Population geography I: Human trafficking

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Abstract

This first report explores how understandings of human trafficking have progressed within population geography. Exemplified by studies of exploitative labour migration, population geography has made implicit contributions by stressing the value of a geographic perspective on the webs of interconnections and links between different places and trafficking. In addition, dominant ideas of linear trafficking *processes* have been disrupted, via evidencing the informal involvement of families in the phases of recruitment, transportation, and control. I argue that a more encompassing, interdisciplinary tenet could be woven into population studies of trafficking, by more explicitly engaging with social science debates. Embedding the legal, global definition of trafficking into wider studies of migration is paramount for this direction of travel. There is also merit in population geography advancing understandings by adopting holistic lenses of enquiry, connecting-up with (sub-)disciplinary geographic studies of migration and trafficking in the Global South and Global North. Studies of trafficking provide a potentially fruitful terrain for population geography to deliver multi-disciplinary, impactful research of a key global challenge, to inform policies to prevent and mitigate the ills of trafficking, and progress conceptual and theoretical understandings of trafficking.

Keywords

exploitation, human trafficking, labour, migration, population change

I Introduction

Migration studies have been intensified within human geography by the so-called 'migration crisis' (Davies and Isakjee, 2015; Collyer, 2016; Raghuram, 2016), sparking countless recent discussions of smuggling, asylum-seeking, refugees, and precarious and insecure movements, as international migration per se is firmly thrust into international political, policy, media and academic spotlights (Smith et al., 2015). Yet there continues to be a relative dearth of studies of human trafficking in geographic scholarship, despite this unprecedented attention to conceptually-overlapping forms of migration (O'Connell Davidson, 2010, 2015). This is particularly surprising within the context of population geography, given the ascendency of migration studies within the sub-discipline and trafficking being a form of migration that is in the limelight.

First, trafficking is symbolic of wider contemporary global trends of the marketization and growth of migration industries within the 'age of migration' (King, 2012). Processes of trafficking, for instance, are expressive of King's (2002: 95) assertion that: 'Migration has become a new global business with a constantly

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shifting set of agents, mechanisms, routes, prices and niches'. Indeed, King uses the example of trafficking to illustrate how market concepts have more fully penetrated into migration processes, describing the growth of a 'Migration PLC' and the proliferation of traffickers, agents, intermediaries, and monetary frameworks for places of origin, routes/transits and destination. In this way, more research on trafficking will shed fuller light on broader global migration processes and trends, such as the constitution of emerging links between initiators, markets, and persons undertaking the act of migration, and regulators of global migration flows.

Second, investigations of trafficking have the potential to yield impactful research that has a global reach and significance, and thus serve to demonstrate the wider social and economic benefits of the sub-discipline. The possible magnitude is typified by the oft-cited call from former UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, for 'a global challenge with a global response . . . to defeat the forces of crime, corruption and trafficking of human beings' (UN, 2000). It is without doubt that trafficking signifies an illicit, conspicuous and pressing humanitarian 'challenge', cutting across national borders in complex, transnational ways. Trafficking is a resounding motif of current international political, media and academic discourses (Bishop, 2016), which is a ripe topic for inclusion within the 'global challenge' priorities of international agencies, national governments, research councils and other funding organizations across the globe. For instance, Hoyle et al. (2011) refer to an 'epidemic of human trafficking', enshrined in the many different forms that it takes, including criminal, labour and sexual exploitation, domestic servitude, and organ harvesting (see Carling, 2006; Shelley, 2010). According to Yea (2010: 2), 'human trafficking is the second largest industry behind the drug trade', and there is a surfeit of grey literature which concurs with this alarming representation of trafficking. Examples include: estimates of 20.9 million

people being trapped into forced labour, globally, via illicit practices of coercion and/or deceit (ILO, 2012) and between 600,000 and 800,000 persons trafficked across international boundaries each year (US Department of State, 2007). Population geography could usefully strive to create new knowledge(s) (see below) to inform policies to counter and mitigate trafficking, as well as changing the behaviours of practitioners in the field, such as non-governmental actors, police and crime agencies, border controls and immigration, and voluntary sector anti-trafficking and victim support charities.

In this, my first report, I explore why population geography would appear to be ambivalent to the topic of trafficking, and does not readily engage with wider social science debates on trafficking (e.g. Cunningham and Cromer, 2016; Reid, 2016; Denton, 2016), such as Anderson's landmark works on 'anti-trafficking' (e.g. Anderson and Andrijasevic, 2008; Anderson, 2010; Anderson and Ruhs, 2010). However, I suggest population geography is implicitly progressing knowledge on trafficking in some important ways. I illustrate this point by focusing on the example of some recent studies of exploitative labour migration, using Yea's (2010) and Zimmerman et al.'s (2011) linear models of trafficking to illuminate the presence of key signifiers of trafficking in these recent exemplars. Finally, with the aim of population geography engaging with social science debates of trafficking in explicit and fruitful ways, some directions of travel for population geography are outlined.

II Studies of trafficking in population geography

Trafficking is a contemporary, high-profile form of population movement that inherently includes: the deceitful redistribution of people (and human organs) via subnational and international migration leading to illicit, preordained

abuse, control and exploitation; likely changes to demographic, familial and cultural structures at places of origin and destination; the growth of transnational trafficking migration industries; and marked interventions of state and non-state 'population control, movement, and support' agencies and organizations. Since these hallmarks of trafficking are prevalent topics that often ignite the fascination of population geographers, it is to be expected that trafficking will be fixed on the radar of population geography. This assumption is reinforced by the close juncture between trafficking as a phenomenon of migration and the ascendancy of migration studies within population geography (Smith and King, 2012).

Surprisingly, the topic of trafficking is generally absent from recent international population geographies and disciplinary conference programmes. Online searches of the dedicated population geography journal *Population, Space and Place* also reveal a paucity of scholarship on trafficking. Interestingly, in the UK context, trafficking is overlooked in the *ESRC Benchmarking Report for Population Geography/Demography* (Rees, 2012). Additionally, and tellingly, an index entry for 'trafficking' is included in King at al.'s (2010: 128) comprehensive *The Atlas of Human Migration*, yet the reader is directed to 'see migration, irregular'. Likewise, Bailey's (2005) landmark text *Making Population Geography* provides a relatively fleeting discussion of trafficking, despite the back cover of the book highlighting 'sex trafficking' as one of the 'compelling population topics' of contemporary society. This begs the question: why would it appear that trafficking has bypassed the research agenda(s) of population geography?

First, it is possible that, until recently, the quagmire of 'conceptual messiness' has led to the lack of studies on trafficking within population geography, as conceptual blurring(s) between trafficking, smuggling, and modern-day slavery have resulted in less coherent scholarship. This is a longstanding conundrum for studies of trafficking within population geography. As Salt (2000) notes in an agenda-setting paper on trafficking, a focus is needed on the 'main conceptual and definitional issues confronting researchers and politicians' (p. 31), to disentangle the blurring between deception and/or coercion that is tied to the act of trafficking recruitment, and (in)voluntary acts of movement. Moreover, Salt comments that: 'trafficking may involve an element of what has come to be defined as smuggling' (p. 34), and this directly poses questions about the links between trafficking and (il)legality. Positively, some impressive recent discussions about the conceptual overlaps and fuzziness between trafficking and other forms of migration have sharpened our praxis of employing particular concepts of migration in appropriate ways, such as the sometimes hazy lines of demarcation between voluntary and forced recruitment of trafficked persons, and different perceptions of coercion and threat during the process of trafficking (see Anderson and Hancilova, 2011; King and DeBono, 2013; O'Connell Davidson, 2013).

At the same time, there is now a well-established international conceptual anchor for studies of trafficking, as defined under the wider auspices of the UN Convention Against Transnational Crime, and the Trafficking (Palermo) Protocol (Article 3) (UN, 2000). This pins down trafficking as:

> The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of threat or use of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation.

Yet it should also be noted that, 10 years later, Koser (2010: 183) stresses that the global definition of trafficking is not bulletproof, since it includes: 'concepts such as "exploitation",

"vulnerable" and "force", terms which are open to considerable interpretation'. Nevertheless, the global definition is useful for highlighting some essential signifiers of trafficking that should be ticked-off on a conceptual checklist to warrant use of the term.

A second key reason for the lack of studies of trafficking in population geography may be tied to the absence of pre-existing, large-scale national datasets on trafficking (see Kelly (2005) for one exception). It is noteworthy that trafficked migrants/victims and traffickers are not reported in national datasets (Tyldum, 2010), since such individuals and social groups will not be recorded in the gathering of primary data on census forms, for example. Of course, this is to be expected given that trafficking is a 'clandestine activity', whereby 'hidden populations' are often kept out of sight' or controlled when 'publicly visible' by traffickers and organized crime (Hepburn and Simon, 2013). By contrast, there is a reliance and orthodoxy in population geography to focus on 'visible' and 'officially recorded and reported' individuals and social groups within mainstream society (Findlay and Boyle, 2007), reported in cross-sectional census datasets (Bailey, 2005), and, increasingly, national, longitudinal, administrative/commercial and microdatasets.

To more fully enrich the quality of datasets on trafficking, population geography is well placed, both epistemologically and methodologically, to draw upon the long-standing expertise of large-scale, national quantitative datasets, to inform new data-led developments in the field. This is vital as existing datasets, such as those based on the National Referral Mechanism in the UK, possibly understate the empirical scale and magnitude of trafficking. Studies of trafficking are urgently needed to empirically substantiate or refute claims that trafficking has dramatically increased during the last decade, and to inform policy formulation. For instance, the National Crime Agency's (NCA) 2015 report on trafficking identifies a rise of 21% in victims of trafficking in the UK, compared to 2014 (*The Guardian*, 2015). Yet the NCA stresses that the report: 'should be considered an *indication* of the nature and scale of human trafficking' (emphasis added). As the NCA makes clear: 'trafficking and slavery are hidden crimes, and statistics and analysis can only be provided on what is already known, and cannot be exhaustive' (NCA, 2014: 4).

It is important to note some caution here given Weitzer's (2014: 6) contention that popular claims about 'human trafficking's international magnitude, trends and seriousness relative to other illicit global activities...are neither evidence-based nor verifiable'. Of course, this does not mean that trafficking should be under-researched. On the contrary, a more robust evidence base needs to be constructed to more accurately measure and quantify the scale and magnitude of trafficking (see also Delgado et al., 2013).

III Progressing knowledge of trafficking

Nearly two decades ago, Salt (2000: 50) argued that: 'there is a dearth of information on the outcomes for most of the [trafficked] migrants involved'. Key gaps in our understanding of trafficking were highlighted:

> Little is currently known about how most trafficked migrants earn a livelihood, how the migration cycle ends for the trafficked/smuggled migrant, both in and out of debt bondage and what the relationship is between the apprehended individual and the criminal system at the destination. (Salt, 2000: 50; see also Salt and Stein, 1997)

Of course, not all trafficked people are apprehended or officially recognized. Although social science scholarship on trafficking has developed since Salt's treatise, commentators echo the articulations of Salt. Lee (2013: 2), for instance, asserts: 'there remains considerable limitations in our knowledge and understanding

of human trafficking', and is highly critical of scholarship that utilizes 'wobbly statistics' and delivers 'shoddy research, anecdotal information, or strong moralistic positions' (p. 2). Although there may be some salience here to some forms of trafficking, it is without doubt that understandings of trafficking have progressed over the last decade through broader social science scholarship, including geographic studies (e.g. Geddes, 2005).

Methodologically, the majority of these progressive studies of trafficking point to common qualitative approaches to identify and make contact with hidden trafficked persons and gain consent for participation in research to gather primary data via direct interactions with trafficked persons and support organizations and – to a lesser extent – traffickers. This scholarship reveals that this often entails high personal and emotional demands on the researcher, listening to troubled personal narratives of abuse, exploitation, threats and maltreatment, as well as exposing the researcher to potentially dangerous and threatening encounters and spaces with criminal actors and organizations. Planning and operationalizing this kind of research on human trafficking is relatively time-consuming and exhausting, and often progresses at a slow pace due to important ethical (see Kelly and Coy, 2016) and health and safety parameters needing to be thought through and sanctioned before the empirical research can commence, as well as the need for ongoing reflection throughout the research process (Scott and Geddes, 2016; Zhang, 2016).

In this vein, some recent scholarship on population geography has made important implicit contributions to understandings of trafficking, despite the majority of studies not using the term human trafficking (see also Duvell et al., 2009). This is emblematic of recent wider trends and developments within population geography to embrace more diverse epistemological standpoints and methodologies, including mixed-method and qualitative approaches. To

exemplify this point, some recent studies of exploitative labour migration into the UK are discussed. The studies are taken from a burgeoning scholarship of precarious labour migration into the UK, particularly since the post-2004 accession of A8 countries to the European Union (e.g. Burrell, 2010; Williams and Balaz, 2008; Cook et al., 2010, 2012; Rogaly, 2008). As a framework to showcase how some verbatim quotes from the studies reveal themes of recruitment, travel-transit, and control and exploitation, which are akin to the signifiers of trafficking, Table 1 integrates Yea's (2010) three-fold linear division of trafficking processes: *means* (*recruitment* processes of persons to be trafficked: place of origin); *mode* (migration processes of trafficking: 'the *transportation*'), and *purpose* (forms of *exploitation/abuse*: place of destination) (emphases added); with Zimmerman et al.'s (2011: 327) linear model of 'the migratory and exploitative nature of a multi-staged trafficking process, which includes: recruitment, travel-transit, and exploitation and integration and reintegration, and for some trafficked persons, detention and re-trafficking stages'. Of course, this is not to argue that the linearities within these models should not be challenged (see below).

To outline some of the ways that population geography has implicitly progressed understandings of trafficking, three key contributions can be highlighted. First, a relatively high proportion of scholarship on trafficking focuses on so-called transnational organized groups of traffickers. Within models of trafficking, these networks are often treated in taken-for-granted ways as the harbingers of recruitment and transportation in the trafficking process, who steer and control trafficked victims via multiple travel-transit points on the journey to the place of destination and, ultimately, exert control in the spaces of exploitation, threat and abuse. Whilst this may be the most prevalent means of trafficking, Blazek's (2014) investigation of non-EU migrants into Slovakia shows that

Table 1. Exemplars of discourses of trafficking and studies of 'exploitative labour migration'.

	Means/Recruitment	Mode/Travel-transit	Purpose/Exploitation
Blazek (2014)	'it [migration] is often **'arranged through informal contacts'** (p. 109)	'agreements with the employer might include **debt bondage** or a commitment to work long term under unfair conditions and **constant threat**' (p. 109)	'the employer often provides accommodation and food and is the mediator of information about law, social and medical services, **generating extremely uneven power relations'** (p. 109)
McCollum and Findlay (2012)	'the prevalence of **unscrupulous activity** with regards to the **recruitment** and employment of migrant workers and labour providers' (p. 2)	'employers and labour providers often used illegal migrants from East-Central Europe prior to 2004' (p. 14)	'they were **susceptible to abuse**, most commonly in the form of very low wages and significant deductions from their pay for costs like transport and accommodation' (p. 25)
Scott (2013a)	'Recruitment agencies (gangmasters) often act as **'channelling mechanisms'** by 'taking workers to where work is available' (p. 707)	**'tactics of allusion'** by employers and **recruitment agencies**, by using 'the rhetoric of upward mobility to motivate workers and present dead-end jobs in a positive light' (p. 710)	'As well as helping people to move and to find work, employment agencies often provide migrants with additional services, most notably accommodation and transport to work. However, it is all too often through these additional services that **migrants find themselves in debt and exploited'** (p. 707)

recruitment and travel-transit, as well as post-migration exploitation and abuse, can also be shaped by extended family, friends and acquaintances, who may act within informal networks throughout the trafficking process. Blazek's study is thus beneficial for challenging homogenizing representations of trafficking processes and emphasizing the importance of not conflating the diversity of trafficking processes (see also Blazek, 2015). This is imperative, given that trafficking takes many diverse forms across the globe in the varied, albeit potentially interconnected guises of domestic servitude, organ harvesting, and labour and sexual exploitation. Blazek's study is therefore important for emphasizing

the plurality and the non-linearity of trafficking processes, as well as bringing into direct question the range of individuals and groups involved in trafficking processes.

Second, McCollum and Findlay's (2012) investigation of East-Central European migrants to the UK, their employment conditions in the UK, legislation and policy, and the role of recruitment agencies and employers reveals the instabilities and fluidity of the identification of trafficked persons, and how the conceptual marker(s) can be transformed by changing legal, legislative and structural conditions (see also Findlay and McCollum, 2013; Findlay et al., 2013; McCollum and Findlay, 2015; McCollum et al., 2013; Shubin and Findlay, 2014).

McCollum and Findlay (2012) note, for example, how unscrupulous activities became less prevalent after the post-2004 accession of A8 countries to the European Union, and reveal that 'A8 migrants have been able to exercise their agency in positive ways' (p. 46). Such changing legislative contexts may also impact on the places and spaces of recruitment, trafficking routes and journeys, as well as post-migration experiences, whereby changing rights and responsibilities in the place of destination for the migrant may influence the capacity of traffickers to abuse and exploit (previously) trafficked individuals, or trafficked victims in the future. McCollum and Findlay's study may also be an important starting point for future studies of trafficking to monitor and track the effects of Brexit, and the impending withdrawal of the UK from the European Union: will Brexit increase or decrease the scale and magnitude of trafficking in Europe and beyond?

Third, much scholarship on trafficking has not effectively shed light on the interconnected trafficking geographies of recruitment, travel-transit routes, and exploitation/abuse. For instance, are enduring links between places of origin, travel-transit and destination (re)produced by trafficking migrant industries? To date, geographic perspectives of trafficking have been seriously lacking. Scott's (2013a) in-depth examination of employers, employment agencies and other labour market intermediaries in the UK food industry is an important intervention here (see also Geddes and Scott, 2010; Scott et al., 2012; Scott, 2013b, 2013c, 2015). For instance, Scott argues that exploitative employment standards and low-wage labour migration is prevalent within specific industrial sectors that are undergoing restructuring. The identification of these specific social and economic geographies of restructuring and exploitative practices of migrant labour may be tied to connected geographies of trafficking. This is exemplified in the UK context by recent national and local media discourses which have

reported outcomes of trafficking in relatively 'off-the-beaten-track' places such as Wisbech in Cambridgeshire (Lawrence, 2016a), and Kings Lynn in Norfolk (Lawrence, 2016b), which are linked to places of origin such as Lithuania and Romania (Grimley, 2016), with movements from and to peripheral small towns and regions which are often under the radar of geographic research (Stenning and Dawley, 2009). The ways in which these destination geographies of trafficking are linked to recruitment and travel-transit geographies of trafficking need to be more fully exposed, particularly as Scott (2013a) contends that similar forms of migration-led exploitation in the labour market are shaped in different ways by places of origin (geographically and socially) and perceptions of future circumstances. What Scott's work implicitly emphasizes is the value of a geographic perspective of trafficking to expose the transnational webs of interconnections and links between different places, routes and trafficking processes.

Within leading mainstream geography journals there are also some recent studies of trafficking that may be important for shaping future directions of travel for population geography and a more explicit engagement with debates of trafficking (e.g. Strauss, 2016; FitzGerald, 2012, 2016; Mendel and Sharapov, 2016). It may be particularly valuable for population geography to engage with other sub-disciplinary geographic investigations of migration and trafficking within the Global South and North, which, for instance, have usefully shed light on the latter under-researched dimensions of the trafficking processes, described by Zimmerman et al. (2011) as '(re)integration', 'detention' and 're-trafficking'. One exemplar is the recent collection of work which theorizes post-trafficking experiences in Nepal (e.g. Laurie et al., 2015a, 2015b; Richardson et al., 2016) and seeks to transcend other studies that have sharply focused on the causes and characteristics of trafficking. Laurie et al.'s (2015a) study serves

to demonstrate, indirectly, the urgent need to provide more systematic and comprehensive analyses of trafficking processes, from recruitment to post-trafficking, which will nuance and advance our theoretical and conceptual understanding of the (non)linearity of trafficking processes. Other pertinent studies of trafficking in the Global South include Piper and Uhlin (2002), Piper (2005) and Yea (2004, 2005, 2013), as well as Van Blerk's (2016) investigation of the mobilities of sex workers in Ethiopia. Although these scholars may not self-identify their scholarship within population geography, the direct focus on migration and exploited populations is clearly highly relevant to debates within population geography.

More fully hooking-up with studies of migration and trafficking in the Global South and Global North will also be beneficial to engage in questions about the ways in which trafficking is truly transnational, spanning and connecting nations within and between the Global South and Global North (e.g. Campana, 2016). Esson's (2015a, 2015b, 2015c) original research on sport trafficking from Africa to Europe, via multiple points of transit, is important here for exemplifying the need for a more holistic spatial perspective of trafficking. It is also vital for population geography to more fully disentangle the unrelated and interconnected forms, processes and geographies of trafficking, such as the differentials and overlaps between sex trafficking and domestic servitude, and so on. At the same time, it may be beneficial to more fully reflect on some contentions that trafficking is a 'chaotic concept', which conflates the diversity of sex trafficking, forced labour, domestic servitude and organ harvesting, and results in the term increasingly 'relating the unrelated' in ways that undermine the conceptual prowess of the term.

IV Conclusion

It can be argued that trafficking warrants a firmer placement on the current research agenda of population geography. It is perhaps poignant here to return to Salt's (2000) call for more research on trafficking, which ends: 'Where do we go from here?' Remarkably, within the context of population geography, there continues to be salience to Salt's conclusion that: 'Understandings of the transnational processes involved in the recruitment, transportation, transference, harbouring and receiving of different trafficked migrants in the UK are thus seriously lacking' (p. 34). I have argued in this report that there are many appealing reasons why population geographers should more fully embrace the topic of trafficking and that population geographers are epistemologically and methodologically well primed to play a key role in future data-related developments in the field. Recent studies of exploitative labour migration within population geography are important for implicitly demonstrating the value of a fuller geographic perspective of trafficking, to more fully understand the interconnected trafficking geographies of recruitment, travel-transit and exploitation/abuse/control, as well as challenging ideas of a linear process instigated and controlled by organized criminal groups. What we need are approaches which shed fuller light on the diverse processes and geographies of trafficking.

To conclude, trafficking provides a potentially fruitful terrain for population geography to deliver impactful research on a leading global challenge, and to engage with cutting-edge debates in a multi-disciplinary arena. It is imperative that population geography continues to build upon some recent implicit contributions to the study of trafficking. There is also an opportunity to deliver a more robust evidence base of trafficking, urgently needed to shape national and international policies to counter, prevent and mitigate the negative effects of trafficking.

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