facilitator of their onward journey to India. Beyond the political context, the participants also had to deal with a completely different climatic environment, and the aftermath of the physical journey from Tibet. This final section examines the participants’ reflections on that journey, how they dealt with the life-changing experience of crossing the border, and their views on their future.
All the participants crossed the border with the intention of making it to the Kathmandu reception centre. Following the closure of the Tibetan Welfare Office in Nepal in 1989, the reception centre continued to operate informally, supported in large part by the Tibetan Central Administration in India. Despite the informality of the centre, it was still the main destination for all the participants, as they knew that it would provide them with some support and respite after their journey from Tibet. Amala explained that:

[T]he reception centre is still there and has not yet been shut down by police. They still receive Tibetans arriving from Tibet and they provide the accommodation, some medical facilities and money for the transport to India. (Amala, non-political participant, departed Tibet 2000)

However, upon crossing the border, the participants recognised that there was a still a significant distance to travel to reach Kathmandu. As Tenzin pointed out:

[crossing the border] is nothing, this is just a small part of the experience. Even if you reach the Nepal border area, you have to walk for many days before you reach the reception centre. From the Tibetan border to the Nepal border area it took many, many days to cross over the mountains. In the morning, we came down, and at night we went back up. There are three or four mountains to cross. (Tenzin, political participant, departed Tibet 1993)
Until this point in participants’ interviews, the participants did spend significant time reflecting on the different impacts of their journey; their responses were all very matter-of-fact and process oriented. Even when discussing their arrival in Nepal, as the above quote from Tenzin demonstrates, the focus was primarily on the process of getting across the border and to the reception centre. By maintaining the mapping approach to the analysis, I wanted to see if and/or how the border was still a present feature in their lives after crossing it, and if so, what they revealed about the situation in Nepal as well.

In an effort to capture more than just the process – which I was only really able to do at the end of each interview – I asked the participants to reflect on their arrival at the reception centre. In the accounts that followed, of particular significance was the shift in physical and mental wellbeing. For example, Pema explained that:

> once I reached the Nepal border area, I was in an independent country, and I felt a kind of freedom, a happiness in my mind. I was relaxed. Even though there was no one there to take care of me, and I was without my friends and family, I was still very happy. (Pema, non-political participant, departed Tibet unknown date)

In addition to this, it was clear that the physicality of the Himalayan border crossing took a toll on all the participants. Tenzin explained that, on arrival in Nepal, ‘I had lice all over my body, and my body had become very dry and cracked’ (Tenzin, political participant, departed Tibet 1994). Importantly, though, not everyone made mention of their physical ailments,
some pointing out that it was less important than their mental state. In this regard, Dechen recalled:

my face had dried up because we spent so many days in the hills and mountains and faced so many storms. Once I reached Nepal, there was some pain on my face because they were all cracked and that was uncomfortable. But still, I felt very happy because I was no longer in danger of being caught by the Chinese police. (Dechen, Buddhist nun, departed Tibet 1994)

The feelings described by Dechen are reminiscent of the feelings noted about the experience of human rights abuses in Chapter Five, which explored the way that the Buddhist nuns, in particular, discussed severe human rights abuses by minimising their pain when compared to the experience of others. That chapter argued that the participants’ acceptance of their own pain and suffering was made possible by diminishing the severity of their own experience and acknowledging or suggesting that the experience of others, particularly the Dalai Lama, was worse. This was also evident in our conversations about their physical and mental state upon arrival in Nepal. As Ngawang recounted:

I remember His Holiness the Dalai Lama when he fled from Tibet, all the way walking and sometimes on a horse. When I think about him [and] the hardships he faced then my own problems seem very, very small. (Ngawang, Buddhist nun, departed Tibet 2014)
As discussed in Chapter Five, Ngawang’s description of how she was feeling, and how she dealt with life after arriving in Nepal, may be a very specific cultural coping mechanism, largely influenced by her religion. Indeed, her interpretation and response to the situation can be seen as reflective of the firmly grounded relationship between Tibetans, His Holiness the Dalai Lama and the teachings of Buddhism. The influence of Buddhism in shaping the responses to post–border crossing experiences was not so apparent for all the participants; however, it does draw attention to the importance of context in examining personal experiences.

Some participants explained that they initially struggled to deal with the change in their circumstances after crossing the border. Chokeyi, who arrived in Nepal with her daughter, recalled how on arrival at the reception centre, she questioned her decision to leave:

When I reached the Nepal border, I thought ‘although there were some problems in my province, I still had enough food to eat’. When [my daughter and I] arrived at the reception centre, the food was poor quality and we were not used to rice and dhal. We were not used to anything, and even the dormitory was not warm, and not sufficient to warm our bodies. I was sad, because at home I was hard working, and our income was good, so I was very sad. Still, I patiently tried to adjust to the situation because the situation in India was going to be the same; the weather, the food, the quality of life … I just tried to adjust because if I got to India, I would get the blessing from His Holiness the Dalai Lama, and because of that I tried to be as comfortable as I could. (Chokeyi, political migrant, departed Tibet 2007)
Other participants identified, albeit not always directly, that there were aspects of their arrival at the reception centre that made them feel uneasy, namely, the nature of the questions they were asked. On arrival at the reception centre, some of the participants were questioned about who they were, where they had come from and how they got to Kathmandu. Dechen recalled the staff asking her a lot of questions:

they asked for my family name, and a list of my family members. They asked about how I got to the border crossing, and about the political situation inside Tibet as well as my legal situation in Tibet. They asked me and my friends these questions. (Dechen, Buddhist nun, departed Tibet 1994)

While many participants noted that they felt safe once they crossed the border, some still had concerns about being reported to the Chinese police. As Dechen commented:

whatever came into my mind, about the name of the guides and her friends, I just said it although I had no idea about the correct name of the guide. So I answered their questions, but I did not really know. In 1994, there were not any problems answering their questions truthfully, but now, in the reception centre there may be many Chinese spies who may be listening to our stories and they may report us to the Chinese department, which also may cause problems for families. (Dechen, Buddhist nun, departed Tibet 1994)
Despite this level of uneasiness, the participants indicated that the reception centre assisted them in making refugee claims in India (from 1989, Nepal no longer allowed Tibetans to obtain this status or to resettle). Pema emphasised how the staff at the reception centre helped her complete the forms required for her to go to India; support that largely informed the reason that the reception centre was often the main destination in Nepal:

> the only thing they asked was for me to fill out a form, and in the form it just asked why I wanted to stay in India. … Because they are under the administration of the Central Tibetan Administration, they did not need to ask any other questions. (Pema, non-political participant, departed Tibet unknown date)

The documents provided by the reception centre are vital to obtain refugee status in India, and must be given to the Indian Government in Nepal. Amala noted that ‘once they knew I was from Tibet, I was welcome and did not have to show any documents. I only had to fill out one form about how I escaped to Nepal, and why I left Tibet’ (Amala, non-political participant, left Tibet 2000). Given the changed reception of Tibetan refugees in Nepal, it was curious that the participants made an effort to make it to the reception centre, as opposed to simply travelling straight to India irregularly. The participants did not indicate that this latter option was one they ever considered; however, in and of itself this draws attention to their view of India as a legitimate, and long-term destination, and that they did not see Nepal as a realistic option for settlement. While this is only one possible interpretation of why the participants viewed the Tibet–Nepal border differently from the Nepal–India border, looking at what the participants did not say raises questions about the situation of Tibetans in Nepal. This falls out of the scope of the present analysis (largely because it was not explicitly
discussed), yet it highlights another series of conscious decisions and processes that are shaped by the context surrounding the participants, a context that shifted constantly throughout the entire border-crossing journey.

While the political situation in Nepal was not a focus of the interviews, the participants’ reflections on their experience at the reception centre offered insight into both the nature of the support institutions in Nepal, and how the participants viewed their life post-migration. It is important to note here that while the territorial border arguably rendered the political affiliation or identity of the participants irrelevant, on arrival at the reception centre, their experiences suggest that the distinction between political and non-political was still significant in shaping the post-border-crossing experience. The analysis in the previous sections has demonstrated that there were differences between the political and non-political migrants in relation to the urgency of their departure, and the support networks in place to facilitate their journey to Nepal. There were also differences in their experiences at the reception centre between the participants who left Tibet for political reasons and those who did not. These differences were less distinct than those observed in the pre-border-crossing stages, but they highlight a relationship between the situation in Tibet, the reasons why the participants left Tibet, and their experience in Nepal, particularly at the reception centre. Among the participants who discussed their experience at the reception centre, the majority indicated that the conditions were poor. As Tenzin and Ngawang described:

The facilities were very poor. When we reached Nepal, there was no permanent building for the reception centre. The building was only leased so there were no good facilities, and the medical facilities were not that good either. The quality of the food
was also poor, and they had only very thin bedsheets for us and we had to sleep in the dormitory with just that one sheet. There were no proper facilities there, and the building itself was not even water-proof. (Tenzin, political participant, departed Tibet 1994)

When I arrived at the reception centre, I was physically relieved, but mentally I was disturbed. I was disturbed when I saw around 800 newly arrived Tibetans already there. About 800, and they all came from different directions from the Nepal border. When I was in Tibet, I did not see any of these types of problems. … People were sacrificing their life to cross the border, and that makes me unhappy. I blacked out how sad I was when I first arrived. In my hometown in Tibet, my parents only looked after five or six people in our family, so I always wondered, ‘How can His Holiness look after this many people?’ I constantly worried about the livelihood of the people at the centre. (Ngawang, Buddhist nun, departed Tibet 2004)

Despite her unhappiness and concern, Ngawang noted earlier in her interview that on arrival she was offered ‘special care at the reception centre – a special dormitory’ (Ngawang, Buddhist nun, departed Tibet 2004). While no one else indicated that this was offered to them, it supports the suggestion that those who were known to be politically active were treated differently from those who were not. However, given that Tenzin and the other nuns did not indicate any differential treatment at the reception centre, this claim is subject to interpretation. Regardless, it does draw attention to the influence or impact of the political identity of the participants, and the possible post-migration outcomes in India.
Research into the experience of Chinese political exiles highlights that the post-border-crossing experiences of politically active migrants are different from the experiences of those who are members of the expatriate Chinese community (Yun Ma, 1993). Research by Yun Ma identifies that unrealistic expectations are often placed on political exiles, and while this relates to Han Chinese exiles, there is evidence that this differential expectation is imposed on Tibetan exiles as well, therefore leading to different post-migration experiences on arrival in exiled communities in India. In his reflections on his political activity after arriving in India, Champo explained that:

The most discouraging feeling that I had when I got to India was when I looked at the hard work and dedication of people fighting for Tibetan issues in Tibet, and the low number of people fighting for these issues in India. Tibet is in a critical condition, China is trying to eradicate our culture, our language, our traditions and religion under the hardline, repressive policies. Still, in India, people are not motivated and do not seem as motivated or concerned about people in Tibet still facing problems. … I was so uncomfortable looking at the situation in India, people were busy trying to work out how to improve their own livelihood, rather than caring about issues in Tibet. People in Tibet are still sacrificing their lives for Tibet. (Champo, political participant, departed Tibet 2008)

I highlight this difference, as it reflects the nature of life in India for both political and non-political participants. The non-political participants often emphasised the ongoing hardship and challenges they had to overcome once in India:
When I came to India, I had nothing to look after myself with; I had no sound financial support and I was very poor so it was difficult to adjust and sustain myself, and my family, because I had to look after my three younger brothers. I now work, and I have managed to look after them. It is very fortunate that because of the hard work, I am looking after the family on behalf of my parents as they passed away. I do look after them, despite my many hardships. I am still facing a lot of problems. (Amala, non-political participant, departed Tibet 2000)

Amala spent a lot of time at the end of her interview reflecting on the hardship of her life, including the low incomes for Tibetans living in India, and the rising costs for her family. She explained that ‘I only have 4000 INRs per month for working. With this salary alone, the costs of living fluctuate for things like rent and food. For that reason it is very difficult to manage with children’ (Amala, non-political participant, departed Tibet 2000). Most of the non-political participants were working in low-paying jobs, and their accounts of Nepal and then living in India were primarily negative, with only glimpses of a sense of gratefulness for having arrived safely, and being able to access the opportunities not available to them in Tibet. Pema had a tumultuous experience after arriving at the reception centre, and while elements of achievement were present in her account, her body language was deflated, and she emphasised the negative aspects of her journey. After arriving in Nepal, Pema was transferred to Dharamsala in India via Delhi, and a week later was taken to the Tibetan Children’s Village (she was 17 when she arrived in India) where her education level was assessed. After being assessed as class 6/7, she began her studies only to be later diagnosed with tuberculosis. After months of treatment, she returned to study but then failed her exams. As a result, she undertook vocational training, and was working as a seamstress at the time of
the interview. By the end of the interview, Pema was staring into her empty tea cup as she spoke. She was not visibly upset, but she described her life without enthusiasm or optimism.

Comparatively, the nuns and other political participants were content; the former were all still practising nuns and, while they missed their family and Tibet, they were happy where they were. While they recognised that there were elements of their lives that were challenging, their reflections focused on the positives – they could continue their religious education, and they were safe. Tenzin and Champo were still politically active and highly engaged with their community. Champo was still politically vocal and, as mentioned above, had an expectation that Tibetans living in India had a responsibility to continue advocating for the Tibetan freedom cause. As he discussed his life with enthusiasm, he sat upright. I remember him sitting very tall telling – if not challenging – me to tell his story to everyone; he was proud of where he was and what he was doing. Tenzin was content during his reflections. Even after the interview stopped, he continued to talk for a long time about what he was doing in India, with a particular focus on his studies and advocacy.

The final question asked of the participants was whether they wanted to return to Tibet. Tenzin, maintaining the very matter-of-fact style of response, explained the process that he would have to follow to return, indicating that even if Tibetans leave Tibet without permission, they can still apply to return. He said:

[y]ou have to apply for permission from the Chinese Government, or the embassy. They will seek all the information and clarification about the purpose of the trip. Once
they get confirmation that the applicant has not been in any political activities in India, or Tibet, they will give a visa. This would only be to do one thing, like see your parents. It’s not a tourist visa … you can go to different places, but you have to get permission from the police in Tibet. So you can go back if you left without permission, [but] you need permission from the Chinese embassy. (Tenzin, political participant, departed Tibet 1994)

Amala reiterated that a Tibetan who has left Tibet without permission could return if granted permission, yet that it was rare to get the visa:

[the embassy] didn’t say no, but they were not interested. They gave me the form and I filled it out, and they told me it would take four months, so come back and ask us then. I didn’t get any permissions because I came into India. I miss my other brothers and sisters so much, but I also miss my country. (Amala, non-political participant, departed Tibet 2000)

As noted in Chapter Five, Pema did return to Tibet. After her mother passed away, she found out that her father was sick so she needed to return. Unable to obtain permission, she decided to leave India anyway:

I felt like I wanted to go back to Tibet, whatever the cost may be, whatever the circumstances I would face. In 2009, I decided to go back. I remember being told that my father was sick, and when my mother passed away I never got to talk to her, and I
thought this would happen again if I didn’t go back. I didn’t seek permission because at the time there was an uprising and there were many problems inside Tibet, so there were also problems getting a visa for Tibetans living in India. I went without permission, and just took the same route I took when I first left Tibet. When I arrived, my father was very worried and said that I should report my presence to the police, so that I don’t face any problems. I listened to my father and reported to the police. Instead of welcoming me, and accepting my mistake they put me in custody for one month. Then after that month they shifted me to another prison for two months. I spent the next five months moving between different prisons. During this six months, I faced a lot of problems. … I had to forget about food because it was awful, and I was constantly questioned by the police. Even though I was not involved in any political activities. I wasn’t beaten or tortured but I was constantly questioned. I was released after six months, and returned to stay with my father. … After another six months, I returned to India, again taking the same route and am now relaxed, and have some sort of satisfaction as I can look after myself. (Pema, non-political participant, departed Tibet unknown date)

Pema’s experience underlines the reasons that most participants believed they would never be permitted to return to Tibet legally. No other participants answered questions about their ability to return to Tibet, particularly the political participants. Just as the nuns avoided answering questions about their experiences in Tibetan prisons, the other political participants seemed to expect me to know that they would never be able to go back to Tibet. So nothing was said about it. The participants who did not elaborate opted to focus on the present. Chokeyi, for example, reiterated that leaving Tibet meant that her daughter had access to the
education that she never had. Others recognised that being in India meant that they were under the care of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, and that was all that they needed.

At the conclusion of the interviews, I offered time for the participants to ask me questions, or offer any concluding thoughts on the research and their experience. Some of the participants asked about the research outcomes, and how I believed this research would help their situation. Pema, for example, wanted to know if I could help with establishing an education program for tailoring workers. During the interview she said that she wanted to continue her studies in English, but that this option was largely unavailable. In answering her question, I spoke about my skill set as a researcher, and what I could realistically do to help. While she seemed somewhat dissatisfied with my response, she still took the khata that I offered to her in appreciation for her time, placed it around my neck, and said thank you. Despite her thanks, our interaction at the conclusion of the interview with Pema challenged and problematised my position as a researcher, and as a foreigner in that there was an assumption that I could be doing more to show my gratitude for being able to conduct the research, while at the same time recognising that my position as a researcher had some benefits as per my answer to her question. As will be examined in the final chapter, my position throughout the interviews was constantly changing: at times there was a high level of mistrust and suspicion that resulted in partially told stories and limited details; at other times I was a respected researcher from Australia with a role to play in mobilising the Tibetan freedom narrative; but at different times, often in the same interview, I was just someone to talk to. Just before Tenzin left the room where we had spent three hours walking through his entire journey, he said, ‘Once I reached India, everyone wanted to know about my experience, but this is the first time anyone has asked me about my border crossing. Thank you’ (Tenzin, political participant, departed Tibet 1994).
7.5 Conclusion

This chapter has examined the distinct phases of the participants’ actual border crossing journey. In doing so, it has highlighted the importance of examining the processes of exiting a country and crossing a border irregularly. The participants’ experiences have reiterated what has been established on other border sites – that there are significant phases and events that can occur in the period between departure and arrival at the border that warrant attention. In mapping the distinct journey of each participant, and accounting for the different contextual features they experienced along the way, we are required to rethink how and why the borders were created, and the impact this has had on the border crossings of the participants, of Tibetans and of migrants globally.

This thesis – and this chapter, in particular – therefore make two major contributions to our understanding of migration and borders. The first is specific to this chapter. The participants’ relationships with their guides complements the broader body of scholarship that highlights some of the limitations in contemporary typologies that present people smugglers as exploitative businessmen who profit on the backs of vulnerable migrants and refugees. As the narrative around the guides in this study have demonstrated, they provided a layer of protection against both the physical and political challenges presented on this border site, and while there is an element of financial gain for guides, there are also nationalistic and kinship benefits for those engaged as guides.

The second contribution draws from this chapter, but also the thesis more broadly. This chapter shifted the focus from the bordering practices (Chapters Five and Six) to the border-crossing process, exploring the individual experience, the hardship, the reality and the overall
complexity and messiness of it all. It illustrated that the specific processes engaged in to prepare for, cross and then arrive on the other side of the border are shaped by different social, political and historical contextual factors. These factors varied for each participant depending on their personal circumstances, and whether they were inside Tibet, on the Tibet–Nepal border, in Nepal proper, or living in India. Therefore, by mapping each border crossing individually, the contextually specific and informed nature of borders, border control and enforcement at three distinct points in this region emerges. The participant experiences suggest that the borders were created and enforced (and therefore navigated) at internal and territorial/external levels, and all worked to contain Tibetans. When the participants made the conscious decision to resist those border structures, regardless of their reason for leaving, they became politicised, if not criminalised. Their experiences therefore illustrate how the border acts as a state tool to contain them while in Tibet, and secure them on the territorial border – which arguably represents a departure from the predominant analysis and understanding of borders, and the role of the mechanisms that create and enforce them. However, the participants’ reflections on whether they wished to return to Tibet revealed that, once they were in Nepal or India, the role of the border shifted to assume a more traditional role aimed at keeping them out, further emphasising and reiterating the transformative nature of borders more broadly.

The participants’ border-crossing experiences have not undermined or challenged the technologies of control framework; rather, these experiences have provided another layer of nuance and understanding of how borders operate and are enforced, and of the resultant implications for irregular migrants in different geopolitical contexts.
Chapter 8: Conclusion – implications from a study on the Tibet-Nepal border

This chapter shifts the focus and scale: from the micro focus on the specific experiences of Tibetans during their irregular border crossing, to consider on a more macro scale the implications that this study has empirically and theoretically. The approach to this chapter has been to reflect on both the data from this study, and the body of literature that examines borders and irregular border crossings. At a time of ongoing debate about contentious borders, and both irregular migration and migrants, there is a persistent need to critically interrogate assumptions about these issues in different contexts, and for different populations. This is what this study has sought to do, and in doing so, it offers first an insight into the largely understudied irregular border crossing experiences of Tibetans at the Tibet-Nepal border, as well as an opportunity to critically engage with the border, the border performance and how these practices manifest at a specific border site.

This final chapter will map the broader contributions of this study, and through this, reinforces the necessity for ongoing border-focused criminological research that interrogates and challenges the role of the border, and its impact on specific migrant populations globally. The first section reflects on what is known about borders in and around Tibet, and the implications this had for participants in trying to leave. Then, through this reflection on the borders, this chapter reiterates that the relationship between the state and the individual (in this case the participants) is an important consideration in examining the nature of borders and border control; both of which are fundamental features of the state performance of sovereignty, as explored in chapters six and seven. The tensions identified within this
relationship – primarily the contention over sovereignty – draws in the contemporary body of literature as a way to explore the specific experiences described by participants, and in doing so speaks to the importance of considering participants’ personal circumstances, their experiences and what challenges these can pose to assumptions about both borders and their impact on irregular migrants. This is the focus of the second section of the chapter, which draws on the personal circumstances to highlight how the notion of support and agency influenced the participants decisions and experiences, particularly in relation to the way in which they crossed the border. This section also explores these notions in the context of the relationship between the guides and the participants, highlighting an emerging and complementary experience between participants and migrants at other irregular border crossings that supports the challenge to exploitative stereotypes often associated with smugglers.

The third section examines the role of the participants identity in influencing their border crossing experience. This draws on the analysis of the intersection between gender, religion and political identity in chapter seven to draw out the need for an ongoing, and more intersectional assessment of the impact that borders can have on irregular migrants. Finally, this chapter outlines the theoretical contributions of this study, which are drawn from a reflection on the nature of borders and border control in this complex geopolitical context, as well as the contemporary body of literature on the performance of sovereignty and technologies of control. These two much broader bodies of work have provided the book end to first explore the nature of Tibetan border crossings, and then offers a way to reflect on, and draw out some of the key features and experiences that both prompt further questions and necessitate an ongoing intersectional interrogation of borders globally.
8.1 A reflection on the role of the border, the relationship between participants and the state, and the importance of critical, small-scale studies on irregular border crossings

The nature of Tibetan migration from Tibet through to Nepal and India has long been interrogated from the situation in Tibet, or the situation among Tibetans living in exiled communities around the world. Empirically, this study builds on this knowledge by bringing the Tibetan border crossing experience – the period between leaving Tibet, crossing the border and arriving in India – into focus. As the previous chapters illustrate, borders and the way in which they were controlled inextricably influenced the participants’ decisions and experiences in different ways. The relationship between the border, the state and the participant is therefore at the heart of this section, as it explores the tensions that arise between them to reinforce calls for a more intersectional assessment of borders and border crossings (Basham and Vaughn-Williams 2013; Masters 2009; Coleman and Grove 2008; Ackerly and True 2008), as well as the continuation of micro-scale studies that examine specific geopolitical contexts outside traditional border sites and populations.

Chapters six and seven sought to illuminate the nature of Tibetan border crossings via the experiences of political and non-political participants. By grounding the analysis in the experience of the two categories of participants, it becomes clear how the border influenced different decisions and experiences in often distinct ways. It does this by highlighting the important role that the participants’ individual circumstances and identity played at different stages of their border crossing, and the relationship between them and the Chinese state; the nature of which is grounded in not only participant descriptions and views of the Chinese occupation, but also in the historical and contemporary literature (see Chapter three).
section therefore outlines some of the key considerations prompted by this study, before moving onto an exploration of how these contribute to the much broader body of criminological scholarship on borders and border control.

Border crossings journeys in this study were characterised by different types of control exerted depending on the participants different circumstances, identities and decisions made at different stages of their journey. As chapter six suggests, these controls were largely about the restriction of personal and social mobility and were thus conceptualised as bordering practices. By examining these controls as bordering practices, this study highlights the pervasive nature of the sovereign and therefore border performance, which as others have argued (see Weber 2014 for example), occurs beyond the physical, geographical border to extends within and beyond the nation. The borders explored throughout this study reflect what is already well established in the context of irregular migration, and therefore the discussion here includes both the physical territorial borders Tibet, and the often-ephemeral borders that manifest inside Tibet, and around participants as a way to reinforce the territorial borders and the performance of Chinese sovereignty. Therefore, for the purpose of this chapter, it is important to reiterate what many have already identified; borders are comprised of many components and can be challenged and reproduced by both irregular crossers and the state. Therefore, the relationship between migrants and the state is vital in understanding the nature of borders at a specific site, and as this study shows, it is important to then be attuned to the intricate details and nature of that relationship to be able to interrogate the border, border control and the impact that these can have for irregular border crossers.
In tracing participants border crossing experience – from the decision to leave, to departing their homes, through their travel to Lhasa, and then the experience of crossing the Tibet-Nepal border, and finding their way into Nepal – it was evident that borders were a prominent influence on participants’ experiences, and had different implications for those that were political and those that were not. While political participants were subject to internal and territorial borders that were created and enforced to keep them inside Tibet, the non-political participants’ experiences of the border were embedded within broader social controls that effectively acted as barriers to employment and education opportunities. For the political participants, as chapter six illustrates, the risk they presented to Chinese sovereignty through their activism resulted in the implementation of strict controls on their physical mobility in and around Tibet, which meant that their efforts to navigate borders occurred earlier in their journey to Nepal and India. For the non-political participants however, they encountered and experienced borders differently. While the internal borders experienced by the non-political participants shaped the early stage of their journey, it was not until they reached the territorial border that the nature of control became evident within their stories. The way that participants described the way they left Tibet shed light on how the internal borders influenced their journey differently. Despite the proximity and intensity of internal bordering practices experienced by political participants, the study shows that the more political they were – the more resources they had access to, to facilitate their exit to India. They had money, and a social network that supported key components of the journey, including refuge while in hiding in Lhasa, and support in arranging the guide. The non-political participants had to be self-reliant, and while many experienced different acts of kindness and support along the way, they had to arrange everything by themselves.
At the micro-level, this top-level summary speaks to the first research question about the border crossing experience of irregular Tibetan migrants; there are broad contextual elements of the border that are similar for both political and non-political participants – namely the underlying aim of control and containment – however when their individual circumstance is considered, several more nuanced differences became evident. Therefore, in addressing this first research question, the border crossing experience of irregular Tibetan migrants at some points is reflective of what is known about other irregular migrant populations (see for example, Gerard and Pickering 2013) in that the journey across the border was often unpredictable and dangerous, while at other points the role that the border plays in influencing particular migration-related decisions creates contextually specific experiences that partially depart from contemporary irregular migration narratives. These differences prompt several considerations that will be explored throughout the rest of this chapter, however one of the most significant is the role and nature of the relationship between the border and the participants (or irregular migrants more broadly) in determining border crossing experiences.

The importance of interrogating the relationship between the participants in this study and the state figure (in this case the Chinese government) is grounded in the role of the internal and physical territorial borders in this context. Here, borders are deployed to keep Tibetans inside Tibet, whereas borders (primarily in the global north) aim to keep irregular (or unwanted) migrants out of a specific territory. This, in turn draws attention to the way the sovereign, and therefore the border performance is articulated at specific geopolitical sites, and to what end. Chapters six and seven suggest that the border performance is about reiterating a level of what is a highly contested sovereignty, and the associated ability to control the mobility of a specific population. This is not dissimilar to role of the border in the sovereign performances.
outlined by Light (2012) in relation to mobility and social control in Former-Soviet Union nations. What is important to draw out from this work is that the way that borders are deployed within the sovereign performance of non-democratic and non-pluralistic state can have implications for those that contest or resist it. This is not to suggest that crossing borders of democratic and pluralistic states does not have an impact on irregular migrants, as this is well documented (Gerard and Pickering 2013; Ham, Segrave and Pickering 2013; Weber and Pickering 2011; Bosworth 2008; Weber and Wilson 2008; Weber 2007; Pickering and Weber 2006), but rather that the reason that the borders are deployed is different, and that warrants attention.

To this end, this study supports the need to continue to critically engage with understudied irregular migrant populations at distinct geopolitical sites to highlight and reinforce that borders are not the same everywhere, and therefore could have different implications for those that encounter them. By mapping the distinct journey of each participant, and capturing the different contextual features they experienced along the way, we are required to rethink how and why the borders were created, and the impact this has had on the border crossings of the participants, and therefore irregular migrants globally. The following sections map the different considerations that arose through the participants border crossing experience.

8.1.1 Challenging assumptions: the role of support, agency and people smugglers in participants border crossing journey

A key focus of this study was to document not only the border crossing experience, but also the process; that is the distinct stages of preparation, departure, the border crossing and arrival at the destination. This approach to the analysis was informed by the need to address
the first research question regarding the irregular Tibetan border crossing experience. However, by continuing from the previous section about the implications of the relationship between the state and participants, it also goes some way in addressing the second and third research questions regarding the nature of the border and border control in this specific geopolitical context.

The first research question sought to document the irregular Tibetan migrant experience. To address this, participants were asked to walk through their overall border crossing journey. The way participants described their journey often included a range of practices that are not unique to this setting: the purchase of fraudulent documents, and the engagement of people smugglers for example, both of which feature in many irregular border crossing experiences globally (see Sanchez 2014; Gerard & Pickering 2012; Weber & Pickering 2011; Wonders 2007; Schorf 2006 for example). There were however, aspects of the way in which participants navigated the different border constructs both inside and around Tibet that offers another layer of complexity in the broader understanding of border crossings and irregular migration as well as the Tibetan experience more specifically, therefore speaking to both the second and third research questions as well.

It is well established that those who do not have access to legal and accepted means of migration will turn to irregular, and often more dangerous routes to do so (Sanchez 2014; Gerard & Pickering 2012; Khosravi 2007). This was evident among participants in this study as well, which reiterates that when borders are fortified and made increasingly (im)permeable, irregular migrants will seek alternative ways to cross. In this study, participants understood that it was almost impossible to get permission to leave the country,
and as result turned to other means of leaving, such as the purchase of fraudulent travel documents. Chapter six and seven outlines how these experiences differed between the political and non-political participants, however as the section above suggests, is arguably premised on the tensions inherent in relationship between the political participants in particular, and the Chinese state. What this meant in practice was that the political participants faced more risks in seeking to the leave Tibet irregularly compared to the non-political participants. While these differences were often stark, there are two features that warrant further attention: access to support and high levels of agency. For both the political and non-political participants there were the series well-informed decisions made regarding the preparation for, and eventual departure form Tibet. For the political participants however, their decision to leave was accompanied by a raft of support mechanisms, including money, and a community network to help prevent them being arrest prior to reaching the border. As noted in the section above, the non-political participants had to be largely self-reliant, albeit with a few examples of kindness that supported their journey.

The way that participants explained their preparation for their border crossing highlighted not only the knowledge that leaving Tibet without permission was illegal, but acceptance that this was the only way to do so. The processes detailed in this stage of the journey were not passively engaged in, rather the participants’ actions illustrate a series of calculated decisions taken to improve their life circumstances, regardless of whether or not that decision was illegal. Both political and non-political participants were aware of and accepted the risks associated with leaving Tibet, which draws attention to their agency within the migration process. While there were stages during their crossing where they felt they did not have control over the situation – such as Chokeyi’s description of having the blind-fold put over her face when she and her daughter were put in the back of the truck to reach the border – the
decisions made to leave Tibet irregularly contributes to the growing body of literature that challenges some of the often political assumptions made regarding vulnerability and exploitation during irregular migration (van Liempt and Doomernik 2006; Sanchez 2017, 2014).

One of the main decisions taken among all the participants was to engage a guide to support their border crossing; a decision that also draws attention to the nature of support accessed and provided to participants throughout their journey. As explained in Chapter seven, the participants’ relationships with their guides highlight some of the limitations in contemporary typologies that present people smugglers as exploitative businessmen who profit on the backs of vulnerable migrants and refugees. As the experiences with the guides in this study demonstrated, the guides provided a layer of protection and support for participants against both the physical and political challenges presented on this border site. This is further emphasised in that the two participants that did not hire a guide were both caught and detained on the border. Further, Tenzin explained that his guide had completed the journey from Tibet to Nepal 26 times. This guide had completed his studies in India and returned to the border to support the escape of Tibetans into India, a task made easier by the ability to speak Tibetan, Mandarin, Nepali and Hindi. What is most notable is that there was no narrative of exploitation in almost all the relationships between the guides and participants, rather there is the strong suggestion that the guides were a fundamental support and protection mechanism.

This then brings the notions of support and agency into focus regarding the role of the guides in participant experiences. Van Liempt and Sersli (2013) argued that there is an increasing
emphasis on the role of people smugglers in refugee and asylum seeker journeys, and how they facilitate irregular migration as opposed to why. The relationship between the participants and the guide in this study, when examined alongside the contemporary political context, draws attention not only to how the smuggler facilitates the border crossing, but redirects attention to why they are involved when there is often minimal or no financial benefit. Grounded in the nature of Tibetan kinship and community networks, their strong sense of nationalism, and the pervasive knowledge of the human rights situation in Tibet, the ability to support Tibetans leaving the country irregularly could easily be interpreted as a contribution to the continuity and survival of Tibetans as a distinct cultural and ethnic group. While the non-financial or community related benefits associated with smuggling have been documented at other border sites (see for example Sanchez 2014; Spener 2009; Zhang 2007; Zhang and Chin 2002), this study contributes to the understanding of the drivers of smuggling practices by incorporating cultural and religious preservation efforts; which in this case involves ensuring that those that have the cultural and religious knowledge and expertise are safely out of the country and can pass it on to younger generations. This interpretation is complemented by cultural and religious perseverance efforts on either side of the border; be it the establishment of the Tibetan Government in Exile (based in Dharamsala in India), and arguably by the ongoing resistance efforts inside Tibet. This line of thinking positions the smugglers in a central role in these efforts.

The notion of support and agency also prompted a consideration of how they can shape border crossing experiences that go beyond the scope of this study. This is raised here to reiterate the need for ongoing research into the specific experiences of irregular migrants, however fall largely outside the scope of this study to address in any comprehensive way. This study contributes to the broader body of work that positions the notions of both support
and agency at the centre of irregular migration facilitation discussions, much of which argues that their presence in irregular border crossing experiences challenge some of the assumptions associated with vulnerability and exploitation evident in contemporary border policies and practices. There is also more to be said about the implications that the availability of both support and agency can have on post-migration outcomes, which in many cases would refer to accessing asylum claims, and life in exiled communities. While this study did draw attention to the role that these notions played at distinct points in the participant’s border crossing, including on arrival in Nepal, it is largely beyond the scope of this study to engage with the impact that these notions have on migration outcomes in any comprehensive way.

An additional consideration that falls beyond the scope of this study is the role that religious and cultural perseveration play in influencing irregular migration decisions. As will be explored in more detail below, religion in particular is a highly influential factor in the participants border crossing journey, however efforts to preserve this and the Tibetan culture arguably go beyond the border crossing, and therefore warrants further attention. As noted above, there have been calls for a more intersectional analysis of borders and border crossing experiences, and while this study does not engage in intersectionality theory in any way, it does prompt questions about how religion and faith intersect with different features of the border (i.e. enforcement mechanisms) to influence particular experiences. The intersection between religion and the border (and therefore the State) also prompts questions about their role in the shaping the relationship between participants and the Chinese State; those participants that promoted their religious identity, namely the Buddhist nuns, attracted more severe control mechanisms both inside Tibet and at the territorial border. Therefore, there is arguably a need for further thinking within both border and criminological inquiry about the
role that religion plays in influencing and shaping the relationship between the state and the individual at the border, and thus, the border crossing experience. Religion was a consistent factor throughout the study, and is also examined in more detail in the next sections.

This section goes some way in addressing the first research question, in that it highlights how participant experiences at this border crossing resembles experiences at other contentious borders, and as a result, there are some commonalities between the participants in this study, and other irregular migrants. While this is a small-scale study, the richness of the data offers a contribution to the much broader body of scholarship that examines borders via the lived experience by incorporating a largely unexamined border site, and irregular migrant population. In addition to this however, this study also offers insight into some of the more contextually specific factors that shaped and influenced the border crossing of these participants, and in doing so, prompts a reflection on what is known about borders and irregular migration on a more global scale.

8.1.2 The impact of the interactions between personal identity and circumstance and the border

As noted in the previous section, analysing the individual journeys of the participants revealed several context-specific features that clearly influenced different stages of their border crossing experience, such as the availability of support. This went some way in addressing the first research question in that there are commonalities here with the way that irregular migrants navigate securitised borders globally, which then drew attention to the way that this border is performed, and how that can shape the individual border crossing experience. This section explores how the participant border crossing experiences offered
insight into the border, the way that it is enforced and performed, and how this influenced their overall journey. In doing so, it also prompts further reflection on key aspects of contemporary inquiry into borders and irregular migration.

Chapter seven outlines the way that the internal and territorial borders influenced the participants border crossing, however it also explores the impact that the border had via the participants reflections on their journey once they arrived in India. Within these narratives, two main impacts for participants that became clear. The first was the way in which the territorial border in particular effectively politicised, and thus criminalised all participants, albeit at different points in their journey. The second is specific to participants with identifies that manifest at the intersection between religion, politics and gender. These features had a specific influence on their (in)ability to cross the border into Nepal.

The nature of containment that characterised the internal and territorial borders of Tibet had one consistent impact across both the political and non-political participants; while the political participants were all politicised prior to leaving their homes, once each of the non-political participants reached the territorial border they too were politicised, and effectively criminalised – regardless of the reason in which they decided to leave Tibet. The intense bordering practices experienced by the political participants while they were still in Tibet was a result of their involvement in political activism, and as chapter six and seven suggest, the threat that this presented to the sovereignty of the Chinese State. The ‘site of control’ concept highlighted this, demonstrating how for the political participants to exit the country, they had to navigate a series of control mechanisms that sought to prevent them (or the information and influence they possessed) from leaving specific spaces and places. For the non-political
participants however, their ability to physically move from one town to another was less complicated, and as Chapter six demonstrated, was largely dependent on access to financial resources and transport options. While the non-political participants did not speak directly about their political beliefs, it is important not to suggest that they did not hold any. Rather, this study suggests their political beliefs and efforts to resist simply occurred in different ways, which in this study manifest as leaving Tibet.

Based on this interpretation, deciding to, and preparing to leave Tibet can be interpreted in-and-of-itself as a political act. This in some ways extends the work of Spener (2009), who argues that the border crossing (via the process of people smuggling) is a form of resistance to the state. Therefore, by the time the non-political participants reached the territorial border with Nepal, the different controls experienced by the political and non-political participants became less distinct as all the participants who sought to leave the country were criminalised, and subjected to more control mechanisms. Therefore the distinction between the two categories of participants essentially lost its meaning at the territorial border as a result of the reason that the border is enforced; to keep Tibetans inside Tibet.

The impact that the border had on participants offers some insight into the nature of the border in this geopolitical context, which represents a departure from how borders and border control is interpreted in more democratic contexts. It reflects Light’s (2012) work on borders and migration in former Soviet Union countries, where the ability to control a population inside the borders – both internal and territorial – is paramount in the performance of sovereignty, as opposed to borders in more democratic contexts such as Europe or the United States, where the border is about keeping specific (unwanted) populations out. The
participants all recognised the political and permanent nature of crossing the border, in that they knew that because they left Tibet without permission, it would be highly unlikely that they would be able to return. All the non-political participants except Dachen left Tibet without permission, and as a result once they all reached and crossed the territorial border they were subject to the same controls that sought to contain and control the political participants. Pema’s experience in particular illustrates this politicisation at the border: upon returning from India to visit her sick father and informing the authorities she had left Tibet without permission and had now returned to visit her father, she was imprisoned for six months. She left after she was released from prison, again irregularly, and knew that this time she would never return. Similarly, when Ani Dolma first tried to flee Tibet without permission, she was captured on the border and imprisoned. While the differences in experiences between the nuns and lay-women is explored more below, at this stage the fact that both Pema and Ani Dolma were imprisoned for trying to leave the country highlights the underlying containment objectives of the Tibet-Nepal border, and that once anyone sought to cross it, they were criminalised. Their experiences therefore illustrate how the border acts as a state tool to contain them in Tibet, and if not, secure them on the territorial border – which is arguably representative of the much broader sovereign control that the Chinese state has tried to enforce across Tibet since the initial occupation in the 1950s. Further, this experience also represents a partial departure from the predominant analysis and understanding of borders, and the role of the mechanisms that create and enforce them by focusing on preventing individuals from leaving.

This interpretation of Tibetan borders returns to the question of the relationship between the state and the individual, and in doing so, goes some way in answering the second and third research questions. The border is performed in the Tibetan context as a way to both project
and enforce sovereignty in Tibet; a sovereignty that is contested by Tibetans, and has informed the underlying tension in the relationship between the Chinese state and the Tibetans for decades. However, by crossing the border, the participants effectively transformed the border into a site of resistance, and effectively undermined the sovereign performance. This resistance is also evident in the permanence of their decision to leave Tibet. Much of the work on irregular migration highlights temporariness of migration, particularly in relation to the undesired global migrant population. The participants in this study are very differently placed in that they are pursuing a permanent exile from their nation. Be it the threat of political persecution, or the inability to access education and employment opportunities, the very decision to leave effectively signalled that the cohesive society in which China sought to create (and promoted externally) was flawed. This questioning inadvertently represents a challenge to the image of successful Chinese sovereignty. Therefore, when the border crossing is viewed as a form of resistance, the objective of the border is effectively undermined, and the relationship between the Chinese state and the Tibetan population that is portrayed by the State comes into question.

This has two implications for how borders are examined. First, when looking at this interpretation from the theoretical foundations of this study (which is examined more below), if borders are understood as a performance of sovereignty in this context, then crossing the border undermines or disrupts that performance. This interpretation also suggests that those that cross borders irregularly can undermine or disrupt the border, they are contributing to a constant production and deconstruction of borders; borders are created because Tibetans try to cross them, but crossing them invalidates their purpose. This also supports the discussions on borders in chapter three, in that it demonstrates how borders are both ephemeral and transformative in nature, and are constantly being created and recreated.
Beyond the broader experiences of control that characterised the participants’ experiences, gender and identity also had an impact on their border crossing journey. Gender did not manifest as a distinction between the male and female participants, rather the differences were most evident between the lay-women and the Buddhist nuns. These differences revealed an interesting intersection between religion and gender and the implications this had for participants’ – namely the Buddhist nuns – border crossing. It is important to recognise at this point that a differentiated experience is inevitable as the nuns are religious women, and it can be argued that many aspects of their lives would be different to non-religious Tibetan women and men. However, in the context of this study, being religious was also targeted as a political act. This assessment of the nuns’ experiences in particular contributes to efforts to bring Tibetan women’s experiences more broadly to the fore of analysis, as opposed to providing collective, comparative or polar assessments of their experiences (Makley 1997; Devine 1993; Havenvik 1989)

Chapter Five draws on the experience of Ani-Dolma to demonstrate how the Buddhist nuns’ political identity was exacerbated by their religious identity as well. Ani Dolma’s experience of being arrested while trying to leave Tibet as a nun, and then successfully crossing the border dressed as a laywoman speaks to the way that the nuns were perceived at the border; they embodied a form of resistance that attracted particular, more intense forms of control and containment. They were more heavily policed, both inside Tibet and on the border. This was the first point in which the relationship between gender, religion and politics became evident. The impact of the nuns’ political and religious identity also had implications for the post-border crossing experience. While the study did not investigate the post-migration
outcomes in any detail there is a point to made about the impact that the border crossing had on the political participants, and the nuns in particular. All the nuns spoke about being politically active, and as a result various forms of control targeted their border crossing efforts. Once they crossed the border however, this political identity was less prevalent in the way they described themselves, their lives in India and the way they spoke about their future. Depending on what side of the border they were on, the border either politicised them (when they tried to cross it), or depoliticised them (in a more personal sense in that the need to be overtly politically active was not as strong). None of the nuns suggested that they had maintained their political activism once they arrived in India, rather they had returned to their religious studies. The other political participants, namely Champo and Tenzin did not suggest that they experienced such a ‘de-politicisation’ following their border crossing and arrival in India. Both participants still emphasised at the very least, their interest in the political situation in Tibet, albeit not as strongly as when they were discussing their lives in Tibet.

This effect of the border on the participants’ identities draws attention to the role of the border in this geopolitical context; not only did it undermine the meaning associated with having either a political and non-political identity on one side of the border, it effectively undermined the significance of their political identity once they were on the other side. This builds on our understanding of the impact of border control on irregular migrants and specifically those that are highly politicised.

This study has provided an insight into the nature of irregular Tibetan border crossings, and the nature of the border, border control and how this forms the broader sovereign performance in this specific geopolitical context. It illustrates that there are both commonalities and differences among the border crossing experience of Tibetans and other irregular migrant populations, however at the individual level, the Tibetan experience
prompts the need for further investigation into the factors such as religion and the impact that this can have for a border crossing. This has illustrated that the Tibetan border crossing experience is therefore not tied to one, territorially defined border. Rather, it required the navigation of a series of internal borders that varied in proximity and intensity to the individual depending on their individual identities, and ultimately, their relationship to the state.

On the broader scale, this study supports calls for a more intersectional investigation of specific border sites and irregular migrant populations, and for ongoing critical engagement with unique populations to reinforce that borders are not the same, nor are the ways they influence specific groups. The nuanced differences exposed via the lived experience of the Tibetan border crossing contributes to the argument made by Newman (2006) and Brunett-Jailly (2005), that there can be no single theory or taxonomy of borders; the border performance will be different depending on the different audiences to which is it being performed, and therefore there needs to be an ongoing reflection on the current assumptions about borders and the way they shape and influence the lives of those that come into contact with them.

8.2 The theoretical contributions on borders, border control and the performance of sovereignty on the Tibet-Nepal border.

The individual participant experiences outlined above lay the ground for the broader theoretical contribution of this study: that is, the addition of a layer of complexity and nuance to contemporary scholarship on borders, border control and the performance of sovereignty.
The study interrogates the nature of borders and border control in what is a unique, and highly complex geopolitical context. It examines it from the perspective of individuals who have lived in an occupied state, where the occupying nation is arguably authoritarian. Given that much of the research on borders and border control is drawn from borders around democratic, pluralistic governments (Light 2012), the Tibet-Nepal border presents an important site to examine the role of borders in the performance of sovereignty. In light of the historical and ongoing contestation regarding Chinese sovereignty over Tibet, this study revealed that borders and border control mechanisms formed a significant part of that sovereign narrative, and therefore the sovereign performance. Drawing on the theoretical foundations of this study – namely the sovereign performance and technologies of control – this section outlines how the use of the analytical construct of ‘sites of control’ was a useful approach to gaining this insight into borders in this context, and in doing so addresses the second and third research questions. First, it provides insight into how borders are constructed in this specific context, and then how they are enforced. This section builds specifically on the contemporary understanding of technologies of control via an analysis of these operations within a non-democratic context.

8.2.1 borders and border control in Tibet

This study contributes to current research that examines the border as a polysemic, highly transformative construct that seeks to manage society in different ways (Vukov and Sheller 2012; Franko Aas 2007; Varsyani and Nevings 2007; Balibar 2002). It does so by mapping the different spaces and places that borders manifest in the Tibetan context, how they shape and impact irregular migrants and migration experiences. The mapping of the participants’ journey employed the analytical construct of a ‘site of control’, which was grounded in Mezzadra’s notion of the ‘confine’ (2012, p. 112 as cited by Garcés-Mascareñas 2015, p.129), but extended it by moving beyond the actual space to include the processes and
practices that create and enforce primarily internal borders. This approach to the analysis revealed how participants and places were targeted by different control mechanisms, and through this offered some insight into the role of borders in the Tibetan context; which arguably demonstrates that the more politically active the participant, the bigger the threat they posed to the question of Chinese sovereignty, and therefore, the more borders they had to navigate.

The second and third research questions sought to investigate the nature of the border performance, and the impact that this had on participants. Given this is a small-scale study, it was never the intention to draw conclusions about the nature and impact of the Tibet-Nepal border, however by incorporating the known historical and political context with the richness of the stories shared by participants about their border crossing, the data offers some insight into the different control mechanisms present via their lived experience. In addition, by drawing on what is known about border control from the contemporary body of border-criminology literature, much of which highlights the increasing securitisation of, and ‘law and order’ approach to border control (Wonders 2017, 2009, 2006; Wilson and Weber 2008, Weber 2007; Franko Aas 2007; Pickering and Weber 2006), this study presents an opportunity to reflect on some of the theoretical assumptions associated with borders, border control and inadvertently, the control of irregular migration.

The participant experiences suggest that the border is used by the Chinese State as a tool to contain them inside Tibet, and secure the territorial border that is argued to fall under Chinese sovereign control. While this represents a partial departure from the way borders are understood in democratic contexts, the participants’ reflections on whether they wished to
return to Tibet also suggests that role of the border could also assume a more traditional role aimed at keeping them out once they reached Nepal or India. This interpretation of Tibetan borders is echoed by what is known about borders in other non-democratic or occupied territories (see Azarov 2014; Busbridge 2013; Light 2012), in that the role of borders in the performance of sovereignty is largely underpinned by the aim of control and containment. By taking this approach to exploring borders in the Tibetan context, as noted above, there is an opportunity to reflect on some of the theoretical assumptions and ideas about borders as they apply to this specific geopolitical context. Specifically, it offers a platform to explore the way in which the literature on technologies of control translates at the Tibetan border.

The technologies of control explored in Chapter three were in part, identified in the Tibetan context via the way participants described the challenges they faced trying to leave the country. The literature around the technologies of control that is specific to borders outlines that they are largely used to justify the measures put in place to securitise borders. This is increasingly achieved by demonising or criminalising categories of migrants thought to be a risk to the State (Franko Aas 2007; Pickering 2007; Wonders 2006), albeit those that are residing outside or, or are external to the state. Chapter two outlined the key policies that effectively sought to identify and control those considered a risk to the state, albeit in this context the particularly risky group were already inside Tibet. This is important, as the study suggests that borders manifest internally, and around specific people and places; a practice that is also detailed and explored by Weber (2013), Wilson and Weber (2008) and Wonders (2006) for example.
Champo’s description of his political activities illustrates how political rhetoric was used in the Tibetan context. He explained that he was resisting the Chinese efforts to depict the Dalai Lama (and his followers) as ‘splittists’ or ‘separatists’; terms that were incorporated into anti-terrorism legislation (Chung 2006). The rhetoric around splittism and social order justifies the implementation of a suite of actual policies (see Chapter two) that, as the participants’ experiences show, enforced the borders around them. The actual policies – more specifically referred to as immigration legislation in the literature – were grounded in efforts to prevent social dissent and disorder. These policies, while not strictly related to immigration per se, still targeted mobility in and around Tibet, and targeted those that represented a threat to the State. Efforts to resist, or non-compliance with the policies – such as crossing a border without permission – attracted a raft of consequences; consequences that Human Rights Watch (2016a) demonstrates are increasingly punitive.

The literature that examines the border infrastructure as a technology of control refers to the physical or tangible constructs that seek to enforce the border or immigration legislation (see Bosworth 2008 for example). Not unlike other contexts, the borders around Tibet were increasingly militarised by security check-points, and identification documentation requirements. When considering that the border control efforts also targeted the internal borders, the border infrastructure could also account for the use of the mobility restrictions enforced via post-release conditions on the political participants, or the legitimate ‘business documents’ (that Chokeyi purchased fraudulently) to gain access to the border area. Further, the enhanced surveillance mechanisms throughout Tibetan communities (see Human Rights Watch 2016b) are also arguably a technology of control in that they monitor the internal borders created to prevent political dissent. All these different mechanisms effectively sought
to enforce the different borders created inside and around Tibet to *contain and control* participants – particularly those considered a threat to China’s proposed sovereignty.

The way that borders are enforced via the use of technologies of control did not differ in substance, rather in the Tibetan context, technologies of control differed in the way, and the reasons in which they were deployed – to enforce state power and sovereignty. Chapter three argued that the border is performed in specific ways depending on the nature of the state in which they are attached to. This study suggests that the border is constructed for different purposes when compared with the borders around democratic, or pluralistic state regimes. In the context of non-democratic, or occupying regimes, the sovereign performance is about enforcing containment and control. This is echoed by what has been established about the enforcement of sovereignty in other non-democratic contexts, such as the former Soviet Union (Light 2012). The border reflects these objectives, and therefore is deployed in specific ways in specific places. In this context, borders were created around specific people and places, or around specific ‘threats’.

This study does not represent a complete departure from the conceptual understanding of these technologies, rather it contributes to, and builds upon it by interrogating their application at different border sites. In so doing, this study highlights the continued importance of attention to and analysis of technologies of control within the context of understanding and examining the performance of nation-state power and its consequences: particularly for those least able, and yet with significant drive to, exercise their right to mobility, irregular migrants.
8.4 Conclusion

This study has brought to the fore analysis that seeks to extend the theoretical and empirical examination of borders and irregular migration via the lived experience of irregular Tibetan migrants. While a small-scale study, the richness of the data has offered an insight into the irregular Tibetan border crossing experience, and in doing so, it has provided an opportunity to reflect on the performance of the border, and the impact that the border can have on a specific population in a largely unexamined geopolitical context.

In the context of ongoing global discussions about responses to increasing flows of irregular migrants and the impact of highly securitised borders, the work of border criminologists is critical. Studies such as the one presented here contribute to this body of work via the incorporation of a border zone that sits outside the dominant focus of inquiry; this is a border that is attached to a non-democratic, non-pluralistic government, and is focused on the experience of a highly politicised irregular migrant population that sought to leave their home country permanently. This research, recognising both the historical and current political context, and drawing on the analysis presented in this study, reaffirms the importance of recognising the transformative nature of borders and the ways in which they are geographically and performatively linked to sovereignty.

While much of the analysis presented throughout this study complements what is known about borders, border control and irregular migration, it has prompted a reflection on the empirical and theoretical concepts that inform the contemporary body of scholarship, and supports the call for a more intersectional examination of border crossing experiences. The way that gender, religion and politics intersect at the border warrants further, ongoing
attention, and to date is not comprehensively addressed in the border criminology literature. In addition, the analysis brings to the fore the incorporation of a reflexive approach to research: the interrogation of silence and the limitations of understanding identified in this analysis, pushes researchers to continually interrogate power dynamics and the transfer of meaning and experience across the broad chasms of cultural, language, faith and other differences, into analysis.

Finally, this study has drawn specific attention to the Tibetan border crossing experience, and to the theoretical and empirical contributions that these experiences can offer to contemporary scholarship on borders, border control and irregular migration. This is a political site that remains tense and dynamic: it must be noted that the research sought to contribute to the recognition and privileging of the border crossing experience and the recognition of the legitimacy of Tibetans; both those remaining in Tibet and exiles living both near and far from the borders of their country of origin. Bringing the experience of irregular Tibetan migrants into focus was an inherently politicised endeavour, however in doing so, this study presents opportunity to push the boundaries of contemporary border-criminological scholarship by bringing to the fore the plight of an irregular migrant population that is rarely recognised.
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Appendix One: Interview schedule

Interview schedule

(note: sub-questions are prompts)

Demographics

1. Did you live in Tibet? (*During what period?*)
2. If yes, how long did you live there?
3. What can you tell me about your family?
4. Can you tell me your age?

Journey to the border

Decision to leave:

1. When did you leave Tibet?
2. Why did you leave?
3. Who decided to leave?
4. What did you do before you left? (*Preparations, apply for documents, family engagements etc.*)
5. Who travelled with you when you decided to leave? (*Alone, family, children, strangers/other community members*)
   a. If you travelled alone, did you tell anyone you were leaving? (if not, why?)

The journey

1. How did you get to the border? (*Search for mode of transport, if they walked, use of a Sherpa/guide*)
2. What did you have to do to get there? (*were there any fees or other logistical arrangements?*)
   a. if you had to pay a fee, do you know what it was for?

Experience at the border
1. What country did you cross the border into? Had you crossed the border before? (*Potentially document journey on map, search for geographical location*)

2. What did you know about this particular border before you arrived?

3. Who was with you when you arrived at the border, and was it the same people you left Tibet with?

4. Did you encounter anyone when you reached the border? If yes, who?
   a. Did you have any contact with police, immigration or the military/border solider?
   b. What happened when you met these people?
   c. Did meeting these people change your plans or onward journey in anyway?

5. Were you required to present anything upon arrival, or explain your presence on the border?
   What was your explanation? [*Was this a true explanation of your arrival on the border? did you have to change any aspect of your explanation?]*

6. What were the border official responses to your explanations or identification documents?

7. Were you allowed to cross immediately?

8. Did you apply for any protection or refugee status when you arrive?
   a. What was the outcome?

**Personal experience**

1. Did you ever have concerns about your safety, or the safety of your family in Tibet? (*if so, why?*)

**Detention**

1. Have you ever been detained while trying to cross a border?
   a. When, and why were you detained?
   b. How long were you detained for?

2. What happened while you were in detention?

3. What has the impact of detention been?

**Friends and family**
1. Do you know about the experiences of any friends or family that may have crossed the border at a separate time?

2. Did you know anyone in the destination country?

Experience post-crossing the border

1. Was your experience on the border different to what you expected before you left?
   a. What was your initial expectation, and what was this based on?

2. Where did you go after you crossed the border?

3. Is this the only place you have been since leaving Tibet? *(If no, where else have you been? Have you had to cross any other borders?)*

Return to Tibet

1. Do you want to go back to Tibet? Are you able to go back?

2. Are there any requirements/restrictions for you to be able to return?
   a. If so, what are they?

Tibet

1. What can you tell me about the history of Tibet?

Women

1. What was it like as a woman making the journey to the border? Did you feel like you were treated differently to the men?

2. What was the hardest part of your journey?

3. What did you expect before you left?
   a. And what were these expectations based on?

4. How did being a woman/nun impact your experience in getting across the border? Why do you think that?

5. Did you know anyone in Nepal/India/Australia?
Appendix Two: Consent form

NOTE: consent was given verbally as physical form was considered a risk for participants

Consent Form

(All Participants)

Title: Tibetan border crossings (to be revised)

NOTE: This consent form will remain with the Monash University researcher for their records.

I understand I have been asked to take part in the Monash University research project specified above. I have had the project explained to me, and I have read the Explanatory Statement, which I keep for my records.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I understand that:</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- I will be asked to be interviewed by the researcher</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- unless I otherwise inform the researcher before the interview I agree to allow the interview to be audio-taped</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- I will be asked to answer questions and provide details about my experience crossing the border from Tibet to my current place of residence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

and

I understand that my participation is voluntary, that I can choose not to participate in part or all of the project, and that I can withdraw up to three months after the interview without being
penalised or disadvantaged in any way. I understand that I can pass on the form, email my withdrawal or call any of the research representatives to verbally withdraw.

and

I understand that any data that the researcher extracts from the interview / focus group / questionnaire / survey for use in reports or published findings will not, under any circumstances, contain names or identifying characteristics.

and/or

I understand that I can request a transcript of my recording from the interview for approval, and this may take some time to receive.

and/or

I understand that I may ask at any time, prior to publication, and prior to my giving final consent, for my data to be withdrawn from the project.

and/or

I understand that no information I have provided that could lead to the identification of any other individual will be disclosed in any reports on the project, or to any other party.

and

I understand that data from the interview will be kept in secure storage and accessible to the research team only. I also understand that the data will be destroyed after a 5-year period unless I consent to it being used in future research.

and
I do/do not give permission to be identified by name/by a pseudonym/ understand the researcher will take all measures to ensure that I remain anonymous at all times in any reports or publications from the project.

Consent to proceed:  Y    N

Participant code: ____________

Date: ______________________
Appendix Three: Explanatory Statement

EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

NOTE: delivered verbally

You are invited to take part in this study. Please read this Explanatory Statement in full before deciding whether or not to participate in this research. If you would like further information regarding any aspect of this project, you are encouraged to contact the researchers via the phone numbers or email addresses listed above.

What does the research involve?

The aim of this research is to document the relatively unknown experiences of Tibetan women and nuns during their journey from what is now known as the Tibetan Autonomous Region to exiled communities in Nepal and India. This research will endeavour to:

- Increase and contribute to the state of existing knowledge with regard migration and extra-legal movement between Tibet, Nepal and India;
- Identify trends in women’s migration patterns, and investigate the underlying causes and motivations;
- Explore the risk and protective factors for Tibetan women and nuns associated with border crossings;
Explore the varying risks and protections for Tibetan women and nuns attempting to cross the Nepali and Indian borders and investigate the causes of risks and or origins (key legislation and policies, cultural and social context etc.);

Identify key gaps in knowledge on this issue, as part of framing research priorities for the future.

You will be asked to participate in an interview in person or by telephone (if in Australia), and it is expected that there may be some follow-up email correspondence or telephone contact if matters need to be further clarified. The interview will take anywhere between 1-2 hours of your time. If at anytime you need to leave, or need a break, we can restart the interview at a later time or date.

Why were you chosen for this research?

You have been invited to participate in this research due to your relationship with Tibet and the Tibetan people. This research aims to document and explore your journey from Tibet through to Nepal or India (or any other exiled community).

Consenting to participate in the project and withdrawing from the research

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You are under no obligation to participate. You may decide not to answer any question; and you may withdraw at any stage. Prior to undertaking the interview, you will be asked to provide your formal consent. If you decide to withdraw, you may request that any information you have already provided not be used in the research up to three months after the interview. There are two ways to withdraw from this research:

1. Fill out the revocation of consent form and return it to the ethics representative, the interpreter or the researcher (if still in the community). If the research representatives are not available, you can outline your withdrawal and email to any of the people mentioned above.

2. You can call the ethics representative, the interpreter or the research on the details below and verbally express your wish to withdraw your interview.
Possible benefits and risks to participants

Internationally, the plight of the Tibetan people has been a longstanding and contentious issue. Knowledge of the experiences of Tibetan people during the Chinese invasion and the latter Cultural Revolution is increasingly of interest to academics and there is substantial narrative around individual stories. However, the impact or influence of the cultural, social and religious restrictions on Tibetan people in Tibet as it functions today remains relatively unknown. According to the scant academic literature investigating these influences, it is suggested that Tibetan people are still fleeing the Tibet to various exiled communities around the world. The available research further indicates that the experiences of women, particularly Tibetan Nuns coming into contact with the border – either legally or illegally – have significantly different experiences to men. This research aims to document their experiences. The stories collected during this research will potentially fill key gaps in knowledge around Tibetan migration trends and identify the risks and protections available prior to, during and after they cross the border.

Given the nature of the research, there is potential that some of the questions will cause distress. If this occurs, you can request that the interview be stopped immediately, and we can finish at a later time or date. Below is a list of local services if you would like any further support.

The results of this study are predominantly for the researcher’s Doctoral Thesis. However, with your consent, results may be published in journal or media articles or presented at conferences. The data analysis will be undertaken with de-identified data, so any comments you make will not be attributed to you or any organisation you work for, or community you live in. No identifying information will be included in any of research outcome including the Doctoral thesis or related publications.

Services on offer if adversely affected

If at any stage you feel distressed, the following services/organisations can provide further support.

| Dekylling | McLeod Ganj |
Confidentiality and data storage

Individual participants will not be named in the research. Only you (on your request) and researchers directly supervising this research will have access to the record of your interview. All information provided will be treated in the strictest of confidence and stored securely.

Data collected will be stored in accordance with Monash University regulations, kept on University premises, in a locked filing cabinet for 5 years. Once analysed, all identifying material will be removed so that your participation remains confidential. This information will be stored on the researchers password protected computer in a password-protected folder.

Results and use of data for other purposes

The final thesis will is due to be completed in 2016. Selected findings of a non-confidential nature may be used in academic articles and selective conference presentations. No participants will be directly named, or made identifiable in any subsequent publications. If you would like to hear about the results, or the release of any publications, please contact Bodean Hedwards on the following details.

Complaints

Should you have any concerns or complaints about the conduct of the project, you are welcome to contact the Executive Officer, Monash University Human Research Ethics (MUHREC):
(For participants in Australia)  (For participants in India)

Executive Officer  Toral Sharan
Monash University Human Research Ethics Local ethics representative
Committee (MUHREC)
Research Office
Monash University VIC 3800

Thank you,

Sharon Pickering  Bodean Hedwards
Chief Resercher  Principal researcher
Appendix Four: Recruitment flyer

Note – on advice of locals, flyer not distributed due to risks presented to researcher, and participants.

Seeking Tibetan volunteers to undertake interview regarding their border crossing experience.

The aim of this research is to document the relatively unknown experiences of Tibetan refugees, particularly women and nuns, during their journey from Tibet to exiled communities in Nepal and India. This research will endeavour to:

- Increase and contribute to the state of existing knowledge with regard migration and extra-legal movement between Tibet, Nepal and India;
- Identify trends in refugee and particularly, women’s migration patterns, and investigate the underlying causes and motivations;
- Explore the risk and protective factors for Tibetan refugees associated with border crossings;
- Explore the varying risks and protections for Tibetan refugees, particularly women and nuns attempting to cross the Nepali and Indian borders and investigate the causes of risks and or origins (key legislation and policies, cultural and social context etc.);
- Identify key gaps in knowledge on this issue, as part of framing research priorities for the future.

You will be asked to participate in an interview in person or by telephone (if in Australia), and it is expected that there may be some follow-up email correspondence or telephone contact if matters need to be further clarified. The interview will take anywhere between 1-2 hours of your time. If at anytime you need to leave, or need a break, we can restart the interview at a later time or date.
The questions are based around your experience in crossing the border, and any challenges you faced. We will ask questions about when and why you decided to leave Tibet, your experiences during the journey and what you did immediately after arriving at your destination and now.

The results of this study are predominantly for the researcher’s Doctoral Thesis. However, with your consent, results may be published in journal or media articles or presented at conferences. The data analysis will be undertaken with de-identified data, so any comments you make will not be attributed to you or any organisation you work for, or community you live in. No identifying information will be included in any of research outcomes including the Doctoral thesis or related publications.

If you would like to discuss this research further, or undertake an interview please contact the primary researcher, Bodean Hedwards at [redacted]