The fish border trade between Cambodia and Thailand provides important employment and income in both countries. The study focused on how women and men engaged in the fish border trade negotiate with representatives of the state, and their differing perceptions of the international border. Both women and men are subject to various fees and border regulations. Male transporters were seen to be dealing more directly with the state within the framework of the international border. Women fish traders, on the other hand, had a different sense of the border. Their perceptions of the border were defined by their relationships with regular customers. Women were seen to defy state control over border movement using their network of relationships. Flexible perceptions of self-identity and the border were used to sustain business relationships.

I. INTRODUCTION

International borders are usually seen as a political creation. With economic integration, however, some think that the world economy is becoming increasingly borderless (Ohmae 1995). Others argue that while borders may become more porous, they still exist (Evans, Huton and Eng 2000). In the distant past, individuals and groups wandered across borders at will for trade and other purposes, but those days are gone except in very remote regions (Evans, Huton and Eng 2000). As Donnan and Wilson
(1999) rightly pointed out, international borders and physical borders are linked in concrete ways and define relationships between people and states. They also create a material and symbolic process of culture. This paper focuses on international borders — characterized by checkpoints and customs authorities. How this physical and bureaucratic barrier influences relationships between people and states, and how states are perceived differently by women and men, are examined through a case study of the fish trade on the border between Cambodia and Thailand.

Cambodia’s Great Lake (Tonle Sap Lake) is rich with aquatic resources. It is said that 70% of the high quality fish from the Lake is exported to Thailand.1 The most important export item in the border town of Poipet in Cambodia is fish.2 The border between Thailand and Cambodia has been volatile over the last half century, with civil war in Cambodia and a precarious bilateral relationship. How have political and economic volatility and change along this border contributed to the creation of a different sense of the border by men and women?

This paper explores the international border checkpoint between Poipet, Cambodia and Aranyaprathet, Thailand from the perspective of small-scale fish traders and transporters.

II. BORDER STUDIES

Martinez (1994) categorized cross-border interactions into alienated borderlands, coexistent borderlands, interdependent borderlands, and integrated borderlands. Anderson (1996) suggests that borders are institutions and processes as well as markers of identity. Donnan and Wilson (1999) reviewed thoroughly the literature on border studies; and by citing Prescott (1987) and Rumley and Minghi (1991), they identified four main research themes in border landscapes. (Border landscapes refer to areas contiguous to state boundaries — including the boundary itself — which are moulded by this special human and physical environment, and which in turn shape the environment.) The research themes identified were: (i) the boundary as an element of the cultural landscape; (ii) how

1 According to an interview with an official in Pursat province.
2 Official customs records in Thailand do not show fish as the largest import item. According to statistics, the largest is recycled steel. However, Cambodian customs officials asserted that fish is the largest export item in Poipet town. Observations in the border town supported this view.
the boundary influences the economic and demographic landscape; (iii) the impact of the boundary on the attitudes of border inhabitants; and (iv) the effect of the boundary on national policies. Recent developments have shown more consideration of border landscapes as products of economic, political, and cultural processes. Based on the review of Donnan and Wilson (1999) as well as other literature, recent border studies can largely be categorized into three themes.

The first theme is the influence of international borders on local culture. Cole and Wolf (in Donnan and Wilson 1999) demonstrated the durability of cultural frontiers even after the physical borders are removed. Berdahl (1999) reported similar findings from Germany, where local people reconstructed cultural and perceptional barriers after the removal of the physical barrier — the Berlin Wall. The sense of belongingness and maintenance of identity is of central importance here. The historical creation of identity through construction of an international border, as seen in Hann and Beller-Hann's (1998) study in Turkey, is a case in point.3

The second theme is how international borders influence nation-state building. The symbols and meanings created are important aspects of analysis in this theme. Borderland perspective emphasizes the role local people play in the formation of the state, and highlights the dialectical relationships between borders and their states. Cheater (1998), in her case study in Zimbabwe, reported how the state used women to strengthen its territorial hegemony. Women border traders were labelled as deviant and denounced publicly in order to establish the state-sanctioned “formal” trade relationship with its neighboring state.

The third theme is migration across borders and the increase in urbanization. Included here are people who choose or are forced to move across borders, as well as the ways in which international borders shape new urban communities and economies. Regional planners see economic prosperity in certain border areas as an opportunity for regional industrialization; they propose the establishment of special economic zones along such border areas to capitalize on such urban developments and economic asymmetries (see Maneepong 2003). While some see opportunity in the urbanization of border towns, others are alert to the power asymmetry across the border. In a study of the United States-Mexico

3 Mouffe (1997) argues that a social agent is an “ensemble of ‘subject positions’ that can never be totally fixed in a closed system of differences.” Thus, identity is always contingent and precarious, temporarily fixed at the intersection of those subject positions and dependent on specific forms of identification.
border, Staudt (1998) highlighted the economic asymmetry between the two states, the movement of people pushed by inequalities, and the human rights and citizenship issues across the border. People move across borders, but the recognition and protection they enjoy is defined by the state. How states define citizenship is especially important to ensure the rights of poor women, men, and children.

As Mitchell (2000) says, determinization is actually reterritorization. It is the process of defining who “belongs” and who does not; the process of excluding and keeping out those you do not like. Although Donnan and Wilson (1999) do discuss urban development along the border vis-à-vis border restrictions, one of the issues they did not highlight is trading networks. Walker’s (1999) study of Northern Laos, and the collection of articles by Evans, Hutton and Eng (2000) focus on trading networks and how they are shaped and reshaped in relation to the state and the wider economy. Long standing relationships can be subverted or transformed in this process.

Studies of informal economic activities along borders are not confined to migration and urbanization, but offer further insights into how local people work against and redefine state rules and regulations in borderlands. Staudt (1998) calls such cultural-political-economic forces that challenge the ideology of the state as “counter-hegemonic forces.” She discussed the strategies that local people employ in order to secure their livelihoods and housing along international borders. Certain informal activities across borders may be restricted, but such activities may thrive precisely because of the restrictions. Such informal activities utilize as well as form the nature and roles of the state. Staudt argues that the informal livelihood and housing strategies that poor women employ in border areas show great potential for creating counter-hegemonic forces. Kusakabe and Oo (2004) reported in their study of the Myanmar-Thai border that migrant women in border towns used counter-hegemonic forces to improve their negotiating power and status. Xie (2000) reported in her study of the China-Viet Nam border that Chinese women were gaining new ground and finding new identities through the prosperous border trade. Similar findings have been reported in Thant’s (2003) study on the China-Myanmar border.

This paper focuses on how border inhabitants are affected by the physical existence of the border, and how they simultaneously use it to create their own sense of border and relationship with the state. How do women and men create their own counter-hegemonic forces by engaging differently with the state? How do the actions of women traders define
the border? Borderlines might be established by the state, but the nature and function of the border is determined not only by the state but also by local people who live and work across the borders. There are differences according to gender as to how people engage in defining the nature of a border. Women and men, because of the roles and behaviors defined for and expected of them by society, engage differently with the state. The state is not, in fact, a monolith. Defined policy and regulations, and their implementation, are very different. Street-level bureaucrats, as Lipsky (1980) calls them, are “the state” for many traders on the Thai-Cambodian border. The strategies that Cambodian women and men traders employ against the state, and their perception of the state, are different.

This paper takes an historic approach to gender analysis of the small-scale border trade in fish between Cambodia and Thailand, and traces the evolution of the Thai-Cambodian fish trade since 1980. Interviews with fish traders on both sides of the border were conducted from September 2003 to July 2004. Over 30 women traders were interviewed, the majority based in Cambodia. Although small-scale women traders were the central focus of interviews, male transporters were also interviewed. Key informants were interviewed as well, such as officers of the department of fisheries, customs, and large fish exporters-importers in both countries.

III. FISH TRADE ON THE THAI-CAMBODIA BORDER SINCE 1980

Cambodia’s inland fisheries are the fourth most productive in the world (Chea and McKenney 2003), given the combined capacities of the Tonle Sap Lake (Great Lake) and the Mekong River. More than one million people depend on the fisheries sector for employment, income, and food security. Freshwater capture fish production was recorded at 385,000 tons in 2001 (MAFF 2004). The fishery sector was estimated to account for 7–12% of GDP in 2002 (Chea and McKenney 2003). Fishing rights were introduced and controlled by the colonial state since the 1870s, and the fishing lot system has remained largely intact — except during the Democratic Kampuchea regime in 1975–79 (FACT 2003). In 2000, Prime Minister Hun Sen ordered large sections of the commercial fishing lots to

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4 Some traders were interviewed in the market, while others were interviewed in their homes. Some traders were interviewed several times to gain in-depth information.
be returned to local communities, and community fisheries were reestablished (FACT 2003).

In Thailand, production of freshwater capture fisheries is half of that of Cambodia — around 200,000 tons in 1997. Thai fishers/farmers culture almost the same amount of fish as they capture (Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives 2004). Because the production of domestic capture fisheries is not enough for domestic consumption, Thailand imports freshwater fish from Cambodia. Thailand is the largest importer of freshwater fish from Cambodia. Trade statistics in Cambodia place yearly fisheries exports at 35,000 to 45,000 tons. However, this is not considered reliable due to underreporting (Chea and McKenney 2003). According to Leepayakoon (2004), who collected daily fish import data at the Aranyaprathet checkpoint from 1999 to 2002, fish exports there from Cambodia to Thailand were 10,720 tons (valued at Baht 300 million) during June 1999 to May 2000, and 10,523 tons (Baht 349 million) during June 2001 to May 2002.

Since the freshwater fish catch in Cambodia fluctuates seasonally, during the slack season cultured fish are imported from Thailand to Cambodia. Thai cultured fish are much cheaper than capture fish from the Great Lake, and are now becoming popular in poor households in the border provinces in Cambodia.

This study looked at trade between Thailand and Cambodia after the Democratic Kampuchea (DK) regime that ended in 1979. During the DK regime, commercial fisheries were banned and individual fishing was restricted. Trade between Thailand and Cambodia was nonexistent. After 1979, with the exodus of refugees to Thai borders, commercial activities reemerged in border areas.

In 1981, Kampuchea Fish Import Export Company (KAMFIMEX), a state-owned enterprise managed by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, was established to collect fish from fishing collective units in villages and state fishing enterprises (Touch and Todd 2002). KAMFIMEX was the sole licensed exporter of fish products, and all fish destined for export had to be sold to KAMFIMEX. In 1990, KAMFIMEX was officially established to manage marketing, distribution, and export.

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5 This figure includes all exports. Thailand's customs statistics in Sa Kaew Province show that official imports of freshwater fish from Cambodia to Thailand was valued at Baht 8.8 million (around $226,000) in 2003. However, this was the amount imported by registered importers who import in large quantities, and is said to be grossly underreported.
of fishery products through agents stationed at landing sites and provincial and border offices (Chea and McKenney 2003).

The first official border checkpoint — between Poipet in Cambodia and Aranyaprathet in Thailand — was a war zone until the early 1990s. It was initially opened to supply daily necessities to Cambodia. In the 1980s, fish could be exported to Thailand only with the help of the military. Traders would pay military drivers to transport their fish to the border, and since they could not ride with the convoy, they would follow on bicycles. Later, traders were able to access romoh (tractors modified to transport people) and no longer used bicycles. Traders paid a fixed price of Baht 300–400 per trip to the military. Some traded in the refugee camps, while others sold to Thai traders. The trade was risky, but lucrative.

KAMFIMEX collected 4% of the total sale as a commission from small companies, and bought fish from provincial distributors who held licenses from MAFF. As the civil war subsided and more traders joined the border trade, traders could transport their fish to the border without the help of military personnel. In 1990, KAMFIMEX established a warehouse in Poipet, and all fish had to go through them and were subject to fees.

In the early 1990s, the fish trade was carried out at the Ra market in Poipet. The trade later moved to the newly constructed Akeak market. During 1994-95, however, due to the war between Royal Government forces and the Khmer Rouge, it became increasingly difficult to trade in Cambodia. With the coup d’état in Cambodia in 1997, the market was shifted completely to Rong Kluer market in Aranyaprathet, Thailand, where it remains until now. Rong Kluer market is a modern market with a concrete floor and high steel roof, and large concrete access roads. Trade is carried out in Thai Baht, as are most transactions in Poipet itself.

KAMFIMEX controlled the Cambodian fish export market until 1997, but several factors led to its fall. Internal conflict led some managers to leave KAMFIMEX and establish the Import Export and Civil Development

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6 The characteristics of the early market are reflected in its present name: Rong Kluer (salt warehouse).
7 One Thai respondent reported that the price was 10 times less if the fish were bought inside Cambodia.
8 This is different from other smaller checkpoints. At the checkpoint of Ban Laem (Chanthaburi, Thailand–Komrieng Battambang, Cambodia), transactions were mainly in Thai Baht, but Cambodian Riels were also accepted on the Thai side of the border. This was not the case for Aranyaprathet. Although all sellers and many buyers are Cambodians, Cambodian Riels were not accepted in Rong Kluer Market.
Construction Company (CDCO). At the same time, the amount of fish going through Poipet and KAMFIMEX was decreasing. Before the establishment of CDCO, some unlicensed exporters had been changing their export route to other informal border crossings to avoid paying high fees to KAMFIMEX. When CDCO was established, CDCO wooed these unlicensed exporters, even asking them to be shareholders of CDCO to secure fish for trade. With the establishment of CDCO, unlicensed exporters either started working with CDCO, or simply stopped paying fees to KAMFIMEX.

At the same time, a growing number of checkpoints and agents were collecting fees from fish traders. Chea and McKenney’s study in 2002–2003 identified 27 payments to 15 institutions at 16 locations to get fish from the landing site at Kampong Chnang, Cambodia to Rong Kluer Market in Thailand. According to their study, 69% of potential profit was paid for fees; exporters were able to realize only 31% of their potential earnings. Of the payments, 68% were made in Cambodia, and of this, only 17% were for custom and duties; 10% went to KAMFIMEX, while payments without official basis amounted to 50%.

Because of such large and frequent payments to transport fish from landing sites to Thailand, transporting agents were contracted by exporters to manage all these payments. Exporters paid Baht 3 per kilogram to transport fish from the landing site to the border town of Poipet, and Baht 2 per kilogram to transport fish across the border to Rong Kluer Market.

The traders did not willingly accept such fees. In 2001–2002, small-scale transporters and traders came together and demonstrated against

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9 One of the high-level managers of KAMFIMEX had a sister who had a registered construction company. He used her company to register as an exporter of fish, thus CDCO’s name shows the history of its establishment.

10 Chea and McKenney (2003) called them “fee brokers.” According to their interviews, brokers were current or former officials in government, military, or military police. This study did not confirm this pattern, especially for those who were working with small-scale traders. Thus in this paper, they are called “transporters” rather than fee brokers. Although some do have military background, many small-scale transporters — especially those on the border with pushcarts, did not have connections with the military or government before joining the trade. They developed such connections during the course of their profession. Many small-scale transporters were disabled men. The fees were reasonable for the disabled, thus small traders hired them to transport their fish. Some were former fish traders themselves. Most transporters are men, or they work in groups of family members and relatives.

11 The payment is higher for small-scale trade. The exact point defining large and small is not clear, but for microscale traders, the payment to transporters is Baht 2.5 per kilogram, making it more cost effective for small traders to combine shipments.
fees charged by KAMFIMEX. They demanded free trade of fish and reduction in export fees. The leader of the demonstration was one transporter who was a native of Poipet. He had previously worked with KAMFIMEX, and knew that KAMFIMEX was not authorized to collect fees from traders. He demanded a clearer role for KAMFIMEX and free entry of traders into the fish export market. He collected thumbprints from 84 traders and transporters, among which around half were women. The traders went to make their demands at the governor's house in Banteay Meanchey Province and finally to the Prime Minister. Their demands were finally approved in 2003 and KAMFIMEX was closed.

No documents on fish marketing in Cambodia that were reviewed for this paper mentioned the uprising. The event was in general downplayed. During interviews with officers of the Department of Fisheries and KAMFIMEX, the uprising was not mentioned. When asked, a Department of Fisheries officer told researchers that KAMFIMEX was closing down anyway and that it did not close because of the uprising. Traders who participated in the demonstration did not seem to be very keen to describe it, mostly because they were afraid of persecution. The protest leader, however, argued that the demonstrations and the support from other small traders had resulted in reduced fee payments along roads in Cambodia.

While Cambodian fees decreased, however, Thai fees increased dramatically. Before 2001, only the Thai customs were collecting fees. Other payments included water and sanitation fees to the Rong Kluer Market. However, in 2001, a Thai member of parliament supported by lobbyists of frog culturists in northeast Thailand questioned the import of frogs from Cambodia in parliament. It was argued that the trade had potential to damage the aquaculture industry in Thailand. Thereafter, both the Department of Fisheries and the Department of Livestock established checkpoints at the border. All imported aquatic animals now must pass through these checkpoints. At the same time, the requirement for importer registration was strictly enforced. Only Thais may register as importers, and all fish entering Thailand must be handled by a registered importer. There were three importers registered at the Aranyaprathet border at the time of this study, and Cambodian fish traders had to pay a fee to one. The fee is not large, but coinciding with all these developments, the amount charged by Thai customs increased to 2 to 5-fold or more. One woman exporter said that prior to 2000 she paid

12 Small-scale traders and transporters refer to those who trade around 200—500 kilograms per day on average. There is substantial seasonal fluctuation in the volume traded.
Baht 6,000 to Thai customs; now she paid, 10,000 to 15,000 per cart. Neary, a woman small trader, said that she paid, 20 per basket before 2000; now she paid Baht 100 and sometimes Baht 200, depending on the “mood” (arom) of the customs officer. According to Pany, another Cambodian small trader, Thai customs used to ask for a lump sum payment per pushcart. Now, they were stricter. Exporters said that payments on Thai side were now the largest of all their costs.

IV. WOMEN’S AND MEN’S ROLES IN THE FISH TRADE

There are various types of participants in the fish trade. There were about 1,000 collectors operating along the Tonle Sap River and the Great Lake — many husband-and-wife teams — who bought fish directly from fishers or lot owners. There were also about 1,000 mobile fish collectors who collected fish from smaller collectors. Both women and men were engaged in this work.

Wholesalers had permanent fish stalls at fish landing sites. They either exported directly to Thailand, or resold to exporters. Both women and men operated as wholesalers, either individually or as a family business. Exporters bought fish from wholesalers at fish landing sites and sent fish to Thailand. Twenty-nine large fish exporters were found during this study. Women were seen to be leading this part of the trade. It was often men who brought the fish, but it was important that the business was done by several people in a family. As Sophea, a woman exporter said, it was not possible to run a fish export business alone. She cited the case of another woman exporter to illustrate how women have the ability to run the business, but would not be able to do it alone (or if they tried, they would fail, thus they should not try). The case cited ran an export business alone and was able to expand her business quite rapidly. However, she started to lose control of her business and accumulated large debts, forcing her to be on the run. “She thinks she can do everything” was a gentle and sympathetic criticism by her fellow women exporters.

Small traders bought fish from middlemen, wholesalers, and exporters to sell in Thailand. One village with 56 households was solely dependent on the small-scale fish border trade for its livelihood. Both women and

13 All names are changed in order to maintain anonymity.
men were thus engaged. Women were more often seen to be leading the activity, but it was important that their male relatives were also involved. Women handled negotiations and recorded the trade most of the time, while men loaded and unloaded fish. The number of small traders involved in the border fish trade was difficult to estimate. Border officials said there were 20 regular small traders. However, as the small village of fish traders demonstrates, there seemed to be a far greater number of regular small traders. A trader would not necessarily cross the border every day. When there was only a small amount of fish, they would sell their fish to other traders.

Chea and McKenney (2003) calculated the annual rate of return for Cambodian fish exporters to be 10 to 60%. The large range is due to the uncertainty of data collected on profit levels, etc. However, they pointed out that the return was still lower than opportunity costs, showing that fish exporters were running marginal businesses. According to respondents in this study, income of those involved in the fish trade ranged from 50,000 to 100,000 Riel per trade for large middlemen, 20,000 to 50,000 Riel per trade for smaller middlemen, and 15,000 to 20,000 Riel for collectors. Small border traders quoted an income range of 13,000 to 72,000 Riel per trade, although income was in the lower range most of the time. Fish prices at Rong Kluer Market fluctuate, but small traders indicated that price differences between the two sides of the border were around 30%. Profit margins were not large because of fees paid on both sides of the border. Although most participants in the fish border trade operated with marginal profits, their income was still better than fish retailers in domestic markets, who earned around 5,000 to 10,000 Rel per day.

At the Poipet-Aranyaprathet border, fish were reloaded on pushcarts because trucks were not allowed to cross the border. Transporters owned these pushcarts, and they also negotiated the payments on both sides of the border. Most of the transporters were men. Women transporters worked

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14 Opportunity costs here is taken as the borrowing interest rates for exporters, which average 60 to 72%.

15 The reason they need to reload in Poipet when crossing the border was not clear. According to customs officers in Thailand, trucks and cars from Cambodia are not prohibited to enter Thailand. However, because most of the Cambodian trucks were “not according to standards of Thailand,” they could not enter. Some Cambodian traders said trucks were not taken into Thailand to avoid a large tariff. At other border checkpoints that were much smaller in size and transactions than Poipet-Aranyaprathet, vehicles from Cambodia were allowed to cross the border. There, six-wheelers from Cambodia transported goods to markets in Thailand.
The Chief of Poipet Commune estimated the population to be more than 100,000. The total area of Poipet commune is 9600 hectares.

With male relatives. Some transporters owned a large number of carts, hiring tens of workers and seeming to do quite well. Others owned only a small cart and operated on a very small scale. Small traders hired these small transporters to transport their goods across the border. Handicapped transporters were preferred by small traders since they are given some leniency in the payment of fees by border authorities.

There were three types of Thai fish traders in the Thai fish market, and here women were most active. Some Thai traders owned a stall in the market. Most of the Thai traders with stalls were long-time border traders of fish. Many had traded through the conflicts in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and had established strong links with exporters in Cambodia. Such links were important for Thai traders in order to secure stable supplies of fish and to control prices. There were also Thai traders who purchased fish from the stall owners. Some itinerant Thai traders from the nearby town of Aranyaprathet used pickup trucks and motorbikes to buy fish from small traders selling on the street. Small traders normally did not sell to stall owners because their volumes were too small. Instead they sold on the street to itinerant Thai traders. These itinerant Thai traders were mostly husband-and-wife teams. There were around 50 Thai traders in Rong Kluer Market.

On the Cambodian side of the border, the population in Poipet town has increased 100-fold over the last 10 years. Official record showed there were 77,198 people living in Poipet commune in 2004, but the actual number is thought to be much higher. Approximately 3,000 Cambodian workers and more than 4,000 traders (including those who were workers in the market) crossed the border into Thailand daily. According to the Chief of Commune, 75% of the population of the commune worked as laborers in Thailand, and around 10% worked there as traders. Both women and men went there for casual labor. Women worked in fish processing in the market and men worked as transport laborers. Some worked in agriculture and construction sites nearby. Poipet had eight casinos, and another was under construction. Almost all customers were from Thailand. The disparity between rich and poor is very large in Poipet, with hotel owners and large business people at one end, and daily casual laborers at the other end of the income scale. In such an environment, engagement in border trade is one of the best possible livelihoods that afford respectability for many people in the commune. Small-scale fish retailing

16 The Chief of Poipet Commune estimated the population to be more than 100,000. The total area of Poipet commune is 9600 hectares.
is dominated by women. Their male relatives either work as their helpers, have another job, or stay at home to look after the house (Kusakabe and Sok 2003). For some households, the division of labor is different from their native villages, where even though men help with household work, tasks such as washing clothes is mainly done by women. In Poipet, because women are busy with their fish businesses and their husbands often do not have a full-time occupation, some men will stay home and take care of the housework and children, including washing clothes, which is normally considered strictly women's work in rural communities in Cambodia. A longtime resident of Poipet said that he did not like to live there for a long time because people were very individualistic. But because of such individualistic attitudes, people also pay little attention to the affairs of others. The non-traditional division of labor in Poipet households is thus relatively free of social scrutiny and sanctions (Kusakabe and Sok 2003).

V. HOW WOMEN AND MEN DEAL WITH THE STATE

Both women and men have taken part in the development of the fish border trade since 1980. But because of their different roles in the trade network, they have shown different ways of dealing with state efforts to control the movement of goods across the border. Men working as transporters need to negotiate with the border custom officials on both sides of the border. They develop connections and use those connections to get better deals, or to at least stabilize fee payments.

It has been a long-standing contention of Cambodians that the border market should return to the Cambodian side, where it was in the early 1990s. Because the market is now on the Thai side of the border, Cambodian traders must shoulder all the risks. Payments to customs as well as price fluctuations are covered by Cambodian traders. On the Cambodian side of the border, however, there are no refrigeration facilities as there are at Rong Kluer Market. Theoretically, both Cambodians and Thais have access to existing refrigeration facilities, but the Thais control them. The complaint is that when fish prices take what is sure to be a short-term drop, Cambodian fish traders are refused use of refrigerating facilities, being told it is full. The fish traders are forced to sell their fish the same day at extremely low prices. Such experience has prompted Cambodians to think of moving the market to the Cambodian side. Leaders
of one village in Poipet commune are planning to establish a market with modern facilities. Such discussion and plans took place during discussions with male transporters and commune/village leaders, but were not heard at discussions with women traders. Women traders’ were pragmatic: it would be easier if the market were on the Cambodian side, but Thai traders would not take the trouble to come over to the Cambodian side. Cambodian women traders said that the difference between Thai traders and Cambodian traders was that Thai traders did not work for a small profit, while Cambodian traders did. The income earning opportunities of traders in the two countries were different, and Cambodian women traders, who were in everyday contact with Thai traders, were well aware of it.

While male officers and transporters were dealing directly with representatives of the state, either through negotiation, confrontation, or alternative planning, what were the women traders doing? Many of the women small traders simply focused on their businesses. The women’s reaction was different from men because of their different roles and positions in the fish border trade. Women were concentrated among the small-scale border traders. Unlike the transporters, who received fix fees for their services, small traders were subject to fluctuations in fish prices in Cambodia as well as in Thailand. They were thus dependent on the actions of others. This, combined with the behavior expected of their gender — i.e. non-aggressive and obedient, and the subject of pity and sympathy — led women to take strategies of subservience to authorities. During the period when traders needed to depend on soldiers, Sokha, an experienced woman trader, said that it was better if women did the business and talked to the soldiers. It was easier for them to ask for their favor. Even with freedom to travel to the border, it was still women who were in the forefront negotiating fees with economic police, soldiers, and other government officers. “It is better if women negotiate. If men negotiate, they will start fighting soon because both sides think that the other is looking down on him.” For women, this is not the case, according to Sokha. When asked about her strategies in negotiating with the authorities, she said, “We beg (som ke). We beg them please do not take much money. This is only to support our family.” Sokha and her neighbor fish traders said that Cambodians are easy to negotiate with. “We are both Cambodians, and we understand each other.” Male transporters also expressed this, but transporters would make friends with the authorities, rather than beg.

When the transporters initiated the protest, women small traders also joined. Although many women traders signed the petition, when it...
came to the actual protesting in the KAMFIMEX warehouse or at the governor’s house, the number of women who joined was less than men. When asked why they did not go to the protest, a woman trader said her husband went to the protest. She said, “Most of the families let their husbands go. Women are not good in talking. We do not know what to say.” So, while her husband went to protest, she carried on with her usual business.

Both women and men in Cambodia perceive that negotiating with Cambodian authorities is not difficult. However, they have problems with Thai authorities. Male transporters expressed difficulties in negotiating with Thai authorities. The leader of the protest against KAMFIMEX said he could settle fees at an acceptable level in Cambodia, but it was not possible to negotiate with Thai authorities. “It is their land (chea dei ke).” Thus men ask the Thai registered importers to provide a letter stating the value and amount of fish that they are bringing in, so that Thai customs would not ask for an exorbitant amount. “But this is as much as we can do,” according to the protest leader.

Women traders had not totally given up on negotiating with the Thais as had male transporters. They utilized the same strategies they used with Cambodian authorities: begging. There were several small success stories of women traders begging Thai customs officers and getting a “discount (choh aoi).” When begging does not work, some women traders resorted to “threat,” which was not heard of in negotiations in Cambodia. One woman small trader said that when Thai customs asked her for a payment of Baht 200, she said that was too much. When the Thai officer ignored her plea, she started shouting, screaming for a loudspeaker so she could cry and denounce the Thai customs the whole day. She finally got her “discount” and paid only Baht 100.

VI. WOMEN’S AND MEN’S SENSE OF BORDER

Some people living along the border may have an ill-defined sense of nationality. On the Cambodia-Thai border, there is hardly any problem of statelessness or dual nationality in any legal sense of the term. Both women and men traders interviewed had a clear sense of their nationality, either being Cambodian or Thai. This sense of belonging was also clear when both women and men Cambodian traders noted that it was easier to negotiate with Cambodians, because they were both Cambodians, while
it was more difficult to negotiate with Thais. Cambodian traders have a strong sense of being Cambodians. If asked to state the differences between Cambodian and Thai women, Cambodian women traders will immediately respond. During interviews, however, Cambodian women traders were encountered who would shift their identity. This phenomenon was not seen among male transporters. It was especially noted when the Cambodian women traders talked with Thai women traders. They would emphasize how similar Thais and Cambodians were, and that they were both women. The emphasis on same identities was made when the Cambodian women traders were negotiating prices, or when they were interviewed in the presence of Thai traders. When negotiating with a Thai woman trader, a Cambodian woman in Ban Laem border town would say, “We are both from the same nationality (chat diao kan).” In Rong Kluer Market, both Cambodian and Thai women would say that Cambodians and Thais are the same. The differences among traders and transporters in the use of shifting of identities might not be because of gender differences, but because of role differences. The men were transporters and needed to bargain less often with the Thais. One woman trader, when interviewed said, “I am Thai 100%.” Then she went on to explain how she used to be in Koh Kong in Cambodia before the Khmer Rouge, doing border trade with her husband (a Cambodian national), then fled to Thailand. When asked if she was actually a Cambodian, she became irritated and said that Thais and Cambodians were the same, and it did not matter. Women traders, in order to negotiate better with their clients, like to keep their boundaries flexible and open as much as possible so they can include others in their classification, thus giving themselves legitimacy to demand preferential treatment. For male transporters, the border is always a physical place lacking flexibility, which they must cross.

Another difference between men and women was seen in their sense of ownership of the market. Male transporters and government officials felt that the market belonged to Cambodians, and claimed that the market should be in Cambodia since most of the people who worked there were Cambodians, and the market used to be in Cambodia. On the other hand, women traders did not really care where the market was located, although they thought it would be easier if it were in Cambodia. Women traders felt that the market was Thai. “Din ke (their land),” they said. But they also recognized that Cambodians dominated market activities. It seems,

17 For example, use of money, how they do business, etc.
however, that women traders did not need to claim ownership of land in order to feel ownership of the market. If they had a mooi (regular customer with whom they had established relations), they felt that the place was theirs. Thai women traders did not cross the border into Cambodia to get fish, and Cambodian women traders did not go beyond Rong Kluer Market to sell fish. The reason given by traders of both nationalities was that their customers were in the market. One Cambodian trader in Rong Kluer Market who was married to a Thai, even though she was a Cambodian, did not go into Cambodia often to get fish, but waited in Rong Kluer Market. It was not that Thai traders could not go inside Cambodia, but there was no need for them to make the effort to go there, since there were so many Cambodians who would go through the cumbersome border process in order to make a small profit. Such differences contributed to the definition of place and border for both Thai and Cambodian women traders. For Thai and Cambodian small-scale border women traders, Rong Kluer Market was the actual border, not the physical border that the states had established.

Women traders had a different perceptual border from male officers and transporters, and it was defined not only by the physical border, but by their relationships. For Cambodian women traders, their perception of Cambodian and Thai checkpoints was the same—they were places where they had to show subservience and beg. Their sense of border extended to the market, which was the limit of their relationships. It was not the physical proximity of the market to the international border that mattered. Even if the market were located a few more kilometers from the border, the Cambodian women traders’ perceptual border would be extended to the limit of that market. Such sense of border among the Cambodian women traders who were the lead agents in the border trade made the Thai side of the market thrive. Both Thai women traders and Cambodian women traders shared a sense of ownership of the market.

Since women traders’ perceptual border was limited by the relationships they had with other women traders, the official closure of the border could not stop the border trade. When the border was closed because of political conflict between Thailand and Cambodia, Cambodian women traders telephoned their regular customers in Thailand and met at other smaller border checkpoints that were not closed.

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18 The border pass does not allow Cambodians to go beyond the market. However, such legalities were not cited as the reason for not going beyond the border market.
When traders and transporters negotiated with the state on the terms of export, it was the men who took the visible and leading role in the protest, although women traders supported them by signing the petition, and by continuing their trade so the family would not incur financial losses. Even though transporters were successful in negotiating with the Cambodian government to get a fair role in export operations, their strategies were within the framework provided by the state. They thus were unable to challenge the state’s hegemony or to transcend the limitations set by the international border. Transcending the existence of the border was not the transporters’ aim in the first place, since the transporters' business existed because of state regulations and the international border. For women traders, this was not the case. For them, business and business relations were the priorities. Thus, if any state regulations got in the way of their business, they quietly looked for ways to maintain their perceptual border, although they still needed men's help in negotiating the fees charged for their operation.

VII. CONCLUSION

The chain of operations of the fish trade from Cambodia to Thailand is gender segregated, especially among the operators involved in the trade at the border. Transporters are usually men, while small-traders are predominantly women. Among the operators, women small-scale traders are the most vulnerable. Larger traders have a better say in determining prices with both fishers and buyers (small traders). Transporters receive a fixed amount for their services from traders, and are thus less vulnerable to price fluctuations, although they are vulnerable to extortion from officials and police. Small traders are most vulnerable since they have less negotiating power. They are vulnerable to extortion, and have no facility to refrigerate fish. Because of the differences in their position and roles in fish trade chain, women traders and male transporters and officers exhibited a different perception of the border, and their relation with the state also differed. Women small-scale traders’ perceptual border was determined by their relationships with Thai traders, thus the state’s closure of the border did not stop them from contacting their customers and continuing to trade across the border. Women and men's perceptual border is important to consider since it influences the way women and men react to border regulations.
REFERENCES


