

VIOLENT CONTENTION THROUGH A NON-VIOLENT CONVENTION

Identity, non-violence and self-immolations: an identity perspective on the
Struggle of the Tibetan Diaspora from Nepal



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*Dedicated to the children of Tibet
who have inherited a fleeting dream*

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CONTENTS

<i>Abbreviation</i>	6
Introduction	7
Research questions and significance of the research	9
Methodology	12
Execution of the Fieldwork	14
Chapter roadmap	15
Chapter 1	17
1.1 Socio-economical positions	17
1.2 Schooling and history	21
1.3 Culture and Buddhism	26
1.4 Traditions of resistance	29
Chapter 2	36
2.1 Inauthentic Tibetanness in exile.....	36
2.2 How to be a Tibetan: the deontological duty of exiles	40
2.3 The existence of the struggle in situ	45
2.3.1 The convention to struggle: an individual dimension of collective action.....	45
Chapter 3	55
3.1 Introduction to an emic framework on non-violence.....	55
3.2 Buddha's sacrifices	55
3.3 The Emic conceptualization of non-violence.....	59
3.4 Transforming identities and cognitive dissonance.....	64
3.4.1 The Guerrilla Campaign.....	65
3.4.2 Violence accompanying non-violent protests in Nepal.....	68
3.4.3 Self-immolation and the proof of cognitive dissonance.....	72
Conclusion	77
Appendices	81
Appendix: A Self-immolation events among the Tibetan diaspora in South-Asia	81
Appendix: B Tibetan contentious actions and police reactions in Nepal	82
Appendix: C The People's Uprising Song: Rise up!.....	89
Appendix: D Pawo Pamo song.....	90
Appendix: E Posters of self-immolators in Tashi Palkhiel.....	91
Bibliography	92

ABBREVIATIONS

ATPD	Assembly of Tibetan People's Deputies
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CTA	Central Tibetan Authority
ICT	International Campaign for Tibet
HRW	Human Rights Watch
HURON	Human Rights Organisation Nepal
NAN	New Age Network
PLA	People's Liberation Army
PRC	People's Republic of China
RC	Refugee Certificate
RTYC	Regional Tibetan Youth Congress
TAB	Tibet Autonomous Region
THT	The Himalayan Times
TJC	Tibet Justice Center
TWO	Tibetan Woman's Organisation
US	United States

INTRODUCTION

Peoples living in Tibet have appropriated very different identities in the eyes of some Westerners during the past century. They went from a ‘primitive’ people in the beginning of the twentieth century (Rijnhart 1901:125 and Waddle 1972:421-422 in Lopez 1999:34), to “an incredible peaceful, non-violent people” hundred years later (Gere quoted in Roberts II and Roberts 2009:217). A peaceful identity now still in existence for “Tibetans reappropriated this identity” (Mountcastle 1997:592) and some even began to promote and endorse this, essentially, western construct (Jamyang Norbu 2007, Tibetwrites).

However, such a thing as ‘the Tibetan’ with a particular ‘Tibetan identity’ did and does not exist, to follow Princess Maxima of the Netherlands when she used the same words to describe ‘the Dutch identity’. This essentially reductionist categorization could be called a “singular affiliation”, the assumption that an individual “pre-eminently belongs” to a particular collective (Sen 2007:20). Something not applicable to the peoples living in ethnic¹ Tibet for they did not identify or affiliate themselves with a Tibetan ‘nation’, but more with specific regional features such as local valleys or mountains (Lopez 1999:197, Yeh 2007:656). Although there was a sense of “*natio*”, or “condition of belonging” (Lopez 1999:198) by means of “commonalities of culture and religion” (Anand 2000:274) it must be said that “sub-national” and “regional identities” predominated (Kolås 1996:53).

It would take the Chinese invasion and displacement of tens of thousands of Tibetans before a national Tibetan identity began to take shape. The Central Tibetan Authority (CTA) established after 1959 in Dharamsala (India) by Tenzin Gyatso, the fourteenth Dalai Lama, was a core player in this process of identity construction. Soon after its inception the CTA began “to preserve Tibetan *national* identity” (emphasis added Roemer 2009:126) by means of a comprehensive (lower) education infrastructure (Rigzin 2004:267-268, Roemer 2009:78-80, 90). The CTA focused on “the *creation* of a Tibetan identity” (emphasis added Roemer 2009:133) in order to imprint a spirit of Tibetanness on generations brought and born in exile, with the aim of cultivating unity among the socially widely diverging Diaspora (Kolås 1996:57, Phuntsog 1998:39). The CTA so invented Tibetanness along a homogenous cultural discourse on collective identity (Anand 2000:273), resulting in the exiles’ claim that they

¹ Following Goldstein’s separation between a ‘political’ Tibet and ‘ethnographic’ Greater Tibet (Goldstein 1998 in Anand 2000:274), we can distinguish different regions. U-Tsang is the area formerly under *political* authority of the Dalai Lama regime in Lhasa, equitable with the contemporary Tibet Autonomous Region (TAB). ‘Greater Tibet’ also includes the eastern provinces of Kham and Amdo, historically ruled by semi-independent principalities (Kolås 1996:53) and now largely incorporated in the Chinese provinces of Qinghai, Gansu, Sichuan and Yunnan.

preserved the authentic Tibetan culture and traditions in its *pure* form, while these were being destroyed by the Chinese in Tibet (Yeh 2007:661).

This idea is however ambiguous for multiple reasons. Not the least because culture itself is “socially and politically constructed and contested” (Anand 2000:278) but more because Tibetans, to mobilize political support (Anand 2000:278), began to appropriate the western construct of the ‘peaceful’ Tibetan as well. These observations so point at a theoretically paradoxical phenomenon, a conjecture in which two contradictory and seemingly antipodal dynamics exist side by side. One aims to preserve ‘the Tibetan identity’ in exile, the other essentially reshaping that identity in order to make it compatible with a western discourse on ‘the peaceful Tibetan’.

This observation evokes puzzling questions. For example how can Tibetan exiles appropriate a peaceful identity while Tibetan history displays many instances² of war and conflict? Further, one can point at an almost thirty year long guerrilla campaign against the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) that ended in 1974³, and many more periodical instance of violent resistance to the Chinese occupation; as for example the 2008 riots in Lhasa (Sautman 2012:94-95). Besides these, contentious actions in India, Nepal and in the West sometimes resulted in semi-violent clashes with authorities. These examples are further supplemented by a genuinely puzzling and unprecedented ongoing phenomena; a wave of self-immolations in which already fifty Tibetans are confirmed to have self-immolated in Tibet since 16 March, 2011 (ICT 2012). This development seems to gain momentum in exile as well; a number of self-immolations occurred outside Tibet in South Asia during the past year.⁴ Although self-immolations cannot be ambivalently labelled violent or non-violent, I consider them instances of violent behaviour following Galtung’s definition of ‘direct violence’ (i.e. violence enacted by an actor on a subject) (Galtung 1969:169,171).

Questions about how these historical facts can run parallel to the existing myth of the Tibetans as ‘naturally’ gentle and their struggle⁵ as ‘non-violent’ are manifold. However this thesis focuses on a complication illustrated by a statement of Samdhong Rinpoche, former Prime Minister of the CTA (2001-2011). He once ascertained that the fourteenth Dalai Lama

² Tibet has a pre-Chinese invasion history of violent internal conflict and wars with neighbouring states (Von Brück 2004:15-33, Sautman 2012:92-93)

³ The armed endeavour started on Tibetan soil during the 1950s, ending almost three decades later in 1974 on the Mustang plateau (north-central Nepal) where the guerrillas had their base (after their expulsion from Tibet by the PLA in the beginning of the 1960s) from which they conducted their operations in Tibet.

⁴ See Appendix: A.

⁵ For analytical purposes I refer not to ‘a movement’, but to ‘the struggle’ in order to encompass the wide spectrum of initiatives activities and actions conducted by *individuals* for the wellbeing of their respective community and the ‘Tibetan identity’ and culture.

had “transformed the Tibet Freedom Movement in exile as well as Tibet into a non-violent movement”. This perspective might be true, but how should we then understand the concomitant phrase in which the former Prime Minister asserts that it was “no small achievement to have restrained the Tibetan people from using violence for the last *forty years*” (emphasis added 2004:454-455). A statement which is straightforward and hard to misinterpret, but either way dubious when the historical fact cannot be denied that the Tibetan guerrilla period is well included in those forty years.⁶

Accordingly, we could ask in which levels of analysis this adaption of the western construct of Tibetanness ought to be sought; in an existential or linguistic dimension? Did Samdhong⁷, and for that matter other Tibetans, really believe this statement which then constitutes ‘reality’ in some eyes, or was he knowingly and intentionally constructing a blatant example of propaganda? Or did his words have an altogether different meaning? Put another way, how did he conceptualize the key words ‘Tibet Freedom movement’, ‘restrained’, ‘Tibetan people’ and above all ‘non-violent’? Even so, if the former point was the case, then how did he make the dichotomy between non-violent and violent contentious actions congruent? Are these two types of action not by their very nature conflicting with each other? To put it more theoretical, did he, and maybe other Tibetan exiles, experience what social psychologist Leon Festinger called a “cognitive dissonance”? A proposition which posits that a person will experience an uncomfortable psychological tension when he or she holds two inconsistent or conflicting cognitions and so consequently feels the urge to remove discomfort by means of changing, altering or adding cognitions (Festinger 1957 in Bem 1967:183)? This is the main subjects this thesis seeks to uncover: does one find expression of a dissonance in social narratives and memories on violent Tibetan contentious events? Further, what could this tell us about the present and future of contentious action; where does this seemingly spreading wave of self-immolations come from and where will it lead to?

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH

Tibetan exiles in Nepal are a logic research population for the issues raised in the introduction

⁶ Tibetan guerrillas seized their activities only in 1974 when Mao Zedong personally pressured the Nepalese King into sending his military to halt the Tibetan fighters (Ardly 2000:15). However, they only laid down their weapons, already under threat of the Royal Nepalese Army, upon hearing a tape recording of the Dalai Lama in wherein the latter “urged” the man to “begin new lives” (Roberts II and Roberts 2009:156, McGranahan 2005:594).

⁷ Since Rinpoche is a Buddhist honorific title meaning ‘precious one’, therefore I will from now in refer to the former Prime Minister as Samdhong.

for the reason that this group theoretically resembles in multiple ways the complications sketched above. Firstly, exiles in Nepal are spatially segregated from the political and cultural centre of Tibetan Diaspora; the Central Tibetan Authority situated in Dharamsala, India, also referred to as the “Little Lhasa of India” (Anand 2000:277). Exiles living in the centre of the Tibetan Diaspora have appropriated a mark of pure Tibetanness (Yeh 2007:662), a condition theoretically thus harder to attain for the exiles born and raised in Nepal, who ‘know’ Tibet only through stories and multimedia sources (Conway 1975:74). Since numerous exiles in Nepal not only lived multiple decades in the periphery of Tibetan society in South Asia, but also in a country home to ethnic groups which share religious and cultural aspects as well as racial origins with Tibetans (TJC: 2002:26-27), these two conditions could consequently have implications for the manner in which exiles living in Nepal construct their feeling of belonging to a Tibetan collective. Secondly, Nepal experienced a six month long spree of contentious actions against the backdrop of the Beijing Olympics in 2008. This spate of contentious activity⁸ gave rise to what some Nepalese labelled the “Free Tibet movement” (Prajapati 2011:1), indicating a degree of involvement in contentious behaviour which in turn is a predicament beneficial for research in the proposed complications. A third factor making Nepal’s Tibetan diaspora communities a suitable research population is their (in)direct experience with violent contention; the majority of Tibetan guerrillas settled in Nepal (TJC 2002:33) after their Mustang stronghold was dismantled in 1974.

In a nutshell, it can be safely assumed that the guerrillas and their offspring are inclined to construe their Tibetanness in relation to; 1) violent contentious action conducted as part of the guerrilla campaign, 2) the contemporary types of contention in Nepal and beyond, 3) the ‘non-violent’ discourse practices with considerable eagerness by diaspora leaders in Dharamsala and, 4) a conceptualization of Tibetanness that distinguishes them from the ethnicities in Nepal with whom they share socio-cultural and physical similarities.

Unfortunately the resources of the author are limited and therefore this research cannot realistically examine in desired depth complex issues taken up in the introduction. This thesis must therefore be seen as exploratory research. It sets out to provide stepping-stones for future inquiry by encompassing as much as possible of the proposed dynamics sketched in the introduction. Consequently, this thesis focuses on two dimensions that lay at their base; 1) the collective construction of Tibetanness in exile, and 2) the individual discourse on violent contentious actions conducted in the struggle for a free Tibet. Therefore, in order to capture

⁸ See Appendix: B.

the nexus between Tibetan identity formation in exile and second the discourse on contentious actions, this thesis will address the following research puzzle:

How is the Tibetanness of exiles in Nepal constructed in relation to the two conflicting types of contentious actions, non-violent and violent, utilized in the struggle?

Research on this question is important, because it generates empirical knowledge on how the constitution of Tibetanness could inhabit or impel contentious behaviour. Further it will investigate whether Tibetans in Nepal (henceforth exiles) experience cognitive dissonance in relation to the narratives on violent contentious actions. It accordingly aims to explicate how Tibetans perceive past and present contentious actions and whether these are seen as violent or non-violent. Knowledge concerning exile attitudes towards violent action should be considered important, since “the future of the Tibetan liberation movement is going to be one of conflict between traditional Buddhist morality as defined by Dalai Lama and the activities of increasingly militant people” (Anand 2000:284). An especially interesting observation when knowing that the Tibetan Youth Congress (TYC), a comprehensive international political network consisting out of eighty seven chapters worldwide (Tibetan Youth Congress 2012), foreclosed “no possible means” as long as they would attain “the ultimate goal” (Mountcastle 1997:591).

Significance of this research project thus lays primarily in the light it sheds on possible future trajectories of the Tibetan struggle, especially relating to the question how Tibetans position themselves in regard to violent action. A point illuminating in the context of the concept of cognitive dissonance and the question whether the Tibetan movement, currently following a non-violent ideology (or maybe *strategy*), inherently excludes the use of violent tactics. A relevant topic in light of the Tibetan self-immolations; these acts are spreading to the diaspora in South Asia and seem to become a lasting tactic. Accordingly we have to ask ourselves whether, as Jason Burke hypothesised, “such acts are part of a culture that becomes established in a given institution or community” (Burke 2012). Consequently, this research can designate whether exile communities are in the process of creating such cultural and social structures (i.e. norms, practices, and discourses) that restrain or liberate individuals to engage in these, in my opinion, violent contentious actions.

METHODOLOGY

The research question dictated two different areas of qualitative inquiry by means of in depth interviews. First, one must delineate were to research the construction of Tibetanness and its relation to contentious action and second what are exile notions on non-violent and violence.

How to approach the construction of Tibetanness is an important question since research on identity construction is *ab initio* a curious and ambiguous undertaking. How to solve the problems which are posed by the mobile, processual and bricolage nature of identities (Anand 2000:273); they are unfixed, contextual and so only capable of capturing the category to which an individual belongs in a specific spatial, temporal, cultural and socio-political context. This thesis therefore approaches the construction of Tibetanness as an ontological imperative inherently taking place *inside* the self as well as in interaction with the structural world *outside* the individual. It thus follows Isaacs's conceptualization of identity as located "in the core of the individual and the core of communal culture" (1975:38 in Stryker 2003:23). Further, the concept of community is not unproblematic as Brubaker (2004) points out, and becomes even more complicated when referring and applied to people living in a diaspora context; should their community be analytically confined to a local, regional, national or international entity? Additionally these questions illustrate the difficulty of demarcating culture⁹; were should it to be sought in respect to these different analytical strata? Supplementary, identity construction is not only driven by communal culture (in this case 'Tibetan culture' as practiced in exile) of the group one considers him or herself to be part of; also the dynamics of the wider cultural and societal context in which the group is situated (in this case Nepalese society) are of importance. Thus, one cannot confine communal culture (as a constitutive element in Tibetan identity construction) to the practices attitudes and mentalities that prevail in Tibetan refugee communities, but ought to incorporate Nepalese societal culture in this concept of communal cultural as well. Accordingly, the inquiry in the construction of Tibetanness took into its scope besides culture as practiced by the Tibetan exiles in Nepal and their communal life, also their position in wider Nepalese society; the societal context in which their communities are situated.

Interviews started with inquiring how exiles described their own Tibetanness. In regard to their communal life questions were focussed on (Tibetan) education for the reason that it, as distilled from literature research, plays a major role in the inception of Tibetanness

⁹ Culture is defined here in the broad sense as "attitudes, mentalities and values and their expression, embodiment or symbolisation in artefacts, practices and representations" (Burke 2010:5).

as cultural identity (Kolås 1996:58, Phuntsog 1998:36-37, Giles and Dorjee 2005:148, Yeh 2007:661-663) while it was also presumed to be a constitutive source of knowledge about the Tibetan insurgency period by means of history classes. Secondly, I perused the qualitative manifestation of Tibetanness as a performance in Tibetan culture and Buddhism; the most cynosure elements put forward by academic sources as points of gravity that provide substance for identity formation in the Tibetan Diaspora (Kolås 1996:59,64, Yeh 2007:665, Giles and Dorjee 2005:140-146, Phuntsog 1998:37,39, Anand 2000:282, Houston and Wright 2003:219,222). Particularly cultural traditions (some of them explicitly relating to contentious actions) were asked about because these, in their capacity as “identity work”¹⁰, contribute in solidification of a Tibetan nation in exile.

Besides the topics central to identity construction in the first part of the interviews, I focussed the second part of the interviews on opinions about, motivations for and modes of participation in contentious activities in Nepal. The inquiry directed attention at three modes of contentious actions; the guerrilla campaign, Tibetan contentious activities conducted in the context of the struggle focussed on Nepal (to a lesser degree India and Tibet), and self-immolations in South-Asia as well as Tibet where they are predominantly conducted by monks.

Interviews were further explicitly designed to detect simple changes in mindset in order to capture contradictions that could indicate cognitive dissonance in ideas of exiles on non-violent and violent contention. To this goal the ‘first part’ of the interview was aimed at mapping the study participants’ conceptualization of the rather abstract concepts ‘violence’ and ‘non-violence’ by means of conversations about their religious beliefs and the meaning of solely these words. This enabled the author to map and reconstruct the emic definitions, or insider’s perspective of these concepts. These empirical dispositions were then instrumental in a comparison with answers to question from the ‘second part’ of the interview which addressed the contentious activities indicated above. The second part of the interview concentrated on concrete and specific contentious events and their presence in exile social life whereby the author, in his position as interviewer, placed the answers in a scrutinizing manner parallel to the position taken earlier by the study participants. Main topics addressed in the second part of the interview were; school experiences in regard to history on Tibet in general and specifically the guerrilla period, cultural traditions as well as personal experiences with protests or demonstrations and lastly viewpoints on self-immolations and the Tibetans who

¹⁰ Identity work is defined as individual or collective undertakings that give meaning to the self and others, thereby creating symbolic resources on which shared identities are grounded (Snow and McAdam 2000:46-47).

conducted these acts.

Questions aimed at generating personal dispositions on the conceptualizations of non-violence and violence in part one were, besides the setting in which they were voiced, unapplied to a specific context (e.g. what is non-violence to you?). In this way was attempted to generate an emic constructs or projections on these matters relatively ‘untainted’ by contextual factors. These ‘untainted’ constructs were vital to critically scrutinize the position adopted by the study participants in their answers to questions in part two; namely the application of their dispositions to concrete events (e.g. were the Tibetan guerrilla’s non-violent?). This *modus operandi* was indispensable to triangulate whether participants sustained their own mental constructs when confronted with the need to apply them on actual events, something not made clear beforehand to the interviewees. In other words, somebody who in the first part described violence as ‘taking up arms’ would *logically* label the activities of the Tibetan guerrillas as violent in the second part as well, making the mental and actual coherent. Discrepancies or ambivalence between the ‘untainted’ and ‘applied’ mental projections on actual events therefore could indicate cognitive dissonance

EXECUTION OF THE FIELDWORK

The research topics, selected on their association to the central interests of the research puzzle, provided the criteria on which a sample frame was formulated. Since the research aimed at placing the construction of Tibetanness parallel to contentious action, I adapted a sampling frame in which two characteristics dictated the selection of a sample group. The preponderate elements were firstly, and unsurprising, the requirement that the sample group would be consisting out of people calling themselves ‘Tibetan’ who secondly, would have some acquaintance with one of the three modes of contentious actions indicated above. Additionally, to enable a certain degree of triangulation, I also spoke with Nepali people about many things relating to the Tibetan issue in Nepal when the opportunity arose. These conversations were initially intended to gauge how Nepali perceived the character of the protests.

The fieldwork, conducted from the beginning of April to the end of June 2012, followed stratified purposive sampling in order to explore what ideas the selected subgroups displayed about their Tibetan identity and contentious actions. Flexibility in regard to sampling proved mandatory since early on in the fieldwork it became apparent that a direct approach was largely ineffective in providing access to people with the desired characteristic

and willingness to participate in the study. To get access I had to rely mostly on gatekeepers whom I met through a combination of direct approach and the snowballing method. Moving within already established networks assured the possible study participants that the researcher could be considered trustworthy, which benefitted the data collection accordingly. Consequently, I was to a large degree depending on help of Tibetan and Nepalese contacts to get in touch with people who were willing to speak to me. Ultimately, purposive sampling resembled convenience sampling but stayed surprisingly close to the selected subgroups: even people who were not conforming to the preliminary sample frame (like for example shopkeepers) turned out to be valuable sources of information for the study; shopkeepers eventually conformed to the sample frame; they had participated in the guerrilla or in Tibetan NGO's like the Tibetan Woman's Organisation. Further many 'ordinary' Tibetans did sporadically participate in demonstrations or politically coloured gatherings.

Eventually the above described *modus operandi* enabled me to speak with a wide range of diverse individuals. The data presented in this thesis is thus extracted from monks and ex-monks to former guerrilla fighters, social welfare workers, associates of the Human Rights Organisation of Nepal (HURON) and schoolchildren while also regional leaders and members of the Regional Tibetan Youth Congress (RTYC) and Tibetan Woman's Organisation (TWO). Snowballing eventually enabled me in the last stage of the data collection phase (June 2012) to speak with young activists operating in Kathmandu valley, who were members of an underground Tibetan protest group called the New Age Network (NAN). Although it must be emphasized that this select group of activists cannot be seen as representing attitudes and behaviours of their respective community, I take their individual opinions as one possible reaction to dynamics that take place in the diaspora communities. Therefore testimonies of NAN members retain validity for they are taken to represent symptoms of a wider social phenomenon.

CHAPTER ROADMAP

As the nucleus of identity construction was taken to be dual (captured in the individual as well as communal culture) I present the findings in the same manner. Integrating both these dimensions that influence identity formation, I was inspired by Brubaker who makes the distinction between the *unit* of analysis, which I take to be the ideas and beliefs expressed by individuals, and the *domain* of analysis, applying in this case to structures and practices which pervade communities and the culture it holds and recreates (Brubaker 2004:46).

Further this thesis departs from the proposition that the analysis of the domain is inextricably linked to the unit of analysis. ‘Truths’ about meanings of practices enclosed in the social dynamics of the domain (i.e. exile societal life) can only be properly voiced by virtue of its units. Thus solely an insider’s or Tibetan emic perspective can lay bare knowledge about identity construction processes in the unit-domain nexus. However this presents a problem for the reason that, in the words of Amartya Sen, “what we can see is not independent of where we stand in relation to what we are trying to see” (2010:156) or, to put it another way, “the ethnographer’s self affects every aspect of the research process, from conception to final interpretation” (Sherif 2001:437).

As the researcher of this project I accordingly decided to incorporate my own perspective in the thesis and to present the generated data in a reflexive manner. This will be done by means of presenting the emic or insider’s perspective in synthesis with an etic (my own) outsiders’ interpretation. Following Isaacs duality of identities as situated in the individual as well as in the communal culture, the first two chapters reflect this demarcation. The first so looks at aspects of exile communal life, which from an etic perspective were judged to be of major importance in the ‘identity work’ that constructs Tibetanness in relation to the struggle. Focussing on the social situation of exiles, their schooling, orally transferred Tibetan history and a cultural identity as held by exiles in Nepal, demonstrates how the struggle is present in social structures that impact the lives of exiles. Chapter two will depict what exiles themselves perceive as the markers of their Tibetan identity, positions that will be scrutinized and commented upon from an etic perspective. From the latter perspective it will be argued that participation in the struggle can take many different forms and has become an integral part of ‘being’ a Tibetan in exile. Concluding, the last chapter will direct attention at variables and characteristics which, from an emic perspective, are instrumental in determining the violent or non-violent quality of behaviour. By scrutinizing from an etic perspective, how exiles apply these variables on the three selected modes of violent contention I suggest that there are strong indications to suspect that exiles experience cognitive dissonance in relation violent contention conducted by their fellow Tibetans.

CHAPTER 1

1.1 SOCIO-ECONOMICAL POSITIONS

Nepal is estimated to accommodate approximately 20,000¹¹ Tibetan exiles of which the majority came to the country in two¹² different periods. Nowadays, old and new arrivals reside in one of the many Tibetan settlements which had been established throughout Nepal post-1959. These exiles, together with new refugees, are part of the thousands Tibetans who live dispersed over Nepal in its borderland with Tibet and more concentrated in refugee settlements in Kathmandu valley and Pokhara region.¹³

Exiles living in Nepal can hardly escape their belonging to a Tibetan collective due to the social space¹⁴ in which they live. Although Nepali and exile lives intermingle, one can still say that both live largely in their own worlds in urban areas. Most exile settlements are spatially isolated from Nepalese living quarters¹⁵, while some others (adjacent to Nepalese) are physically segregated, for instance by (low) walls.¹⁶ A division reinforced by the appearance of exile settlements; one can hardly mistake them for Nepalese due to ‘Free Tibet’ slogans graffitied on corrugated iron shacks or engrained in once fresh cement. Groups of older ladies dressed in *chupas* (traditional Tibetan dress) sitting together turning their prayers wheels in the vicinity of the always present (Buddhist) Stupa or monastery, landmarks that further articulates the Tibetan character of these ‘spatial communities’, (i.e. areas dominantly

¹¹ Estimates place the number of Tibetan exiles on “at least” 130,000 people worldwide (Houston and Wright 2003: 220) of whom 95% are living in South Asian states like India, Nepal and Bhutan (Anand 2000:272). However, the amount is growing on a yearly basis with already 2500 to 3000 refugees escaping from Tibet via Nepal alone (TJC 2002:7). The problematic nature of these numbers is illustrated when taking into account that, in regard to Nepal, estimates place the number of Tibetans on 20,000 (UNHCR 2012:34) who live in settlements dispersed over its territory, while unofficial statistics place the number as high as 100,000 (Roemer 2009:76).

¹² The first major influx of Tibetans in Nepal followed after the fourteenth Dalai Lama’s escape to India in 1959. The second wave took place when Tibetan guerrillas, based on the Mustang plateau in the north-central part Nepal after the People’s Liberation Army had pushed them out of Tibet during the first half of the 1960s, were forced to halt their operations in 1974 after Mao Zedong personally pressured King Birendra of Nepal (r. 1972-2001) to deny them a safe haven from which they could conduct military and intelligence operations (Ardly 2000:15, McGranahan 2005:579).

¹³ Nowadays most Tibetan exiles in Nepal live in settlements located in the outlying quarters of Kathmandu (Bouddha, Swayambunath, Jawalakhel and Jorpatia), in settlements located in the Pokhara region (namely Jampaling, Paljorling, Tashi Ling and Tashi Palkhiel) and in Dhorpatan, Chialsa, Chiarok, Shabus and Lumbini located in the northern regions of Nepal (Tibet Justice Center 2002:37).

¹⁴ Social space should be viewed as a “relatively enduring pattern of social arrangements or interrelationships within a particular group, organisation, or society as a whole” (Gecas 2000:93).

¹⁵ This applies to the settlements Jampaling, Tashi Ling and Tashi Palkhiel in the Pokhara region. The first situated in a rural area while the last are located at the fringes of Pokhara city. Settlements in the Kathmandu valley conform this description are Bouddha and Swayambunath which are likewise outlying quarters.

¹⁶ Settlements in this capacity are for example Jawalakhel in Kathmandu and Paljorling in central area of Pokhara city.

inhabited by Tibetans).

Hard work¹⁷ benefitted the exiles accordingly and made these spatial communities not the only places inhabited by exiles, although they harbour the majority. Judging by the amount of Tibetan flags¹⁸ on houses situated in better parts of Kathmandu and Pokhara, one could think that some obtained the financial resources to rent houses and leave the refugee settlements¹⁹, something corroborated by many Nepali's I spoke. Although "few Tibetans have been financially successful" (TJC 2002:72), many Nepali see this differently and describe the exiles almost invariably as 'rich'. They would have generated these financial resources during the decades in exile by means of the once thriving carpet-industry and foreign donors. However, many exiles "struggle" for their daily sustenance (TJC 2002:5) in a variety of labour jobs²⁰ and allegedly more dubious sources of income: some Nepali told stories about Tibetan involvement in lucrative though illegal trade of dollars²¹, drugs, and shockingly even the involvement of 'high lama's' in (child) prostitution, taking place in the Tibetan area of Bouddhanath (near Kathmandu).²²

These rumours could be true or false, but they indicate the relative negative character of the exiles' social interaction with Nepali and so their position in society. A social factor which arguably influences the need of return to the homeland is the feeling (stimulated by Nepali as well as the Tibetans themselves) of being out of place through social isolation. More often than not I found evidence of shallow contact and interaction with Nepalese citizens. Although Nepali-Tibetan relations have been generally peaceful during the past decades (TJC 2002:84), speaking to Nepali reveals considerable dismay about the (financial) position of the Tibetan exiles. 'Why should you call them refugees when they are better off than most Nepali?' a Nepali shop owner told me once.²³ Although this explicit attitude focuses on the economical circumstances of exiles, it also illustrates a tendency to socially categorize the Tibetans as a coherent homogeneous group despite the fact that they intermarry

¹⁷ 'Tibetans are dedicated and hard working.' States Ngawang, daughter of ex-Khamba fighter, president of the Regional Tibetan Youth Congress and Tibetan elderly home worker, Jawalakhel Tibetan refugee settlement, in Lalitpur, Nepal. 11 May 2012.

¹⁸ Something which should be done with caution; Buddhist prayer flags are also used by Buddhist Nepali. However, there is some deduction possible when one knows that Tibetans, besides the worldwide known colourful prayers flags hanging down from a horizontal rope, use another typical Tibetan type of flags which are attached to vertical poles with its base on the ground. Author's conversation with Sandeep, shop owner. 8 July, 2012. Kathmandu, Nepal.

¹⁹ Tibetans were at least up till 2002 prohibited from owning personal or real property (TJC 2002:70).

²⁰ For example as in subsistence agriculture or Tibetan handicraft factories, or as salespersons, shopkeeper, small eatery owners, street vendor on the streets of Pokhara or as porters in local trekking circuits.

²¹ Author's conversation with Vezay, Nepali student. 29 June, 2012. Kathmandu, Nepal.

²² Author's conversation with Gopal, Nepali documentary maker, 18 June, 2012. Kathmandu Nepal.

²³ Author's conversation with anonymous shopkeeper, June 15, 2012. Kathmandu, Nepal.

with Nepali and already live side by side for multiple decades. How this categorization as ‘Tibetan’ contributes to social isolation and relative exclusion from mainstream society is well illustrated by Kathmandu resident, Tsering Dolker:

“Having spent my entire life in a Tibetan community I am more in touch with my Tibetan roots and its culture. I feel safe here not having to put on earphones to shut racial comments made by insensitive people for whom this type of hurtful teasing seems to make their day. You step out and it’s a completely different zone. Conductors mocking your accent, shopkeepers laughing while you try to bargain in the best Nepali you can are some of the things which get to you. But nothing is worse than being called ‘ey Bhote’. I know Tibet is referred to as ‘Bhot’ and Tibetans are known as ‘Bhote’ in Nepali but the way it is said, it demeans the word. I am sure people from Terai feel the same way when they are called ‘Madhesis’ and ‘Dhotis’- a feeling of being cast as outcast and pariahs” (2011, Tibetwrites).

Though this personal statement is emotional, perhaps exaggerated and thus not fully representing general tendencies of interaction, also I found little evidence of strong social ties between adult Nepali and Tibetans. Most of the former did not have any Tibetan friends. Conversely, young Tibetan exiles seem to be increasingly integrating in Nepalese society, as some of them had been to a Nepalese school or made Nepalese friends.

Isolation in the social space, echoed by relative spatial segregation, is additionally buttressed by the legal (i.e. refugee) status of many, especially younger exiles. Many younger Tibetans have no identity papers except for the ‘green book’²⁴ due to twofold reasons. Firstly, “50% of the Tibetan refugees do not have refugee card [sic]” since the “Nepal Government discontinued the practice of issuing Refugee card [sic], legally in 1989” (TRWO 2011:16), although many exiles are legally entitled to them (TJC 2002:62). Secondly, countless Tibetans remain stateless despite the *theoretical*²⁵ possibility of acquiring Nepalese citizenship. Besides its social and economical consequences (TJC 2002:2-5), this reality also affects the self-perception of especially younger exiles, judging by the words of Tenzin: ‘when it [the issuing of RC’s] stopped we had nothing. It is like we belonged nowhere because we do not have an

²⁴ A Tibetan citizenship document the size of a passport issued by the CTA. It is called this way because of its outer appearance (Roemer 2009:125).

²⁵ Nepal’s Citizenship act of 1963 makes exiles “theoretically eligible for citizenship” (TJC 2002:52) but the practical possibility of acquiring citizenship is hard, judging by the remark of Home Minister Ser Bahadur who said that “there is simply no policy of giving the [Tibetan] refugees Nepalese citizenship” (TJC 2002:53).

identity.’²⁶ Something similar is echoed by another Tenzin:

When someone comes and asks us: ‘from which country are you?’ We have nothing to say. We can say Tibetan, but we are not grown up there. We cannot say Nepali as well because we have not got the citizenship. We are like people from another planet with *no identity at all* (emphasis added).²⁷

Nepalese citizenship, although often desired for economical reasons²⁸, brings its own deliberations in respect to perceived loyalty and betrayal of a ‘Tibetan identity’. Especially the older generations appear to struggle with this point as Jamyang Dorjee, a thirty year old resident of Tashi Ling, illustrates: “I don’t want to obtain [Nepalese] citizenship. I am Tibetan. How can I become Nepali?” (TJC 2002:56). Moreover, exiles from all walks of life describe themselves as ‘being refugee’²⁹, and all had the wish to return to Tibet:

Tibet is my country, so everyone loves and likes ones country because country means identity. I am very happy and satisfied in my country. Being exiled means being a refugee and refugee means we have to depend on other people.³⁰

Concluding, contemporary social legal and economical position of exiles within Nepalese society partially bar Tibetans from full integration and arguably bolsters a negative self-concept as refugee. Additionally, it must be said that many exiles themselves also feed this self-concept as victims, reminding themselves constantly of their longing to the home country and their problems in Nepal. However, this longing should not necessarily seen as just a feeling of entitlement and belonging, since many youngsters in Pokhara as well as Kathmandu settlements talked about their economical deprivation in direct relation to going back to Tibet;

²⁶ Tenzin, assistant-director carpet factory and master of ceremony, Jawalakhel Tibetan refugee settlement, in Lalitpur, Nepal. 16 and 19 April 2012.

²⁷ Tenzin, musician and teacher in the local Tibetan school, Tashi Palkhiel refugee settlement, in Pokhara region, Nepal. 5 May 2012.

²⁸ ‘Identity is the biggest problem here: so many people do not have it. That’s a problem because then you cannot go abroad or work in government, hospital or everywhere. Recently there was a family that was robbed. I asked them why they did not put the money in the bank; they could not get a bank account because they did not have the identity [documents].’ Ngawang, daughter of ex-Khamba fighter, president of the Regional Tibetan Youth Congress and Tibetan elderly home worker, Jawalakhel Tibetan refugee settlement, in Lalitpur, Nepal. 11 May 2012.

²⁹ Samten, son of an ex-Khamba fighter, member of the Regional Tibetan Youth Congress and Tibetan elderly home worker, Tashi Palkhiel Tibetan refugee settlement in Pokhara region, Nepal 6 May 2012.

³⁰ Orgyen, ex-Khamba, Jampaling old-age home for Tibetan guerrilla fighters, in Pokhara region, Nepal. 3 May 2012.

the place they saw as the panacea to their problems.³¹ The ‘out of place’ quality of Tibetanness in Nepal, and a negative status as refugee, can stimulate feelings of belonging and claims on Tibet: ‘no one wants to remain as a refugee and no one wants to see his or her country dominated by another country.’³² Such feelings arguably provide incentives for return, thereby influencing action preparedness in regard to behaviour directed at realizing this goal. However, Samten in this case, speaks about something else more than his refugee status for he displays an awareness that could make exiles even more prone to participate in contentious initiatives; political consciousness about the condition of his country. Accordingly, to more fully comprehend how a political dimension of Tibetanness is nurtured in Nepal, the analysis now turns to the question how a political dimension of Tibetanness is cultivated in exile by internal dynamics of exiled communities.

1.2 SCHOOLING AND HISTORY

The Tibetan schooling system and especially their history taught or orally transferred within Tibetan social circles, are important means through which exiles are imprinted with a notion of belonging to the collective category ‘Tibetan’ and a sense of political awareness. Education curricula of Tibet government run schools and monastery schools already represent Tibetan ‘identity work’³³: Tibetan grammar, religion and history are always present.³⁴ Further reinforcing Tibetan ‘identity work’ is the location of Tibetan schools; many are firmly placed inside and around the Tibetan spatial communities.³⁵ Children therefore stay within a ‘safe’ social space in which they are permeated by Tibetanness, for example through being educated by fellow Tibetans. What makes this last point crucial is the influence that comes from the continuous embeddedness of exiles in Tibetan social life; it not only exacerbates their aforementioned isolated position in the wider Nepalese society, but also enables fellow Tibetans to teach and direct identity work of ‘future’ Tibetans. Children are so brought up to be Tibetans, because ‘the child’s mind is like a clay; you gradually make a shape and when it

³¹ Group discussion with Tibetan youths of Tashi Palkhiel refugee settlement, in Pokhara region, Nepal. 2 May 2012.

³² Samten, son of an ex-Khamba fighter, member of the Regional Tibetan Youth Congress and Tibetan elderly home worker, Tashi Palkhiel Tibetan refugee settlement in Pokhara region, Nepal 6 May 2012.

³³ Identity work should be seen as individual or collective undertakings that give meaning to the self and others, thereby creating symbolic resources on which shared identities are grounded (Snow and McAdam 2000:46-47).

³⁴ Ngawang, daughter of ex-Khamba fighter, president of the Regional Tibetan Youth Congress and Tibetan elderly home worker, Jawalakhel Tibetan refugee settlement, in Lalitpur, Nepal. 11 May 2012.

³⁵ For example, Tashi Palkhiel, Tashi Ling in Pokhara region as well Jawalakhel in Kathmandu all have their own Tibetan elementary school located inside the settlement. One can further easily find Tibetan schools (elementary and kindergartens) in Bouddha area and in the parts of Lazimpat which surrounds Jawalakhel.

is that shape you cannot chance it.’³⁶ How this shaping of Tibetanness could become enacted is well illustrated by Tenzin who lives in Tashi Palkhiel, the largest Tibetan settlement in the Pokhara region, where he works as English and science teacher in the local Tibetan school:

I know that the [exile] kids living in Nepal do not really have some good idea about who we are and where we belong. I always try to give small ideas about the country where we belong and we are from. Sometimes I ask them ‘do you know where we are from?’ they say ‘we are from Tibet we are Tibetans’ then I ask ‘do you know what Tibet means?’ Then they want me to answer and I tell them: “Tibet is a country where our parents and forefathers lived and *that belongs to us.*” Then I tell the history; how the Chinese conquered our country and how the people right now in Tibet are suffering. I just want them to know that the people living in Tibet and the people here in exile are all brothers and sisters. These kinds of things, I always give my ideas about it.³⁷

Although this single example cannot be representative for all schools, we can take it as expression of a common phenomenon; many youths in Pokhara and Kathmandu corroborated the story of one of their counterparts in India who wrote that “the idea of youth is unabashedly political in the exile context. In Tibetan schools, before a child learns to spell ‘Apple’, he is given a new name: ‘Seed of the Future Tibet’” (Topden Tsering 2007a, *Tibetwrites*). Notice that Tsering sees this naming as political, hinting at a specific content or role attached to being a ‘seed of future Tibet’, a matter addressed in the following chapter.

Slight tendencies of ‘identity work’ and politicization present themselves in the content of Tibetan history in schools. When asked what they learned about Tibetan history in elementary school, surprisingly many youngsters would say that the Chinese invasion was hardly spoken of at that time; the emphasis was not on contemporary history, but specifically focussed on the mighty kings of yore. As Ngawang, president of the RTYC in Jawalakhel illustrates;

History was all about what all those kings have done. There is also in history that the king was very powerful: they could even occupy the whole world. At that time I

³⁶ Sonam, student, in Thamel, Kathmandu, Nepal. 17 May 2012.

³⁷ Tenzin, musician and teacher in the local Tibetan school, Tashi Palkhiel refugee settlement, in Pokhara region, Nepal. 5 May 2012.

thought it was rubbish, that are fairytales you know, if they were very powerful why didn't they... (changes subject).³⁸

Something similar is further exemplified by Samten, a member of the RTYC in his settlement, who tells about what he learned in school;

In the time of Songsten Gambo³⁹ Tibet was very powerful. Nepalese authorities of that time [the seventh century] tried to make nice and good relationships with Tibetan people, because they saw the power of Tibetan people and Tibet.⁴⁰

Such historical narratives implicitly convey a moral message not explicitly voiced: these Tibetan kings, although mighty and powerful, allegedly restrained from conquering their neighbours. Moreover, these emic stories represent what Denpa considers the core message of Tibetan history classes: 'they mainly said Tibet is not a part of China.'⁴¹ A topic especially relevant for claims on Tibet when one considers that this very subject of historical sovereignty is heavily contested by China which considers Tibet as a *historical* part of the People's Republic. In other words, narratives on history of ancient Tibetan kingdoms, inserted from the education system into the social memory of exiles, tend to portray a veiled but strong political statement; they attach legitimacy to claims on historical sovereignty, making the homeland even more deserved⁴² and desired. Accordingly, this kind of history likely increases motivational dynamics engrafted on return to, and regaining Tibet, dynamics which are considered important to movement participation. (Snow and McAdam 2000:62).

Further, orally transferred historical representations reinforce politicization of a Tibetan identity by means of a politically coloured meta-narrative of injustice focussed on the suffering of Tibetans during and after the Chinese invasion. In most cases, stories about the invasion start with something similar to what Ngawang expresses:

³⁸ Ngawang, daughter of ex-Khamba fighter, president of the Regional Tibetan Youth Congress and Tibetan elderly home worker, Jawalakhel Tibetan refugee settlement, in Lalitpur, Nepal. 11 May 2012.

³⁹ King Songsten Gampo, also Tride Songsten, ruling in the seventh century, is accredited with establishing Tibet as an international entity to reckon with when he conquered parts of Nepal and Burma while politically engaging in an alliance with the Chinese T'ang dynasty. He was to be venerated as incarnation of Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara (Von Brück 2004:11-13).

⁴⁰ Samten, son of an ex-Khamba fighter, sociology student and member of the Regional Tibetan Youth Congress (RTYC) Tashi Palkhiel. 6 May 2012. Pokhara, Nepal.

⁴¹ Denpa, NAN member, in Bouddha, Kathmandu, Nepal. 15 May 2012.

⁴² 'We are the *rightful* owners' of Tibet (emphasis added). Tenzin, president of the Regional Tibetan Youth Congress president and student, Tashi Ling Tibetan refugee settlement in Pokhara region, Nepal. 30 April 2012.

Tibetans are very dedicated to Buddhism. They are very humble and kind. That is how people can cheat them very easily. All this history is like that. China came in Tibet; they tried to help them, tried make a road. Actually they were not helping Tibet, they helping themselves to open a road for them to come inside [Tibet] more.⁴³

Some even recount how Tibetans were ‘welcoming’ the Chinese: ‘in 1949 we made the food for them and were all peaceful,’⁴⁴ said a youngster in Tashi Palkhiel settlement, after which the story continues in the style of what Tenzin was told by his grandfather;

He said that the Tibetan people were treated like cattle, the Chinese invaded Tibet and on the way all the Tibetans they caught (...) were enslaved and made to build roads, put to work. He told that the Chinese pierced their nose and tied them together with rope like cattle, buffalo’s. They used the people to make roads and tortured them: he told that they cut the reproduction organs of the male and the breasts of the female. I still remember. Recently, in the old age home, they [old Tibetans] were telling exactly the same.⁴⁵

Many of these accounts resemble “mythico-histories”, as they explicitly represent the past in fundamentally moral terms (Malkki 1995:54-55 in Yeh 2007:661) in which the innocence of native Tibetans contrasts the guiltiness of the invading Chinese. Many gave detailed descriptions of the atrocities poured out on ‘the Tibetan collective’, implying that this particular *topos*⁴⁶ of suffering is important. Some exile accounts even suggest that this topos could be very influential in making people feel attached to the Tibetan cause and even instigate action. Denpa recalls: ‘from [Tibetan] history we learned in school I got curious, and then I went to the library and got a book that was written by a prisoner inside Tibet. [He told] how they tortured people and from that I got a big influence.’⁴⁷ Similarly, Sonam places emphasis on his concern for the hardships of the people in Tibet: ‘I read news about Tibetan conditions and the way the Chinese government treats them (...) [then] I felt like I am in a

⁴³ Ngawang, daughter of ex-Khamba fighter, president of the Regional Tibetan Youth Congress and Tibetan elderly home worker, Jawalakhel Tibetan refugee settlement, in Lalitpur, Nepal. 11 May 2012.

⁴⁴ Group discussion with Tibetan youths of Tashi Palkhiel refugee settlement, in Pokhara region, Nepal. 2 May 2012.

⁴⁵ Tenzin, assistant-director carpet factory and master of ceremony, Jawalakhel Tibetan refugee settlement, in Lalitpur, Nepal. 16 and 19 April 2012.

⁴⁶ A *topos* finds its origin in classical Greek rhetoric, the art of discourse, and can be simplified used as a theme or topic.

⁴⁷ Denpa, NAN member, in Bouddha, Kathmandu, Nepal. 15 May 2012.

position that I want to do something.’⁴⁸ Both illustrate how awareness of the suffering of fellow Tibetans is stimulating a feeling of concern and engagement.

Moreover, suffering and social injustice seem connected to more profound action preparedness. Even Singay, ethnic Gurung⁴⁹ but despite that an ardent supporter of Free Tibet, stated while telling why he participated in protests:

I grew up in a Tibetan school and that affected me. I study all my years till my twelfth in a Tibetan school. There I heard all the things that the Chinese did in Tibet; that they took their country, killed many people. They did so much injustice there...

Singay later added that he became involved in Free-Tibet protests; ‘because I grew up with all Tibetan friends. My friends wanted to do something for Tibet because of the injustice.’⁵⁰

A topos of suffering not only provides virtuous and righteous motivation for action, but also endows moral legitimacy on the struggle by contrasting the Tibetan collective identity with that of the Chinese rulers. As Tenzin argues:

In college the senior people told me about the problems and brutalities that are happening in Tibet and because of that they are suffering a lot. (...) Tibetans might look inferior against the Chinese might, but in terms of morality and happiness we Tibetans are superior to the Chinese government.⁵¹

In short, a topos of suffering ethically shapes the nature of China’s regime and the Tibetans in Tibet, animating awareness and moral motivations for action. Historical narratives are thus social resources which legitimate and even drive political action; who does not see the just nature of the Tibetan cause and can abstain from political action or deny support for this resistance to a ‘brutal’ adversary? Narratives on the suffering of the collective so enclose powerful moral stimuli for participation in actions aimed at freeing Tibet. However, not only historical accounts give young exiles a symbolic resource on which ideas on collective identity, political awareness and action can be grounded; looking at a Tibetan cultural

⁴⁸ Sonam, student, in Thamel, Kathmandu, Nepal. 17 May 2012.

⁴⁹ The Gurungs are one of the many ethnic groups in Nepal. I was interviewing Singay because he was said to be Tibetan.

⁵⁰ Singay, (Gurung) student, in Pokhara, Nepal. 4 May 2012.

⁵¹ Tenzin, president of the Regional Tibetan Youth Congress president and student, Tashi Ling Tibetan refugee settlement in Pokhara region, Nepal. 30 April 2012.

identity⁵² in exile shows how contentious action seems to be an integral part of being a Tibetan. Therefore I will now discuss Buddhism and two specific ceremonies to illustrate why and how the struggle is inseparably part of a Tibetan cultural identity in exile.

1.3 CULTURE AND BUDDHISM

Communal traditions demonstrate how cultural traits foment Tibetan collectivism while, directly or indirectly, creating incentives for action through a cultural identity appropriated by exiles. This paragraph will start with Buddhism; the element exiles see as fundamental to their Tibetan identity and, as will be shown, collective unity. It will be argued that Buddhism is not so much a personal religion but a set of social and moral values, which stimulate behaviour aimed at elevating the hardship of others.

Exiles invariably stated that they were ‘born’ Buddhist, meaning that Buddhism is initially instilled from their family setting: ‘in Asian culture if your father is a Hindu then you are Hindu, if he is a Buddhist then you are a Buddhist.’⁵³ A similar opinion is echoed by Tenzin:

When a child is born, he is born to be a Buddhist if his family is Buddhist. In Tibet all the Tibetans follow Buddhism I think. We are Buddhist by nature and we learn to practice Buddhism by seeing our parents practice Buddhism. In the school as well we are taught by Buddhist monks. They told us about the importance of Buddhist rituals and all. So by birth we are Buddhist.⁵⁴

Noteworthy here is how Tenzin aligned his personal identity as Buddhist with that of the collective. Tibetan Buddhism, while essentially an idiosyncratic⁵⁵ commitment, is in his (and others’) eyes remarkably allocentric⁵⁶; a symbol of the unity of Tibetans by means of their shared identity as Buddhists. Being a (Tibetan) Buddhist can thus cautiously be translated as an element that merges collective identity with personal identity and as such foments a personal notion of belonging to a collective.

⁵² A cultural identity consists out of the “ideas, beliefs, and practices of a society; its features implicitly ascribed to all members of society” (Stryker 2000:22).

⁵³ Tenzin, NAN member, in Bouddha, Kathmandu, Nepal. 15 May 2012.

⁵⁴ Tenzin, musician and teacher in the local Tibetan school, Tashi Palkhiel refugee settlement, in Pokhara region, Nepal. 5 May 2012.

⁵⁵ The psychological level of collectivism (Deaux and Reid 2000:174).

⁵⁶ The cultural level of collectivism (Deaux and Reid 2000:174).

However, Buddhism in the exile context should not be seen as a religious conviction per se but as a tradition⁵⁷:

Six million Tibetans, they claim they are Buddhist by birth, just by birth. This doesn't mean that they are Buddhist practitioner. They follow the tradition but not the norms of Buddhist, the things Buddhism guides them to do.⁵⁸

This perspective again points at how Buddhism can bridge a divide between collective and individual, but leaves unclear what the practice or norms of this 'tradition' entail in the lay context. Ngawang's position, besides corroborating the general adherence of layman to Buddhism, sheds light on this essential element, for it is here where a direct link with contentious actions can be observed;

Actually, I am a born Buddhist; it is not like I am so much into religion. I know the people that go everyday to the temple, everyday around the stupa [shrine], but I am not this kind of person. I know one thing: *if you can help people that is the best*. But if you cannot help, at least do not hurt others. That is the main thought I think of Buddhism' (emphasis added).⁵⁹

This attitude, evoked by religion, is a commonly held one, as Tenzin explained, 'Buddhism makes the Tibetan People (...) more compassionate than others: they help each other when in need.'⁶⁰ A notion closely related to the conceptualization of non-violence, as will be addressed in chapter three.

In the exile communal context, Tibetan Buddhism is strongly allocentric because it establishes collective inclusion. It was sometimes said that 'Buddhism is not like other cultures [in] that you *have* to follow [Buddhism]' (emphasis added)⁶¹, but we should not mistake this for an uncontested fact. Other exiles attest the complications of conversion or rejection of that Buddhist tradition. Dalha for example told that it would lead to tension in the

⁵⁷ 'Our family where Buddhist, it's a Tibetan tradition.' Geshe, headmaster of a monastery school, in Bouddha, Kathmandu, Nepal. 14 May 2012.

⁵⁸ Sangye, headmaster of a monastery school, in Swayambunath, Kathmandu, Nepal. 23 May 2012.

⁵⁹ Ngawang, daughter of ex-Khamba fighter, president of the Regional Tibetan Youth Congress and Tibetan elderly home worker, Jawalakhel Tibetan refugee settlement, in Lalitpur, Nepal. 11 May 2012.

⁶⁰ Tenzin, musician and teacher in the local Tibetan school, Tashi Palkhiel refugee settlement, in Pokhara region, Nepal. 5 May 2012.

⁶¹ Denpa, NAN member, in Bouddha, Kathmandu, Nepal. 15 May 2012.

family⁶² when an exile child would become a Christian, while other exiles shared the opinion that ‘when you are no Buddhist, maybe you lack moral guiding.’⁶³ When taking these last instances together with the expressed need to ‘help’ one another, one can deduct that lay Buddhist ‘practice’ is connected to moral ethics and practices, which in turn robustly touch upon reasons for action in servitude to Tibetans in Tibet. This is illustrated more clearly in the words of the monk Rinchen:

Buddhism is very important but also effective: it makes people *support each other*. Other religions do not believe in reincarnation and therefore Buddhism is better: our activities take into account the next cycle of life and so *we work hard to do good deeds*.⁶⁴

These thoughts on Tibetan Buddhism suggest that its lay practice can be taken as a set of religiously grounded social-ethical conventions that could instil moral notions on desired and so legitimate action, similar to how Christian norms are echoed in certain contemporary ideas on action for example just-war theories⁶⁵ (Bartholomeusz 2002:4).

Obviously helping people and doing ‘good deeds’ can take many forms, but when taking into account that the topos of suffering is so ominously present in oral traditions of exile history, we can expect that Buddhist values, as voiced from an emic perspective, at least sanction if not stimulate engagement in actions aimed at elevating the hardship of fellow Tibetans in Tibet. Tibetan Buddhism as lay practice so resembles Hobsbawm’s definition of an ‘invented tradition’: “a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past” (Hobsbawm 2012:1). However, Buddhism is not the only tradition that hints at how the content of a Tibetan cultural identity in exile and behaviour in servitude to Tibetans in Tibet are in concord. Therefore I now turn to two traditions that are explicitly concerned with the collective memory on the origins of the exiles’ contemporary ‘refugee’ status, as well as the inception of contentious action in the cultural life of Tibetan exiles.

⁶² Dalha, former WTO associate and currently shop owner, Pokhara 29-04-2012.

⁶³ Dondup, president of the Regional Tibetan Youth Congress and Tibetan elderly home worker, Tashi Palkhiel refugee settlement, in Pokhara, Nepal. 28 April 2012

⁶⁴ Rinchen, chanting master in local monastery, Tashi Palkhiel Tibetan refugee settlement in Pokhara region, Nepal. 7 May 2012.

⁶⁵ Theories on how and when military action can be justified.

1.4 TRADITIONS OF RESISTANCE

Two real invented traditions more saliently show how an exile Tibetan cultural identity is gradually merging with past and contemporary contentious actions and how this inserts the struggle for a Free Tibet in the social memory of exiles. The most prominent of these traditions is Tibetan Uprising Day, observed on the tenth of March to commemorate a failed revolt against Chinese rule in 1959 in Tibet. The commemoration of Uprising Day, though not observed in public communal fashion in Nepal during the last years (because of political restrictions) still ‘works’ Tibetanness by its mere presence as ‘national’ holiday. Many Tibetans corroborated the position of Tenzin who asserted that ‘all Tibetan schools and organisations must know and perform the commemoration and the Uprising Day song [*Rise up!*] on the tenth of March so that the students know what they [the Chinese] have done to us.’⁶⁶ A song that literally beseeches “Rise up all patriotic people... Rise up!”⁶⁷

Although we cannot know what of the content taught children internalize, I interpret that it could have a profound effect since culture is as much making an individual as an individual is making that same culture. We could discern the possible effect of this ‘invented tradition’ by the text of its official song, *Rise Up!*⁶⁸ This song displays unambivalently the same topos of suffering present in Tibetan mythico-histories, so conferring certain values and norms of behaviour’, namely patriotism. As Yeh describes, national songs also play a central role in inscribing Tibetanness in the children’s psyche through emotional laden lyrics, and how the songs embody Tibet as “less a topographic destination than a moral destination for many exiles” (2007:661-662). Previous paragraphs on Tibetan history and lay adherence to Buddhism already illustrated how a moral plight to help fellow Tibetans in Tibet is coming forward from history (lessons) and religion, but not the emotional dimension which enforces this plight. As Yeh elaborates, during their Tibetan education years, the children are not only taught the ‘facts’ of Tibetan mythico-histories but also the correct emotions to feel: “when practicing the song, children in Tibetan schools are admonished, ‘No smiling! Look serious [literally show a black face]!” (Yeh 2007:661-662). The author also encountered this phenomenon when he met two children in their teen years, who told that they had ‘happy

⁶⁶ Tenzin, musician and teacher in the local Tibetan school, Tashi Palkhiel refugee settlement, in Pokhara region, Nepal. 5 May 2012.

⁶⁷ See Appendix: C.

⁶⁸ See Appendix: C.

days' like *Losar* (Tibetan New Year) and 'sad days' like Uprising Day.⁶⁹

Further, these children brought his attention to another sad day; a 'tradition' which even more than Uprising Day integrates the struggle for a Free Tibet strongly inside the cultural and emotional sphere of exiled life; a martyr commemoration called the *Pawo-Pamo* [lit. translated, Brave Man, Brave Female] 'ceremony'.

The Pawo-Pamo tradition is a young phenomenon, incepted through the nexus between Tibetan folklore stories and an act of contention on the 27 April, 1998. On that day, Thupten Ngodup, a former Tibetan guerrilla fighter, who set himself ablaze during a 'Hunger Strike Unto Death' organised by the Tibetan Youth Congress (TYC) in Delhi. Through his act of self-sacrifice, it was this man who after he died two days later, was referred to as the first contemporary Tibetan martyr with the 'ancient word'⁷⁰ or title *Pamo* (Tibetan Youth Congress 2012c, Tibetanyouthcongress).

This title is permeated by historically defined social meanings, which strikingly illustrate social prestige one acquires through dedication and sacrifices for the struggle, knowledge indispensable for the second chapter of this thesis. Historically it was generally used in Tibetan poems and religious chants⁷¹, more dominantly in stories about the mythical King Cesar of Ling, a beloved Tibetan epic hero appearing in folklore as the incarnation of a bodhisattva who was sent to vanquish the evil demons that gripped mankind. The social significance of the title lays in its semiotic value for it coalesces the self-immolator with mythico-history; participants are placed in a lineage of historical personas that fought 'for dharma [the natural order of things] against evil' thus appropriating a quality as 'protectors of religion and society' acting as 'natural stabilizers and law enforcers who protect the law of nature [i.e. dharma].'⁷² The title essential laurels the martyrs, for they become virtuous fighters whose acts 'balance instabilities of societies' through a 'fight against wrongs or evil' as in a 'titan [like] war between good and evil.'⁷³

The public happenings that occurred after Ngodup self-immolated were precursors to practices nowadays in the process of being institutionalised as the Pawo-Pamo tradition. After his dead Ngondup continued to live on in the collective memory of exiles, a memory

⁶⁹ Author's conversation with Dawa and Karma, elementary school kids, Tashi Palkhiel Tibetan refugee settlement in Pokhara region, Nepal. 28 April, 2012.

⁷⁰ Zigsa, NAN member, in Bouddha, Kathmandu, Nepal. 15 June 2012.

⁷¹ Authors consultation with a personal Tibetan friend named Lobsang, student in Tibetan Buddhism and lives in Shangri-La (Zhongdian), Yunnan province, China. 5 July 2012.

⁷² Author's consul with a personal Tibetan friend named Lobsang, student in Tibetan Buddhism and lives in Shangri-La (Zhongdian), Yunnan province, China. 5 July 2012.

⁷³ Author's consul with a personal Tibetan friend named Lobsang, student in Tibetan Buddhism and lives in Shangri-La (Zhongdian), Yunnan province, China. 5 July 2012.

materialized in a martyr statue in Dharamsala, while the Tibetan diaspora commemorates his day of passing (29 April, 1998) as ‘Martyr’s Day’ (Tibetan Youth Congress 2012c, Tibetanyouthcongress). Martyr’s Day was however rendered obsolete in recent years since exiles in Kathmandu felt compelled to honour the many Tibetans who began to sacrifice themselves in recent years.⁷⁴ A same development took place in Tashi Palkhiel, Tibetan refugee settlement in the Pokhara region, as Samten (one of its residents) tells us;

Before we did it (the ‘ceremony’) once in a year, three or four years back we did it once or twice in a year. This time the number of martyrs is highly increasing, that’s why if we got some news from Tibet or from the media, we organize that kind of ceremony for the martyrs, for the Tibetan people who gave up their life for the country. This time in a year we have four or five times that kind of ceremony, concerned with the martyrs and other matters.⁷⁵

However, one cannot call these practices ‘ceremonies’ for the reason that this custom is more like a tradition; instead of purely ritual performances it also transfers a set of social values through various practices, like an ‘invented tradition’. Illustrating this are the many forms this ‘ceremony’ took in Kathmandu, for example as candle light vigil⁷⁶ (Tib. *tsok*), mass prayers⁷⁷ or, like this year a mass gathering organized by the RTYC wherein a thousand fishes were freed in the Trisuli River near Kathmandu.⁷⁸

How these events are part in structuring social beliefs and values is demonstrated by the communal and intimate character the tradition takes in Tashi Palkhiel according to Samten:

We do different programs for the Pawo’s and Pamo’s, some are only praying and lighting butter lamp, others are interactive programs where opinions [about the self-immolations] are gathered and the positive and negative aspects discussed. Sometimes we give a life history of the person and what happened in the event.⁷⁹

⁷⁴ Denpa, NAN member, in Bouddha, Kathmandu, Nepal. 15 May 2012.

⁷⁵ Samten, son of an ex-Khamba fighter, member of the Regional Tibetan Youth Congress and Tibetan elderly home worker, Tashi Palkhiel Tibetan refugee settlement in Pokhara region, Nepal. 6 May 2012.

⁷⁶ See Appendix: B, 6 June 2011.

⁷⁷ See Appendix: B, 1 and 10 November, 2011.

⁷⁸ Ngawang, daughter of ex-Khamba fighter, president of the Regional Tibetan Youth Congress and Tibetan elderly home worker, Jawalakhel Tibetan refugee settlement, in Lalitpur, Nepal. 11 May 2012.

⁷⁹ Samten, son of an ex-Khamba fighter, member of the Regional Tibetan Youth Congress and Tibetan elderly home worker, Tashi Palkhiel Tibetan refugee settlement in Pokhara region, Nepal. 6 May 2012.

Onlookers could get the impression that these practices indicate the established nature of the tradition but cross referencing different perspectives of exiles demonstrates that it is influx and contested. Judging by conflicting notions about content, character and aim of the Pawo-Pamo tradition, it could be noticed that the tradition is far from homogenously practiced. For example Tenzin, who lives in Tashi Palkhiel just like Samten, asserted that the ceremony ‘happens once every year’⁸⁰ whereas Samten stated that it happened the past year ‘four or five times.’⁸¹ However, it remains unclear where this inconsistency stems from; Tenzin possibly saw some of the ceremonies not as specifically Pawo-Pamo ceremonies while Samten did (considering he also indicates that they are concerned with undefined ‘other matters’). Could the discord between their two perspectives perhaps suggest a different qualitative interpretation relating to the content or meaning of the ‘ceremonies’?

Moreover, looking at the character of the tradition from an emic perspective reveals more contradictions. As illustrated, the recent inception of the tradition into Tibetan exile culture life should be traced back to self-immolations in Tibet, in line with Geshe’s opinion, giving it a character of ‘a memorial’ or ‘very important new history’ that ‘needs to be remembered because they [the Pawo’s and Pamo’s] sacrificed themselves for other beings, Buddhist teachings and free Tibet.’⁸² As Tenzin told, it is ‘very important to memorize them and their deeds and also to give some knowledge about the martyrs, what they have done for the country.’⁸³ Although both talked about the same group, the Pawo’s and Pamo’s, it is a mistake to infer that they meant the same people; while Geshe is explicitly *only* referring to the contemporary martyrs, the self-immolators, Tenzin and many more exiles made clear that ‘not all the martyrs [i.e. Pawo’s and Pamo’s] are self-immolators. The people that died during the uprising day are also martyrs; *all* the people who died for the cause of Tibet are martyrs’ (emphasis added).⁸⁴ The question remains why Geshe is only referring to the self-immolators as Pawo’s and Pamo’s, but it is uncontested that they were the ones initially baptised as the

⁸⁰ Tenzin, musician and teacher in the local Tibetan school, Tashi Palkhiel refugee settlement, in Pokhara region, Nepal. 5 May 2012.

⁸¹ See footnote 75.

⁸² Geshe, headmaster of a monastery school, in Bouddha, Kathmandu, Nepal. 14 May 2012.

⁸³ Tenzin, musician and teacher in the local Tibetan school, Tashi Palkhiel refugee settlement, in Pokhara region, Nepal. 5 May 2012.

⁸⁴ ‘We are not exactly saying that the people who self-immolate are martyrs and so. All the people who died for the cause of Tibet are all martyrs. So I do not think it is going to hamper the kids. We are saying ‘those are the people who have died for our country or were killed by the Chinese’. They are not saying those self-immolators are particularly called martyrs, but they are also called martyrs later since they died for the country.’ Tenzin, musician and teacher in the local Tibetan school, Tashi Palkhiel refugee settlement, in Pokhara region, Nepal. 5 May 2012.

‘brave martyrs’. However, through the time in which the ceremony descended upon the cultural repertoire of exile communities, the term for some Tibetans came to include the guerrillas, as well as other people who died due to China’s occupation of the homeland.

Besides these inconsistencies in ideological coverage of who is to be called a Pawo or Pamo, another ambiguity can be pointed at to illustrate the contested meaning of the Pawo-Pamo tradition. On the one hand it is called ‘only a political theme’⁸⁵ while its actual form is a ‘celebration [which] relates to Dharma: we pray for them we offer butter lamp for them, for Pawo-Pamo.’⁸⁶ Accordingly, where to place the emphasis; is it a religious tradition or a political happening or can we say that it is a political happening performed within religious conventions?

Either way, the social goal of remembering the Pawo’s and Pamo’s is, according to some exiles, distinctly different from purely ‘commemorating’ this ‘new history’ and praying for the martyrs. The tradition could also be seen as ‘giving honour for what they have done’⁸⁷ or ‘salute their greatness’⁸⁸ and gives ‘a high status to the martyrs that sacrificed themselves for Tibet.’⁸⁹ Conversely, Denpa asserts that because ‘here [in Nepal] the people live a high standard live (...) they forget about the struggle and community.’ He thus sees the ceremonies as ‘a good example [for these people] because they see that the people have given their life for the struggle.’⁹⁰ Other perspectives suggest that the Pawo-Pamo tradition, besides being commemorative, also functions as a conditioning mechanism; various exiles stated that it should remind people of their ongoing struggle for a Free Tibet (a point elaborated on in the second chapter). A tendency further expressed by the ‘visual’ and thus psychological presence of the Pawo’s and Pamo’s in the daily lives of exiles in the form of posters hanging in many communities in Nepal as well as in India.

Fixed, public and scripted happenings, but also their constant presence in the spatial communities by means of big posters with explicit depictions of their burning or scarred bodies could signal that the martyrs not only become exemplary models for resistance but also

⁸⁵ Rinchen, chanting master in local monastery, Tashi Palkhiel Tibetan refugee settlement in Pokhara region, Nepal. 7 May 2012.

⁸⁶ Geshe, headmaster of a monastery school, in Bouddha, Kathmandu, Nepal. 14 May 2012.

⁸⁷ Ngawang, daughter of ex-Khamba fighter, president of the Regional Tibetan Youth Congress and Tibetan elderly home worker, Jawalakhel Tibetan refugee settlement, in Lalitpur, Nepal. 11 May 2012.

⁸⁸ Samten, son of an ex-Khamba fighter, member of the Regional Tibetan Youth Congress and Tibetan elderly home worker, Tashi Palkhiel Tibetan refugee settlement in Pokhara region, Nepal. 1 May 2012.

⁸⁹ Rinchen, chanting master in local monastery, Tashi Palkhiel Tibetan refugee settlement in Pokhara region, Nepal. 7 May 2012.

⁹⁰ Denpa, NAN member, in Bouddha, Kathmandu, Nepal. 15 May 2012.

that their specific tactic of self-immolation is not rejected.⁹¹ The Pawo-Pamo tradition even seems to encourage and instigate this kind of action. Although Ngawang has the opinion that ‘it is not like a message to other people to do something [like that]’ one could also think as Sonam;

They [exiles] see the pictures of the monk burning *every day*, then they get that feeling, you know; ‘I should do something.’ Subconsciously then you have that thing in your mind that you should do that too, why not? Then the person becomes convinced that they should do it. You have that thing which is triggered in your mind that makes you do things that you feel are good. A person’s environment is somehow related to what one thinks. If people see these images constantly, or if they hear about self-immolation constantly, gradually they begin to accept that fact that it is good. And later on they say it is good, why not? We are fighting for the freedom of Tibet and we should do something.⁹²

Illustrating that martyrs are indeed made to be role models and that commemorations and posters partly function as instigators of action is even more pronounced by Samten;

In my thoughts it will give positive impact to Tibetan youngsters and it will also give information [about] what is going on inside Tibet to tourist and other visitors who visit our settlement. Negative [impact] may happen if they think they are great persons, they are hero, they have given their life, they have sacrificed their life that is great; I think [by] myself ‘I also do like this thing’. This kind of thinking may arise among the Tibetan youngsters. But if they think positive; ‘good that is great thing they have given their life, if they can give up their life, then I should also do something for my country.’ Though I cannot give my life, I should do something else for my country because they are also Tibetan people, they are also sons and daughters of Tibet. That is not only their responsibility, it is also my responsibility. So I also need to do something for my society and my country. This is a positive impact. I think by hanging that kind pamphlets and pictures, it will give positive impact to Tibetan

⁹¹ The author witnessed for himself the more than one square meter posters in Tashi Palkhiel (Appendix: E) while interviewees reported that this was also the case in Swayambunath and Bouddha areas, and settlements in India. Further, exiles make a custom of displaying big posters with little photo portraits of the self-immolators during commemorations, or Pawo Pamo commemorations, in Lalitpur and Bouddha during the past years (See Appendix: B, 1 November, 2011 and 10 November, 2011).

⁹² Sonam, student, in Thamel, Kathmandu, Nepal. 17 May 2012.

youngsters and the members of the Tibetan community.⁹³

That the Pawo-Pamo tradition facilitates incentives for ‘doing something’ is further corroborated by the way in which the Pawo-Pamo song explicitly calls for political action. As Kuchen, a youngster living in Tashi Palkhiel, explained while helping the author to translate the Pawo-Pamo song from Tibetan to English, the song implicitly indicates that ‘we also have to do like them’⁹⁴, i.e. in the words of the song; ‘face the challenges and organize programs against the Chinese occupation.’⁹⁵

Concluding, though causality between the Pawo-Pamo tradition and possible contentious behaviour it brings forward is hard to infer or measure from individual accounts, we should take these opinions as grounded in their social reality and the tradition as indeed affecting at least some exiles in their feeling towards action for the cause. This influence can already be seen in the way Zigsa, just like Samten, exhibited an certain dedication while saying; ‘sometimes I feel bad because I feel that I cannot *contribute* so much as they [the self-immolators], *I want to do more* but I cannot.’⁹⁶ Voiced by a man in his twenties, who has seen the inception and rise of the tradition, indicates that the deeds of the martyrs are examples for him, although he felt that he could not commit self-immolation himself. However, it remains to be seen how this tradition shapes young children, like the teenagers Dawa and Karma, who are growing up among posters of burning people who are additionally honoured for their sacrifice and dedication to the homeland, although not everybody agrees with the modus. Will they, already in full veneration labelling the self-immolators their ‘hero’s’⁹⁷, perhaps see them as role-models and later follow in their footsteps?

⁹³ Samten, son of an ex-Khamba fighter, member of the Regional Tibetan Youth Congress and Tibetan elderly home worker, Tashi Palkhiel Tibetan refugee settlement in Pokhara region, Nepal. 6 May 2012.

⁹⁴ Kuchen, working in a local grocery store, Tashi Palkhiel refugee settlement, in Pokhara region, Nepal. 2 May 2012.

⁹⁵ See Appendix: D.

⁹⁶ Zigsa, NAN member, in Bouddha, Kathmandu, Nepal. 15 June 2012.

⁹⁷ Author’s conversation with Dawa and Karma, elementary school kids, Tashi Palkhiel Tibetan refugee settlement in Pokhara region, Nepal. 28 April, 2012.

CHAPTER 2

2.1 INAUTENTIC TIBETANNESS IN EXILE

Many young exiles struggle with the authenticity⁹⁸ of their Tibetanness as their self-concept has incorporated Nepalese characteristics despite the thorough way in which Tibetanness is embedded through the structural factors described above. This was already noticeable in the manner one exile⁹⁹ already stated how he conceived to have no identity at all, although this could be interpreted as referring to a *tangible* identity represented in official documents like passports. However the problem becomes clearer when looking at Tibetanness situated in Nepal along Brewer's theory of optimal distinctiveness. A theory which postulates (when applied to this case) that identification as Tibetan derives from two universal human motives, namely at one side a need for *inclusion* and *assimilation* while on the other a need for *differentiation* from others (Brewer and Silver 2000:155).

Notions of exiles on inclusion and assimilation in their national identity *initially* show an unambiguous self-concept as belonging to the social category 'Tibetan'. In descriptions on my question what constitutes being Tibetan, exiles invariably recited an ethnic perspective, reified through what could be called 'structural primordial symbols.'¹⁰⁰ Contemplating on these self-perceptions with the exiles showed that most of them not only based their social identity as Tibetan on their parental blood but also in their 'born' status as a Buddhist; 'by blood and my religion I must say that I am a Tibetan.'¹⁰¹ Although one could hardly expect nothing less from a nun, this viewpoint also voiced by many lay people, indicates that personal adherence to Buddhism (as described in chapter one), is a key mechanism in inclusion in the collective identity. Self-identification as 'Buddhist' thus enables a feeling of belonging to the collective category Tibetan.¹⁰² A tendency further enhanced by the cultural repertoire of exiles since 'most Tibetan traditions are related and very similar to Buddhism', consequently called 'Tibetan Buddhist traditions.'¹⁰³

⁹⁸ Authenticity here refers to "individual strivings for meaning, coherence, and significance. It deals with assessment of what is real and what is false with regard to oneself and suggests that individuals are motivated to experience themselves as meaningful and real. It also implies that individuals strive for congruence between their self-values and their behaviour; since lack of congruence leads to feelings of inauthenticity" (Gecas 2000:101)

⁹⁹ See Chapter 1 footnote 26.

¹⁰⁰ These 'structural primordial symbols' are defined here as a shared ancestry, history and language as well as communal cultural practices and customs.

¹⁰¹ Muskan, nun, in Lalitpur, Nepal. 23 April 2012.

¹⁰² See Chapter 1 footnote 53 and 57.

¹⁰³ Geshe, headmaster of a monastery school, in Bouddha, Kathmandu, Nepal. 14 May 2012.

However, blood and religion as the two dominant existential dimensions of Tibetanness, reified through structural primordial symbols, appeared insufficient to establish a robust personal feeling of Tibetanness, or personal Tibetan identity. Although many exiles substantiated their collective identity in collective symbols and shared characteristics, quite a few of the youngsters participating in this study reiterated Tenzin's argument which conveyed a notion that suggests slight feelings of inapt or unauthentic Tibetanness;

I speak Tibetan¹⁰⁴ and I live the way the Tibetans live because I follow Tibetan culture and traditions, so I think I am a Tibetan. *Not like the Tibetans in the past* but I still eat Tibetan food in my home: like a special salted tea in the morning and 'Pak'¹⁰⁵; we mix it with Tibetan tea. That was the main Tibetan food we had in Tibet. And being a Tibetan I am a Buddhist I respect His Holiness the Dalai Lama and all the Buddhist Gods, I go to the Tibetan Monasteries (emphasis added).¹⁰⁶

Speaking is the way in which he characterizes himself as different from 'Tibetans of the past'; likely a logical interfered dialectic due to the propensities of change driven by the passing of time, but possibly something else. Could it have been a feeling of 'incomplete' Tibetanness, based on a consciously or subconsciously experience of discrepancy (as he saw it) between 'authentic' Tibetans of the past vis à vis that of his own Tibetanness? This would be rather strange for the reason that a primordial notion of Tibetanness inherently entails continuity with the past. Although this comes not directly forward in Tenzin's words, to put it simply, how can the blood of contemporary Tibetans be 'felt' as different from that of historical Tibetans?

The problem which could result in an inconclusive feeling of primordial Tibetanness lies in the *cultural* assimilation of Tibetans in Nepal, thus lack of distinction in one of the primordial symbols. This figures veiled though clear in the manner second, third and fourth generation exiles¹⁰⁷ talked about their Tibetan identity. For example, Tenzin while born and raised in Tashi Palkhiel (the biggest Tibetan settlement in the Pokhara region), still exhibited some hesitation, as well as major structural complication in regard to his Tibetanness, when

¹⁰⁴ With 'Tibetan' he means a version of the Lhasa dialect which has become the common language in exile. It is taught through the Tibetan education system and is now the standardized language of the diaspora (Yeh 2007:656).

¹⁰⁵ 'Pak' is made through mixing cheese, tea, or some other binding agent with *Tsampa* (i.e. roasted barley flower and the Tibetan national food) from which little round balls are made. It is often eaten with tea.

¹⁰⁶ Tenzin, assistant-director carpet factory and master of ceremony, Jawalakhel Tibetan refugee settlement, in Lalitpur, Nepal. 16 and 19 April 2012.

¹⁰⁷ These exile-born generations comprised the lion's share of the participants in this study.

asked to describe his identity:

*I want to say I am Tibetan ... but then we have been living and we have been born in Nepal. So yes some our Nepalese friends call us Nepalese as well: as they say 'you guys have been born here, you are Nepalese'. But for myself I am a Tibetan, a pure Tibetan (emphasis added).*¹⁰⁸

The regret I heard in his first words, while speaking to him, possibly indicated the problematic nature of his feeling of Tibetanness; he 'wants' to call himself Tibetan, hinting at a sense of non-entitlement due to a lack of distinction from Nepali. However, this alleged feeling of inauthenticity seems to be suppressed through later on accentuating (more to himself than to the author) his 'pure' Tibetanness.

Not only Tenzin evinced this ambiguous description of his Tibetanness. I could describe in length the many examples which illustrate how some exiles can inconclusively rely on primordial resources to construct a distinct Tibetan identity; some cannot read and speak Tibetan¹⁰⁹ or are physically¹¹⁰ and culturally¹¹¹ hard to distinct from Nepalese. Instead I turn to a recent event recalled by Jangbu who, together with Samten and other attending exile youths, was asked during a 'non-violence workshop'¹¹² in Dharamsala to describe why they were Tibetans:

¹⁰⁸ Tenzin, musician and teacher in the local Tibetan school, Tashi Palkhiel refugee settlement, in Pokhara region, Nepal. 5 May 2012.

¹⁰⁹ 'I met a lot of youngster around twenty [years old] and they had really trouble with reading and some could not speak Tibetan.' Sangye, headmaster of a monastery school, in Swayambunath, Kathmandu, Nepal. 23 May 2012. This was also observed by the author when he was trying to find a Tibetan youngster in Tashi Palkhiel who could help him translate the Pawo-Pamo song from Tibetan script (as presented in a schoolbook) to English.

¹¹⁰ 'I think Tibetans after the last fifty years; maybe the way we look is very similar to the Nepalese. Now by looking at the facial features you cannot say he is Tibetan. I think the language is most important; the language differentiates Tibetan from Nepali. If you go the lakeside you might see some Nepali who look like Tibetan, there are some Tibetans in our camp who just look like Nepali. By looking at the face it is very difficult. It is our language and the dress.' Tenzin, president of the Regional Tibetan Youth Congress president and student, Tashi Ling Tibetan refugee settlement in Pokhara region, Nepal. 30 April 2012.

¹¹¹ 'I am a Tibetan boy but I know Nepali culture and civilization more than [that of] my [own] country. Because I was born here, I was grown up in Nepal society; I did my schooling and college all in Nepal, that's why I am also being socialized with Nepali culture.' Samten, son of an ex-Khamba fighter, member of the Regional Tibetan Youth Congress and Tibetan elderly home worker, Tashi Palkhiel Tibetan refugee settlement in Pokhara region, Nepal. 6 May 2012.

¹¹² Jangbu as well as Samten and Ngawang told me that all exile youths are given the opportunity to once in their lifetime attend 'leadership' training in Dharamshala, provided by the Tibetan youth congress and free of charge. Other trainings are organised as well like this one non-violence workshop in which the participants int. al. talked with Carole McGranahan about Tibetan history (she did extensive research in regard to the oral history of the Tibetan guerrilla period). Further, classes in non-violent action were given by a member of Otpor, a Serbian (youth) movement which contributed to the downfall of the Milosevic regime through non-violence resistance in 2000.

Some said that it came from our history and ancestry or parents and blood, others said Buddhism, or because we speak Tibetan and follow Tibetan culture and eat *thukpa*.¹¹³ Many things [were said], but we did not find a *clear* answer to this question (emphasis added).¹¹⁴

Words partially resembling Tsering's who, writing about his life in Kathmandu, tells:

“My Tibetan friends and I often talk about the situation [of Tibetans in Nepal] and we question ourselves about where exactly is it that we belong? We were born here, have lived our entire lives, the disconnect we feel is palpable” (Tsering Dolker 2011, Tibetwrites).

These instances suggest that exiles search for more tangible markers of their Tibetan identity, although cultural resources are important for reifying their primordial notion of Tibetanness. Consequently, one can hypothesize from the last sentence of Jangbu and the problematic feeling of ‘belonging’ Tsering talks about, that self-views on being Tibetan held by various exiles seem to be unsatisfactory reassured or proved by the structural primordial symbols present in their daily life. This is puzzling since you *feel* Tibetan or you do not: why would a green book¹¹⁵, or for that matter eating thukpa from a premade package¹¹⁶, make you feel more Tibetan? Of course, day to day encounters with these symbols reify the mental constructs through which people experience their identity, but presumably all answers are ‘clear’ when you existentially perceive that you *are* Tibetan; reification becomes mere formality when one believes.

Taking these observations further, the hypothesis of this thesis poses that the primordial symbolic resources that reify Tibetanness could be waning in power for the exile born generations. Whether this dynamic inhabits a cognitive dissonance in regard to ‘being

¹¹³ Tibetans told me that *thukpa*, a kind of noodle, is typically Tibetan food, remarkably even if it comes from a premade package. However, Nepalese I spoke to discarded this and were convinced that it was Nepalese food. *Momo*, a steamed or fried dumpling, enjoys the same contested status, as Tenzin a student of history told: ‘Momo are traditional Tibetan food, but now you find momo in Nepali restaurant. Some historians try to claim that momo was from Nepal, which is not true; it is Tibetan food.’ Tenzin, president of the Regional Tibetan Youth Congress president and student, Tashi Ling Tibetan refugee settlement in Pokhara region, Nepal. 30 April 2012.

¹¹⁴ Jangbu, NAN member, in Bouddha, Kathmandu, Nepal. 25 June 2012.

¹¹⁵ Question: ‘If you could become a Nepali would you do this?’

Answer: ‘If I would have to tear my green book I do not accept Nepali citizenship. The *green book means that we are still Tibetan*’ (emphasis added). Dalha, former WTO associate and currently shop owner, Pokhara. Nepal. 29 April, 2012.

¹¹⁶ This was observed multiple times by the author.

Tibetan' is left open for discussion but it seems like it; more than a few study participants seemed to extract a personal feeling of their collective identity¹¹⁷ by adding cognitions to the primordial content of being Tibetan. In other words, exiles displayed that adherence to, and participation in the traditional Tibetan cultural repertoire was not sufficient to determine membership of the Tibetan collective. Instead, exiles reified their collective identity by ascribing to Tibetans specific characteristics that were not based on primordial symbols. What these cognitions are and how these possibly relate to contentious initiatives makes it now necessary to turn to mechanisms through which exiles distinct themselves from Nepali and allegedly enable the reinstatement of a feeling of 'pure' and 'real' Tibetanness.

2.2 HOW TO BE A TIBETAN: THE DEONTOLOGICAL DUTY OF EXILES

Exiles warrant their inclusion in the Tibetan community and a salient feeling of their Tibetanness through two cognitions that fall outside the sphere of symbolic primordial symbols that reify Tibetanness. Specific cognitions added to the cultural repertoire on which ethnic or primordial notions on being Tibetan are based, were a pain caused by their status as refugee and a sense of duty or responsibility. These two cognitions seem instrumental in making salient a belonging to the Tibetan collective through subjugating the lack of cultural and physical distinction from Nepali. Further, following Sheldon Stryker's identity theory which posits that an identity inhabits behaviour through certain roles connected to that identity (2000:27), we can see how membership of the category Tibetan is established through commitment to, for now undefined, 'action' in servitude to 'the community'. It will be argued below that the appropriation of the collective Tibetan identity is channelled by the roles exiles attach to their identity as refugee: behaviours can reaffirm the feeling of being Tibetan through verification of this particular identity in action (Stryker 2000:34). Accordingly it becomes clear that Tibetanness is directly constructed through *enactment* of this identity by means of emotional and behavioural 'identity work' strongly connected to the struggle. This will provide insight in how contentious activities of exiles in Nepal could be seen as integral and coming forward from 'being' Tibetan.

The first cognition used by some exiles to authenticate their Tibetanness is based on feelings derived from the refugee status in conjunction with the topos of suffering (described earlier). Illustrating that being a refugee is not only an objective legal condition but has

¹¹⁷ Collective identity is here referred to as shared cognitions about characteristics and activities constituting membership of the respective social entity (based on Johnston *et al.* 1994:5 in Stryker 2000:23).

become an existential dimension in ‘being’ Tibetan, is demonstrated by the prominent presence of collectively ‘felt’ emotions in narratives on being a refugee: ‘maybe Tibetans look happy but it doesn’t mean that they are very happy: we are refugee, *what we feel inside* we sometimes cannot express. What we feel inside, other people do not know’ (emphasis added).¹¹⁸ Explaining that this collective “mental pain” (TRWO 2011:15) assimilates exiles in the Tibetan community, can be read in the words of Kuchen: ‘we Tibetans only have a body without a spirit. The *real* Tibetan has a spirit that tells you the pain of what is happening in Tibet. *To be a Tibetan* you need that pain inside’ (emphasis added).¹¹⁹ Some exiles thus explain that a self-view as Tibetan, comes with a degree of emotional attachment or ‘affective commitment’ (Stryker 2000:28); feelings enabling authentication of, or at least strengthen a personal dimension of Tibetanness while the lack of individual pain negatively impacts the realness of this social identity.

The profound instrumental value of affective commitment as exclusion and inclusion mechanism in the virtual community of Tibetans is even more pronounced by Tenzin:

I see so many Tibetan foreigners coming here from Lhasa in a tourist bus. (...) Then they come here in our refugee settlement. I have seen a lady *with tears in her eyes*. It shows that they are Tibetans, *real Tibetans*. Those people who are working under the Chinese, they are Tibetan but I think they are all brainwashed. They are Tibetans but they are acting like Chinese. (...) You can see so many Tibetan young guys who are the police of Chinese. They are Tibetans but they are beating the Tibetans. They are Tibetan physically, but they *do not have Tibetan in themselves*.

All the Tibetans living in exile, *they know and feel the pain of the Tibetan people living in Tibet*. We feel the pain they are going through. *They may not show in front of others but I am sure that they feel the pain, even when the people do not want to take part in protest I know that inside that they are part of it* (emphasis added).¹²⁰

Two very interesting points emerge from what he tells. First, he places ‘realness’ of Tibetans beyond the spheres of the structural primordial symbols and physical constitution (having Tibetan blood) but inside the existential world of the individual; bodily feelings, specifically

¹¹⁸ Ngawang, daughter of ex-Khamba fighter, president of the Regional Tibetan Youth Congress and Tibetan elderly home worker, Jawalakhel Tibetan refugee settlement, in Lalitpur, Nepal. 11 May 2012.

¹¹⁹ Kuchen, working in a local grocery store, Tashi Palkhiel refugee settlement, in Pokhara region, Nepal. 2 May 2012.

¹²⁰ Tenzin, musician and teacher in the local Tibetan school, Tashi Palkhiel refugee settlement, in Pokhara region, Nepal. 5 May 2012.

that feeling of pain. By attaching an cognition of pain to his social condition as refugee, also done by others¹²¹, provides means through which his personal identity ‘extends’ (Snow and McAdam 2000:50) to include characteristic ascribed to Tibetans in Tibet; a perpetual suffering under the Chinese occupation. A metaphorical pain, shared by exiles and Tibetans in Tibet, seems to create “shared distinctiveness”¹²² from Nepali peoples, while it also reaffirms group membership. This is amply illustrated when Tenzin almost excommunicates the Tibetans who cooperate with the Chinese; ‘they do not have Tibetan *in themselves*.’ In his eyes these ‘Tibetans’ not share, but instead become the inflictors of this same pain, almost like traitors to their identity.

A second observation, illustrating how Tibetanness is reified through action, can be discerned from the last section of Tenzin’s words. One could interpret that he conceptualizes a causal link between emotions and acting them out (i.e. taking part) in protest; first he talks about feeling that pain, but then makes a sudden, but for him very concrete conceptualized switch to protests when talking about showing that pain. He puts ‘not showing’ in direct relation, not to *physically* taking part in protests, so implying that the pain is expressed by, or symbolized in protesting. Secondly, the later part of Tenzin’s statement implies that even though exiles who do not participate in protest are still part of it, apparently through exactly this dimension where the pain is felt; namely ‘inside’. They are thus through this mental pain still committed to the act of protesting; inside they are part of it.

A causal jump from a feeling of pain to action, attested in his emic perspective, is initially unclear, but becomes delineated when synthesized with a role other exiles attach to being an exiled Tibetan. Conspicuously many Tibetans saw their displaced condition and the relative freedom it provides in connection to a responsibility to the struggle for the Tibetan community:

¹²¹ ‘Feeling a pain is really important when you are Tibetan [in exile].’ Karma, journalist, Jawalakhel Tibetan refugee settlement, in Lalitpur, Nepal. 22 June 2012.

Exiles are ‘suffering of not being able to return to our home country’. Tenzin, president of the Regional Tibetan Youth Congress president and student, Tashi Ling Tibetan refugee settlement in Pokhara region, Nepal. 30 April 2012.

Further I interpret the feeling of ‘being an orphan’, something agreed upon by many youngsters in the discussion, also as a feeling of pain or incompleteness. Group discussion with Tibetan youths of Tashi Palkhiel refugee settlement, in Pokhara region, Nepal. 2 May 2012.

One can see the expression of pain even in written sources; for example in the earlier quoted Memorandum [sic] which talks about the “mental pain of exile” (TRWO 2011:15) and in the words of Sungshik Kyi, who writes “This pain of the wounded heart cannot be endured anymore”. Or Tsewang who says “I realized that the pain I had held in my heart all this time and my hatred of the Chinese government was *shared by everyone around me*” (emphasis added) (Rebecca Novick 2009, Huffingtonpost).

¹²² A group property which likely engages “high levels of attachment and identification with a given social group or category” (Brewer and Silver 2000:155).

*As being a Tibetan I have a responsibility. We have lots of freedom compared to the people inside of Tibet. They are facing lots of problem and we are here enjoying an ordinary life. I've read many books and seen many movies about inside Tibet and what the Chinese do to them. We have to keep the hope alive of the people that live hell inside Tibet. But we are here enjoying. To keep their hope alive we are here.*¹²³

Although these words come from an active member of an underground protest circle in Kathmandu called the New Age Network, we can take them as pointing at a core emic notion on being a Tibetan in exile; his feeling of 'responsibility' was echoed, literally or slightly differently, by many others. Tenzin, quoted earlier¹²⁴ when indicting what made him Tibetan, not only gave the structural primordial resources on which he based his Tibetan identity but also asserted that:

Being a Tibetan is not only having a Tibetan name, *it is how you fulfil the duties of being a Tibetan* (...) During all the Tibetan ceremonies we celebrate over here, I am the MC [Master of Ceremony]; every time the Tibetan ceremony is over here at our camp I organize it. So I think I am Tibetan and I fulfil my Tibetan Duty.¹²⁵

Also others attested, in one way or another, feelings of duty:

I should be connected [to the struggle for Tibet] because I am born from Tibetan parents who really support it very much according to what they explained. (...) So I should be part of the Tibetan struggle but I have never been able to be part of the Tibetan struggle in terms of participating in a protest or raising your voice against something, only in terms of *keeping Tibetan tradition alive*. By studying and reading and sharing our knowledge with others I may have been able to become part of the struggle. But physically I have never been able to be part of the struggle.¹²⁶

We Tibetans are born as a refugee and each of the Tibetans has a responsibility. It doesn't mean you have to go protest, whatever you do to benefit the community; I do

¹²³ Denpa, NAN member, in Bouddha, Kathmandu, Nepal. 15 May 2012.

¹²⁴ See chapter 2 footnote 106.

¹²⁵ Tenzin, assistant-director carpet factory and master of ceremony, Jawalakhel Tibetan refugee settlement, in Lalitpur, Nepal. 16 and 19 April 2012.

¹²⁶ Sangye, headmaster of a monastery school, in Swayambunath, Kathmandu, Nepal. 23 May 2012.

that in social service.¹²⁷

Every citizen of every country, they should be responsible to their country; independence and other matters of the country. As a Tibetan youth, we are also responsible for our country. We need to gain knowledge about the political, social cultural, economic and other aspects of our country.¹²⁸

From these positions we can observe two things. First that, for these exiles, being an exiled Tibetan is closely linked to deontological demands (i.e. demands of an ethical duty (Sen 2009:19-22)). Therefore it seems that being an exile endows upon the diaspora a “relational obligation” (Sen 2009:214) entailing that the individual as part of social entity needs to be willing to do something altruistic along his or her capabilities. Secondly *what* one must be willing to do, although in Ngawang’s words visibly closely related to protest, is not necessarily participation in contentious activities; she enacts her responsibility by working in social service. A clear link between that ‘duty’ or ‘responsibility’ and protest can be inferred from the words of Sangye; though he places his participation in the struggle not on physically taking part in protest, he feels still part of the struggle as wider undertaking by means of keeping Tibetan culture and identity alive which is being destroyed in the Chinese ‘cultural genocide’. Instead, Samten strongly connects this responsibility to gaining and spreading knowledge about almost all possible aspects of Tibet, but particularly to independence. That these actions could be instrumental in the appropriation of a self-view as Tibetan is well illustrating by Kuchen who was the first exile to say this to me when he amended my question ‘what makes a Tibetan’ by saying: ‘the question is not what *makes* a Tibetan, but *how to be* a Tibetan.’¹²⁹ When asking other exiles what this meant they invariably brought up a duty or responsibility, making the circle complete.

Concluding, the question becomes how should we interpret these feelings of responsibility and duty and what do they say about actions taken accordingly? Their importance is clear but only comprehensible when knowing where these feelings come from and what actions they bring forward. Thus, to find an answer to the question how to be a Tibetan, we must understand what is expected of exiles as Tibetans.

¹²⁷ Ngawang, daughter of ex-Khamba fighter, president of the Regional Tibetan Youth Congress and Tibetan elderly home worker, Jawalakhel Tibetan refugee settlement, in Lalitpur, Nepal. 11 May 2012.

¹²⁸ Samten, son of an ex-Khamba fighter, member of the Regional Tibetan Youth Congress and Tibetan elderly home worker, Tashi Palkhiel Tibetan refugee settlement in Pokhara region, Nepal. 6 May 2012.

¹²⁹ Kuchen, working in a local grocery store, Tashi Palkhiel refugee settlement, in Pokhara region, Nepal. 2 May 2012.

2.3 THE EXISTENCE OF THE STRUGGLE IN SITU

“A way has to be found out, particularly, to save Tibetan culture, environment and national identity from the urgent situation of being completely destroyed inside Tibet”

(Department of Information & International Relations 2011:5)

The centrality of saving Tibetan culture and national identity in the struggle of the diaspora has, for some, made the struggle itself existentially part of being a Tibetan exile. As argued in chapter one, exiles have already incorporated past and present contentious action in their cultural identity through the cultural repertoire practiced in exile. However we can also see hints of integration of the struggle beyond the social, into the personal identities of exiles, by means of a convention present in exile social life. Scrutinizing emic perspectives on what makes an exile a ‘Tibetan’ will illustrate how communal cultural values and beliefs propel contentious actions. Accordingly, the manner deontological demands are enacted by exiles suggests that the collective struggle, already impacting features of Tibetanness in exile through cultural practices, becomes an individual struggle for it seems to be inscribed *psychologically* in the minds of some exiles.

2.3.1 THE CONVENTION TO STRUGGLE: AN INDIVIDUAL DIMENSION OF COLLECTIVE ACTION

Searching for the possible source of these deontological demands directs attention at a social value held by many study participants. The Tibetan Governmental education system as well as monastery schools, both extensions of the family when it comes to raising children, are central mechanisms through which exile are imprinted with a sense of heritage and duty when they are labelled ‘future seeds of Tibet’. This dynamic is however also present outside these institutions in the form of what could be called a social convention to partake in the struggle. Especially many older exiles, when asked about their opinion on protests, placed this convention as ‘duty’ and ‘responsibility’ in particular upon the younger generations. Therefore it is not strange that Samten said ‘as a Tibetan youth, *we* are also responsible for our country’ (emphasis added)¹³⁰, implying that it is as much a personal undertaking as in a

¹³⁰ Samten, son of an ex-Khamba fighter, member of the Regional Tibetan Youth Congress and Tibetan elderly home worker, Tashi Palkhiel Tibetan refugee settlement in Pokhara region, Nepal. 27 and 28 April and 6 May 2012.

sense the obligation of his generation. He could have said this from individual convictions but others corroborated his point:

‘Demonstrations, protesting, raising your demands, raising your voice is very important, especially among the college students and the youngsters. *The youngsters are the future of Tibet* actually. *They* have to take *that* responsibility (emphasis added).¹³¹

From this perspective we can see that especially future continuation of these respective activities is explicitly assigned to the new generations. We can take his position as representing others, like Dalha’s, who displayed clearly the way in which the struggle has become a lasting part of exile life. Just like the old guerrilla fighter Gyaltsab who stated ‘we will continue our actions till our last breath’¹³², she asserted ‘we never give up the fight: maybe we have to wait ten years, fifty years, hundred years or hundred fifty years, we hope that one day Tibet will be free.’¹³³ Also she so implicitly imposed this convention to struggle upon future generations; for they are the ones who ought to continue the fight for the homeland.

Clear signs that these instances are not just that, i.e. instances, but part of a social convention to struggle which sanctions and stimulates behaviour with political characteristics, can be deducted from the manner partaking in the struggle is often seen as praiseworthy socially desired. In this regard Ngawang illustrates well how deontological demands (although ethical) are saliently connected to a very *political* dimension of responsibility through cultivation of this convention in the ‘future seeds of Tibet’:

We are refugees here in exile. *Why* we are in exile that is the question. We are in exile that is why we have more responsibility. I always tell my friends and some youth: first we have to ask ourselves ‘why we are in exile’. That puts you to the questions that let you know you have the responsibility to your own community to do what you want. We are [not] in exile because we have an economic problem, we are no economic

¹³¹ Tenzin, president of the Regional Tibetan Youth Congress president and student, Tashi Ling Tibetan refugee settlement in Pokhara region, Nepal. 30 April 2012.

¹³² Gyaltsab, ex-Khamba, Jampaling old-age home for Tibetan guerrilla fighters, in Pokhara region, Nepal. 3May 2012.

¹³³ Dalha, former TWO associate and currently shop owner, Pokhara 29-04-2012.

refugees. We are political refugees.¹³⁴

Further, evidence that there is a degree of social standing connected to the enactment of these ‘responsibilities’ is demonstrated by various exiles. This is for example dimly articulated by Sangye when asked why he did not participate in demonstrations:

‘Main reason is that I am not very brave. I cannot actually *face* the police: I think that maybe they will be very rude and beat me, speaking frankly. Another reason is that I feel that I am too old to go now. The younger ones of course they can go and *obviously we support them* (emphasis added).¹³⁵

Making it clear in the plural form that support for demonstrations is ‘obviously’ present, while later adding ‘I am in favour of that I would say: they are doing what they are supposed to do’ illustrates social approval of these contentious activities. However, more remarkable is the way he describes protesting as ‘*face* the police’; the Pawo-Pamo song uses exactly the same word when depicting in an applauding manner those who stood up against the Chinese occupation.¹³⁶

Further evidence that participation in contentious action is not only looked positive upon, but additionally confers social status to the actor is given in two critical opinions about self-immolation events in Kathmandu. First we can think of a remark made by Shyam Lal Gyawali, Bouddha, Chief of the Metropolitan Police Circle in Kathmandu, who said about a recent self-immolation attempt of eighteen exile-youths: “we think it was a planned bid not to self-immolate, but to earn cheap popularity and pose a threat to security.”¹³⁷ A statement which closely resembles the serious doubts Dorjee, an associate of the Human Rights Organisation of Nepal (HURON), expressed about the intentions behind the self-immolation attempt conducted by Sonam Choedon in Jawalakhel Tibetan refugee settlement.¹³⁸ After using almost the same words to describe her motivation (i.e. earning esteem) he asked the rhetorical question why Choedon doused herself gasoline in front of the police when she could have prepared herself at her home; only few meters away? From his perspective a

¹³⁴ Ngawang, daughter of ex-Khamba fighter, president of the Regional Tibetan Youth Congress and Tibetan elderly home worker, Jawalakhel Tibetan refugee settlement, in Lalitpur, Nepal. 11 May 2012.

¹³⁵ Sangye, headmaster of a monastery school, in Swayambunath, Kathmandu, Nepal. 23 May 2012.

¹³⁶ ‘They *faced* the challenges and organized so many programs against the Chinese occupation’ ‘Hands on hands they *faced* every difficulty for the freedom of Tibet’ (Appendix: D).

¹³⁷ See Appendix: B, 10 November, 2011.

¹³⁸ See Appendix: A, 2 November, 2011.

deliberation on her side that enabled the assembled exiles to stop her from lighting herself ablaze.¹³⁹

Conversely, there is also reason to believe that non-adherence is negatively looked upon by some. Following this line of thought makes it not surprising that Denpa told, with a tone of dissatisfaction, ‘here [in Nepal] the [Tibetan] people live a high standard live and so they forget about the struggle and community.’¹⁴⁰ Further, despite the estimate that already half of the youths in Tashi Palkhiel was a member of the RTYC¹⁴¹, Tenzin also perceived this lack of involvement:

I see so many guys in our settlement doing nothing; not going to school not working in the community. Seeing them I feel that they are strong and brave, they should do such acts¹⁴² which somewhere goes to the help of Tibet.¹⁴³

Also Karma expressed a similar feeling when stating, ‘if I do not give a shit about the country then what use is it to be a Tibetan?’¹⁴⁴, while later asserting his ‘respect’ and ‘gratitude’ for the activities of the NAN network, a small group of exile activists in Kathmandu. Accordingly, it is not unlikely that the deontological demands, though felt as individual obligations, are imprinted through shared beliefs and socially regulated rules on how exiles should contribute to the benefit of the Tibetan community, in Nepal as well as Tibet.

Opinions of other exiles suggest that deontological demands stem from a need to comply with the convention to struggle because many exiles integrate seemingly unrelated activities into the concept to struggle, sometimes on a compulsive level. As already demonstrated in previous quotations¹⁴⁵ one could perceive that daily activities distant to the struggle, like working in social service or studying Tibetan culture, are emically perceived as part of it. Demonstrating that even just playing sport becomes a ‘struggle’ activity, can be read from the words of Kuchen who with the team of his settlement would play in a ‘Tibetan only’ football championship in Dharamsala. He asserted ‘I play football for the free Tibet

¹³⁹ Dorjee, HURON associate, in Kathmandu, 29 July Nepal, 2012.

¹⁴⁰ Denpa, NAN member, in Bouddha, Kathmandu, Nepal. 15 May 2012.

¹⁴¹ Samten, son of an ex-Khamba fighter, member of the Regional Tibetan Youth Congress and Tibetan elderly home worker, Tashi Palkhiel Tibetan refugee settlement in Pokhara region, Nepal. 6 May 2012.

¹⁴² Just before, the author asked about Jamphel Yeshe’s act of self-immolation in India, conducted on 26 March 2012.

¹⁴³ Tenzin, musician and teacher in the local Tibetan school, Tashi Palkhiel refugee settlement, in Pokhara region, Nepal. 5 May 2012.

¹⁴⁴ Karma, journalist, Jawalakhel Tibetan refugee settlement, in Lalitpur, Nepal. 22 June 2012.

¹⁴⁵ See footnotes 125,126,127,128.

revolution.¹⁴⁶ Additionally, the richer Tibetans Danpa accused of having forgotten about the struggle, were also not totally disconnected: nota bene it was them who donated money when he and sixteen other members of the NAN network were fined 27.000 Nepali rupees each (about 300 dollars¹⁴⁷) after being arrested in a protest in front of the United Nations complex in Pulchowk.¹⁴⁸ Ngawang also subscribed this when asked whether richer Tibetans contributed to the struggle as well, she told: ‘they [the rich exiles] donate to whomever who needs help.’¹⁴⁹

More saliently connected to the struggle was an often voiced responsibility or duty exiles felt to ‘spreading awareness’ about Tibet by means of talking to people like the author (i.e. foreigners). For example, when speaking about how he fought for a free Tibet, Rinchen said: ‘I do not shout and protest but I inform foreigners about the truth.’¹⁵⁰ Just like Tenzin:

Right now what I am doing with you is also a part of the duty: spreading the Tibetan awareness. (...) The core part [of my duty] I think is spreading the awareness of Tibet, awareness means spreading the knowledge of the Tibetans that Tibet is not part of China. Tibet is a free land and Tibet belongs to the Tibetans. I think spreading this message is very important as the main part of the world do not know what Tibet is, where Tibetans belong. So I think it is very important to spread this message. I am doing my best to do this. I think we have two three people guest like you, a week. So I think I am fulfilling my duty.¹⁵¹

Spreading knowledge, considered to be an act of contention since it contests the Chinese occupation, is however not confined to inform foreigners about the Tibetan issue. It also entails ingraining the convention to struggle in the generations born in exile by means of instilling that ‘awareness’ about Tibet and the martyrs. Future contentious activities are being perpetuated and safeguarded by making the martyrs examples and almost role models; they

¹⁴⁶ Kuchen, working in a local grocery store, Tashi Palkhiel refugee settlement, in Pokhara region, Nepal. 2 May 2012.

¹⁴⁷ A considerable sum when one considers that around 5500 rupee (about sixty dollars) is a month’s wage for many full time working adolescents in Nepal. Authors field notes on conversations with Nepali youths.

¹⁴⁸ Zigsa, NAN member, in Bouddha, Kathmandu, Nepal. 15 June 2012. Denpa corroborates this: ‘last time we had to pay 27000 [rupees]. Since I come from a poor family, my father earns only six to seven thousand [Nepali rupees] per month, so how can we pay?’ Denpa, NAN member, in Bouddha, Kathmandu, Nepal. 15 May 2012.

¹⁴⁹ Ngawang, daughter of ex-Khamba fighter, president of the Regional Tibetan Youth Congress and Tibetan elderly home worker, Jawalakhel Tibetan refugee settlement, in Lalitpur, Nepal. 11 May 2012.

¹⁵⁰ Rinchen, monk and chanting master in local monastery, Tashi Palkhiel Tibetan refugee settlement in Pokhara region, Nepal. 7 May 2012.

¹⁵¹ Tenzin, assistant-director carpet factory and master of ceremony, Jawalakhel Tibetan refugee settlement, in Lalitpur, Nepal. 16 and 19 April 2012.

are becoming the symbols of resistance for exile born generations, urging the latter to pull their weight in the struggle as well. Consequently, the convention to struggle, especially through the Pawo-Pamo tradition, instils deontological demands; the social need to honour and support the martyrs permeates family, educational and cultural life of exiles and urges the youth to know their responsibility, demonstrated below.

From an etic perspective I found the self-sacrifices of the martyrs shockingly accepted and frequently heard that many young children *had to* attend the Pawo-Pamo ‘ceremonies’. Pondering on the effects this could have on young minds I often inquired what their place was there and whether exiles thought this could have possible negative effects. Surprisingly very few agreed with my concern, from which I deduct that the act of self-immolation is becoming, not necessarily approved of, but indeed socially respected as a justified mode of action. A tendency to portray the Pawo’s and Pamo’s as examples is serious, and in my opinion very unhealthy for young exiles. Something which was confirmed when Geshe, the headmaster of a monastery school in Kathmandu, told about the way the tradition could affect children:

On the one hand it is a little bit dangerous for young children because they maybe get a different imprint, maybe bad imprint. But if you are a monk not: they talk in relation to Dharma. *How to practice self-immolation and how to sacrifice for other beings, we can talk and we can explain in school.* One thing is a little bit related to politics, also to the Tibetan government. (...) They want to make some politicians so they introduce about the hero’s [the Pawo’s and Pamo’s], and a bit about Tibet and China. Since they are child, since in school, then they get imprint. Then, after they [get of] age, they know I am Tibet, I must want to do Free Tibet because the Chinese government killed so many people and how control and how torture and force and invaded Tibet. *We talk on political; it’s very important, important advice!* Because very important is the new generation for Tibet, particular for Tibet (emphasis added).¹⁵²

From his statement one can deduct how important he finds it to unabashedly condition young children into Tibetan politics along a topos of suffering. Secondly, we can see that the acts of the martyrs, in his eyes, are inconspicuously positive; he even shows readiness to explain how self-immolation should be practiced, shockingly as a teacher of young children. Thirdly, the nexus between deontological demands and a convention to struggle is omnipresent when

¹⁵² Geshe, headmaster of a monastery school, in Bouddha, Kathmandu, Nepal. 14 May 2012.

Geshe indicates that talking about martyrs (as well as Tibet and China) is meant to make ‘politicians’ (i.e. people who are involved in the struggle). That this nexus goes beyond training future officials but also affects (‘imprints’) children on at a very personal dimension, (encouraging them to participate in the struggle) is clear from the part where he states that children should think that they ‘*must want*’ to do something for a freedom in Tibet. Of course these dynamics sketched above will not necessarily cause contentious behaviour or self-immolation, but give a view on how the struggle is transferred from one generation to the next and how important the transmission of this convention to struggle could be for the emergence of contentious actions.

The actual effect this condition has on children, though it is impossible to point at a direct causal link, can be inferred from some exile narratives. For example from Ngawang’s account when she talked about the Pawo’s and Pamo’s:

‘Even my nephew, he is just four and a half [years old], but he still knows Tibet is taken by China. That’s why from the small we teach, why Tibet is not anymore, what is happening in Tibet. Sometime when they see the picture [big poster] of self-immolation they ask question to us ‘why are they doing this’. Then we explain them; it was China you know, too much pressures. They even do not have a right to do their own language, life, that’s why they give up their life. Then they know.’¹⁵³

What she taught her nephew is in effect an instance of social conditioning, in this case along the sacrifice of the Pawo’s and Pamo’s for Tibet. That this conditioning has profound effects and makes the struggle part of her nephews worldview, even at the age of four or three¹⁵⁴, is especially clear when taken in relation with the manner Ngawang’s nephew reacted to what he was being taught:

My nephew said China is very bad, sometimes he says he wants to kill *all* the Chinese (laughs). Kids love to play with guns and bow and arrow and he always says ‘now I am going to kill Chinese’ [quickly adds] he knows it’s not good. He knows. If he says something wrong we always make connection. But he is just like a small baby; he has

¹⁵³ Ngawang, daughter of ex-Khamba fighter, president of the Regional Tibetan Youth Congress and Tibetan elderly home worker, Jawalakhel Tibetan refugee settlement, in Lalitpur, Nepal. 11 May 2012.

¹⁵⁴ Tibetans usually start counting the years of a child from the moment it is growing in the mother’s womb, therefore it is unclear whether her nephew is three or four years old from the western manner of counting the age.

anger, wanting to destroy.¹⁵⁵

While her nephew is clearly too young to kill the Chinese or participate in any kind of ‘classic’¹⁵⁶ contentious activity, we can discern even at his age how he is imbued politics through this convention to struggle. Further, demonstrating that the education of youngster outside the schooling system in synchronicity with the Pawo’s and Pamo’s seems to play central stage in this conditioning process, can be observed in the way Tenzin narrates about his interaction with children in his settlement, Tashi Palkhiel:

The kids ask me, they have seen the boy [Jamphel Yeshe¹⁵⁷] in the fire, I told them about the reason he self-immolated. I try to tell them all the things happening around us. Some got angry and say ‘sir can we fight against them?’, they say like that. I am not telling them to do so. That’s why we are here at the school to learn something and to do something. For the Tibetan kids in school there are two objectives: Nepalese kids just learn for themselves.

Some of the small kids, when we tell them about the Chinese occupation, they think that Chinese are also not good. When some Chinese foreigners come here some of the kids use bad language against them. Because they think that those are the people that took our country. Actually the Chinese people are not our enemy, they are also suffering. It is the Chinese government and their ideology that has to be changed.¹⁵⁸

Playing that you go kill or fight the Chinese could be interpreted as universal child’s play; who did not as child imagine himself a knight who fought dragons and villains? However, the political undertone of this ‘play’ resulting in bad language against visiting Chinese is more dubious but admittedly, children worlds and their games are formed in interaction with their environment. Paradoxically, reflecting on this behaviour we come to the central question; what is the meaning of these actions for the children themselves? Should we place emphasis on the ‘playing’ aspect and designate its meanings as just a qualitatively adaptation to social structures prevalent in their direct environment? Or should we see these structures as a

¹⁵⁵ Ngawang, daughter of ex-Khamba fighter, president of the Regional Tibetan Youth Congress and Tibetan elderly home worker, Jawalakhel Tibetan refugee settlement, in Lalitpur, Nepal. 11 May 2012.

¹⁵⁶ Classic in this context means demonstrations or protests or other organized collective actions that contest Chinese rule over Tibet.

¹⁵⁷ The poster of Jamphel Yeshe is prominently displayed in one of the central streets in the settlement. See appendix E, 26 March, 2012.

¹⁵⁸ Tenzin, musician and teacher in the local Tibetan school, Tashi Palkhiel refugee settlement, in Pokhara region, Nepal. 5 May 2012.

constitutive force that stimulates this for children, presumably, uncommon politically flavoured conduct by means of the convention to struggle? In other words, is the quality of this child's play just an adaptation to the dynamics in a social environment, or is the convention to struggle already thoroughly internalized? Is it their own agency which predominates in giving meaning to their games or do they have the idea that they enact their exile duty, i.e. fulfil deontological demands?

In brief, from these instances cannot be claimed that deontological demands necessarily stem from a convention to struggle, for they represent the classic problem of the chicken and the egg. In other words, where does action come from; the need to comply with this convention to struggle or the feeling that one has an individual duty which has to be fulfilled? Undoubtedly both are instrumental in the occurrence of contentious initiatives but there is reason to believe that the convention to struggle, as a communal value, is a dominant conditioning force; it undoubtedly contributes to the inception of deontological demands.

Contrasting to the idea that the convention to struggle predominating as social incentive for action, must be said that the enactment of deontological demands hints at a very personal, almost coercive psychological drive to be part of the struggle. The compulsive nature of partaking seems to make its presence felt in the words of Sangye when saying that he 'should'¹⁵⁹, almost *ought*, to be part of the struggle. Just like this feeling of compulsion can be discerned from Geshe's wish that children, through their 'imprint', begin to feel that they '*must want to do Free Tibet*' (emphasis added).¹⁶⁰ Is this feeling maybe resonated by Samten's words when saying 'it is our compulsion, that's why sometimes we demonstrate and protest'¹⁶¹, hereby almost implicitly saying that he feels not totally free to choose whether to go protesting or not?

A psychological drive to be part of the struggle is especially noticeable by Tenzin who gave the following description when asked by the author about the core part of his duty.

Since my childhood, I am raised in this camp which is directly associated with the Central Tibetan Administration in Exile in Dharamsala. So since our primary schoolings or high schoolings we were helped by the Central Tibetan Administration.

So we should fulfil our duty being a Tibetan; whatever I am, is because the Central

¹⁵⁹ 'I should be connected [to the struggle for Tibet] because I am born from Tibetan parents who really support it.' Sangye, headmaster of a monastery school, in Swayambunath, Kathmandu, Nepal. 23 May 2012.

¹⁶⁰ Geshe, headmaster of a monastery school, in Bouddha, Kathmandu, Nepal. 14 May 2012.

¹⁶¹ Samten, son of an ex-Khamba fighter, member of the Regional Tibetan Youth Congress and Tibetan elderly home worker, Tashi Palkhiel Tibetan refugee settlement in Pokhara region, Nepal. 27 and 28 April and 6 May 2012.

Tibetan Administration.¹⁶²

Tenzin's personal sense of duty to the CTA goes deeper than just informing people about Tibet from an official position. He displayed its presence on an almost compulsive level when forced to go deeper into the content of this duty by the author who asked whether his duty was connected to his education:

*I do not think so.. Because I do not have a specific aim to work under the CTA but now I am doing it. With the help of my degrees I got this job and, in one way or another, this study is connected to this work, so I think it is.*¹⁶³

From an etic perspective it seems that he initially sees no connection between duty and study but this notion changes in matter of seconds, possibly through reflection upon his feeling while answering the question. Could it be that he experienced a cognitive dissonance through realizing that his study *should be* connected to his duty; his first reaction is 'no' but is changed it into 'yes' moments later. Constitutes this change a reflective switch or was it brought about by means of an uncomfortable psychological feeling which instigated him to change his cognition from a 'no' feeling into a mental 'yes'?

This question is intriguing and concealed for the reason that it touches upon the central question of cognitive dissonance: do exiles experience this phenomenon and in what way? Accordingly to further illuminate this subject the analysis now turns to the manner through which exiles qualify non-violent and violent behaviour, and how they ascribe a violent or non-violent quality to the three modes of contentious actions that form the scope of this research.

¹⁶² Tenzin, assistant-director carpet factory and master of ceremony, Jawalakhel Tibetan refugee settlement, in Lalitpur, Nepal. 16 and 19 April 2012.

¹⁶³ Tenzin, assistant-director carpet factory and master of ceremony, Jawalakhel Tibetan refugee settlement, in Lalitpur, Nepal. 16 and 19 April 2012.

CHAPTER 3

3.1 INTRODUCTION TO AN EMIC FRAMEWORK ON NON-VIOLENCE

Tibetan exiles in Nepal base their qualitative denomination on acts as being violent or non-violent initially on three fundamental variables and further on the identity ascribed to the person who commits the deed. Exiles displayed the tendency to rely on an ethical framework based on Buddhist philosophy when outlining their perspectives on non-violent behaviour; many made references to moralistic stories in which Buddha sacrifices himself for the good of others. These stories pointed at three variables on which exiles qualitatively judged acts to be violent or non-violent, namely; 1) the intention or purpose of the actor, 2) the form of the act itself and, 3) the outcome of the act. Accordingly this chapter first presents two often-invoked stories to illustrate the workings of these three variables. Subsequently, it will demonstrate that the concept of non-violence should be seen as an action that has, according to emic conceptualization, two characteristics closely related to the three variables that delineate a concept of non-violence; the intention to do no harm and to help others. It will be argued that these two emically perceived characteristics inhabit a cognitive dissonance when they conflict with each other, in other words when helping is done by means of doing harm. This point is consequently illustrated by the narratives on three cases of past and present contentious actions (i.e. the Tibetan guerrilla campaign, contemporary protests and self-immolations). Accordingly it will be argued that exiles are supposedly able to mitigate a cognitive dissonance by means of specific cognitions, which redefine the identity of the actors engaged in violence, specifically their rationality and sometimes the action itself.

3.2 BUDDHA'S SACRIFICES

Many lay exiles in their discussions with the author on the self-immolators¹⁶⁴ and whether these deeds were qualitatively violent or non-violent, brought up the story of *Namo Buddha* from the Sutra *The Wise and the Foolish*. They used this story to illustrate how behaviour that *looks* violent is in fact non-violent. Many knew this story, which has its counterparts in Chinese and Indian Buddhist narrations (Yün-hua 1965), since it is a famous origin myth of a contemporary holy site in the Kathmandu valley, also referred to as *Tagmo Lüjin* (*lit.* “the

¹⁶⁴ Most interviews engaged the self-immolations after the inquiry had concentrated on the decontextualized concepts of non-violence and violence as described in the methodology.

place where the future Buddha sacrificed his body to a Tigress”). The story recounts how Prince Mahavattma (before he became Buddha) strolling through the forest, encountered an emaciated tigress that just gave birth to her cubs.¹⁶⁵ The compassionate Prince wanted to save the mother and her cubs, but could only do this by means of preventing the Tigress from eating her own cubs. Since the Tigress needed food to survive he decided to sacrifice himself and consequently lied down besides her so she could feed on him. The tigress was however too weak to eat him and so he began to cut pieces of his body to feed her, eventually succumbing and dying from his wounds.

Another story invoked in various different forms¹⁶⁶ during discussions on the violent quality of the Tibetan guerrilla period¹⁶⁷, placed a Buddha or Bodhisattva in confrontation with a bad man or demon who wanted to collect the souls of humans. As Sangye told his version:

The story goes that Bodhisattva kind of had clairvoyance; the wisdom to see what will happen. So he had the power of clairvoyance and through that clairvoyance he knew that the black man with the spear was going to kill all his companions who are on the same boat. (...) This Bodhisattva knew that he [the black man with the spear] was going to kill his thousand companions. Then he was thinking in himself and finally decided that there is only one way this time: I kill him to save the thousand lives. Buddhism in this case says that violence is not necessarily always violence. This is violence to our eyes because he killed a person, seemingly violence for our eyes. For him it is not violence because he did that to set alive a thousand. With this action he went to Nirvana [enlightenment]; he got a good result.¹⁶⁸

Many exiles, as Sangye did, perceived these acts invariably not as sins because ‘you did the sin only with bad intention’¹⁶⁹ but as *just* deeds. Accordingly, they could call these ‘visually’ violent acts essentially non-violent, a deliberation based on three interlinked factors. Most

¹⁶⁵ Rinchen asserted that the tigress was pregnant. Rinchen, chanting master in local monastery, Tashi Palkhiel Tibetan refugee settlement in Pokhara region, Nepal. 7 May 2012.

¹⁶⁶ Rinchen for example told: ‘*Mahākāla* (a *Dharmapala* or protector of Dharma) killed one ghost in order to protect the lay people. This was not violence because it was with a positive purpose: therefore the way of killing is different.’ Rinchen, chanting master in local monastery, Tashi Palkhiel Tibetan refugee settlement in Pokhara region, Nepal. 7 May 2012.

¹⁶⁷ Most interviews engaged the guerrilla period after the inquiry had concentrated on the decontextualized concepts of non-violence and violence as described in the methodology.

¹⁶⁸ Sangye, headmaster of a monastery school, in Swayambunath, Kathmandu, Nepal. 23 May 2012.

¹⁶⁹ Singay, (Gurung) student, in Pokhara, Nepal. 4 May 2012.

exiles agreed that Buddha's act *seemed* violent outwardly (killing himself or the 'black man'), but retained that his behaviour was essentially non-violent; Buddha had good intentions and his action had a positive outcome. In the former he saved the cups and tigress, while in the latter his fellow passengers or future victims of the bad man. Subsequently, these two factors, especially Buddha's good intention¹⁷⁰, made the act *an sich* virtuous and non-violent accordingly. Conversely, a *sinful* act would have been inherently violent.¹⁷¹

However, this line of reasoning arouses puzzling questions when knowing that suicide and murder diagonally oppose teachings of (Tibetan) Buddhist doctrine. For example, one could question whether similar acts, with dead people as consequence, would be seen in a different light when they had not been committed by Buddha but by an 'ordinary' Buddhist. To illustrate this we only have to consider some statements on the *general acts*¹⁷² of killing and especially suicide:

If you really claim that you are Buddhist practitioner than you have to really embark by the law of non-violence and *you are not supposed to kill others* (emphasis added).¹⁷³

I am a Buddhist follower so it's my religious obligation to follow that, *not to kill, not to harm others* (emphasis added).¹⁷⁴

Killing others is the *biggest* sin (emphasis added).¹⁷⁵

In Buddhism it says that killing [your] self is not a Dharma, it is *very bad* (emphasis added).¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁰ 'You did the sin only with bad intention.' Singay, (Gurung) student, in Pokhara, Nepal. 4 May 2012.

¹⁷¹ 'Whether giving up one's life constitutes a sin or virtue depends on the nature of the act: once Lord Buddha gave his flesh to a pregnant tiger because he wanted to save the tiger so she would save her unborn cubs. This is not a sin because it is non-violent.' Rinchen, chanting master in local monastery, Tashi Palkhiel Tibetan refugee settlement in Pokhara region, Nepal. 7 May 2012.

¹⁷² General in this context means the acts *an sich* when not placed in a specific context, like in the aforementioned stories in which the Buddha enacts them.

¹⁷³ Sangye, headmaster of a monastery school, in Swayambunath, Kathmandu, Nepal. 23 May 2012.

¹⁷⁴ Orgyen, ex-Khamba, Jampaling old-age home for Tibetan guerrilla fighters, in Pokhara region, Nepal. 3 May 2012.

¹⁷⁵ Ngawang, daughter of ex-Khamba fighter, president of the Regional Tibetan Youth Congress and Tibetan elderly home worker, Jawalakhel Tibetan refugee settlement, in Lalitpur, Nepal. 11 May 2012.

¹⁷⁶ Tenzin, musician and teacher in the local Tibetan school, Tashi Palkhiel refugee settlement, in Pokhara region, Nepal. 5 May 2012.

You are not supposed to kill yourself in Tibetan Buddhism, doing that means creating a *big sin* (emphasis added).¹⁷⁷

If you read the [Buddhist] scriptures; *committing suicide is a direct entrance to the fires of hell* (emphasis added).¹⁷⁸

Suicide is violence to oneself: the one who does it will immediately go to hell (emphasis added).¹⁷⁹

These two moralistic stories, retelling the acts of Buddha, illustrate strikingly show that it is the context (in these cases Buddha's sacrifice for others and the murderous intentions of the 'black man') which prescribes the qualitative conceptualization of the act as violent or non-violent. The variables that determine the non-violent quality of the killings in these stories are clear, (the intention of sacrifice and the eventual positive outcome). Yet one should not disregard the fact that they are conducted by Buddha; possibly also a crucial factor considering his godlike status. Thereby, these reasons do not tell anything about how exiles can suppress the violent appearance of the acts themselves; it is undeniable that despite good intention and outcome people got killed. To understand this, one needs to analyze which variables from an emic perspective *characterize* non-violent deeds when these concepts are detached from religious influences presented in the aforementioned narratives. Accordingly, the following sections shall first reconstruct an ethical conceptualization of non-violence along the characteristics ascribed to a non-violent action. It will be shown that these characteristics are intangibly connected to the identity of the actors involved and that it is particularly the nexus between the identity of the actor and the character of his actions which determines the violent or non-violent quality of an action in emic perspectives. The following sections so clarifies how emic descriptions of non-violent and violent behaviour , base the qualitative definition of an act not solely on the variables given by the religious storylines but is also incorporate and determine the identity of the actor itself.

¹⁷⁷ Sangye, headmaster of a monastery school, in Swayambunath, Kathmandu, Nepal. 23 May 2012.

¹⁷⁸ Sonam, student, in Thamel, Kathmandu, Nepal. 17 May 2012.

¹⁷⁹ Rinchen, chanting master in local monastery, Tashi Palkhiel Tibetan refugee settlement in Pokhara region, Nepal. 7 May 2012.

3.3 THE EMIC CONCEPTUALIZATION OF NON-VIOLENCE

From the inhomogeneous emic views on what constitutes non-violence, given by the participants of this study, we can discern how some variables instrumental in emic qualifications of actions as on non-violent could inhabit cognitive dissonance. Emic perspectives on non-violence conveyed almost invariably that non-violence is nothing in itself, but ‘has to be in an action’¹⁸⁰ which is qualified as non-violent by two different requirements which relate closely to the three variables presented earlier. Firstly, non-violence, in the meaning of the Sanskrit term *Ahimsa* (*lit.* the avoidance of violence), should not make a ‘problem’ for others or do ‘harm’, mostly specified on living, especially *innocent* beings. Secondly, the emic notion on non-violence characterized the action as aimed at doing ‘good’, often in the form of the more or less concrete concept ‘peace’. These two characteristics thus symbolize, in their respective order; 1) the outcome of the action, and 2) the intention of the actor. However, these two characteristics come in conflict in the act when one does ‘good’ through harming others and so theoretically arouse cognitive dissonance.

Some exiles placed characterized non-violence in parallel to the meaning of the term *Ahimsa*. They present the first fundamental characteristic of non-violence when describing the concept:

Non-violence means not to make any problem and tension to other. Not to do harm to other.¹⁸¹

Non-violence: that means not to harm others, not to give pain to others.¹⁸²

[Non-violence means] not to harm others not kill not to tell lie.¹⁸³

We [the NAN network] believe that when you blow up a train railway track we believe that that is not violence. It is not violence because we are not harming others: we are

¹⁸⁰ Sangye, headmaster of a monastery school, in Swayambunath, Kathmandu, Nepal. 23 May 2012.

¹⁸¹ Orgyen, ex-Khamba, Jampaling old-age home for Tibetan guerrilla fighters, in Pokhara region, Nepal. 3 May 2012.

¹⁸² Muskan, nun, in Lalitpur, Nepal. 23 April 2012.

¹⁸³ Gyaltsab, ex-Khamba, Jampaling old-age home for Tibetan guerrilla fighters, in Pokhara region, Nepal. 3 May 2012.

only blocking the transportation.¹⁸⁴

Though the last position is not necessarily shared with others, for example Sonam contests this¹⁸⁵, it can safely be asserted that ‘not harming’ is one of the central characteristics which makes an action non-violent in many emic perspectives.

Further, conceptualizations of non-violence include another crucial characteristic; besides ‘not doing harm’ many exiles expressed non-violence as action in the servitude to society of their fellow man:

The concept [of non-violence] is a great idea and makes man civilized. It guides people to do the right thing and inspires society. When it is applied, it makes life easier [for] the self and others.¹⁸⁶

It [non-violence] means peace, it doesn't mean tension. How to make a happy life, how to make peace. We need peace. Just doing good. It means trying to do good. Not being lazy; working for good.¹⁸⁷

Non-violence means you do a good thing and get better.¹⁸⁸

We [humans] do not want suffering, everybody wants happiness, peace. Peace never comes from violence, peace comes from non-violence.¹⁸⁹

From the preceding narratives speaks clearly how these exiles conceptualize non-violence as an *action* which is closely related to doing ‘good’ without harming. However, sometimes when actions were judged to be ‘good’ and indeed ‘harmed’ someone, we can see how the conceptualization of non-violence deviates from the two characteristics. Subsequently these emically declared characteristics of non-violence overruled by one of the variables that determine the non-violent quality in the religious stories described earlier:

¹⁸⁴ Denpa, NAN member, in Bouddha, Kathmandu, Nepal. 15 May 2012.

¹⁸⁵ ‘[a] factory belongs to someone and a guy is working hard to maintain the factory. So we cannot say blowing up things is not violent. It is obviously violence.’ Sonam, student, in Thamel, Kathmandu, Nepal. 17 May 2012.

¹⁸⁶ Rinchen, chanting master in local monastery, Tashi Palkhiel Tibetan refugee settlement in Pokhara region, Nepal. 7 May 2012.

¹⁸⁷ Gendün, son of ex-Khamba fighter and shop owner, in Pokhara, Nepal. 29 April 2012.

¹⁸⁸ Gendün, son of ex-Khamba fighter and shop owner, in Pokhara, Nepal. 29 April 2012.

¹⁸⁹ Muskan, nun, in Lalitpur, Nepal. 23 April 2012.

If I was there that time [during the second world war], living that time and really had a very good intention for others, in order to save the life of the millions, if I was in that power, I would, without hesitation, go and kill Hitler, and still I would say I am a good Buddhist [i.e. did not do a sin, which can be equated with following non-violence].¹⁹⁰

When someone comes to your home and tries to kill you: self defence is not violence. If you are doing good there is always a negative.¹⁹¹

Using the fist is also violence but it depends on the situation: if someone is beating you then it is our responsibility to self-protect. So at that time it is not violence [to use your fists].¹⁹²

Although intention and outcome are explicitly addressed by Sangye we can perceive that the last two positions exhibit a more ambiguous reasoning; we could interpret their argument as based on intention but this is not explicitly addressed, nor is outcome. Instead their accounts suggest that they conceptualized the quality of these respective actions depending on the ‘*situation*’, accordingly qualifying the act of self-defence (implicitly by means of using force) as non-violent due to the justifying nature of the context.

Aforementioned statements point at a seemingly contradiction in terminis which is especially clear in Denpa’s position. Focussing on him we see how first is asserted that using your fists is violence but this sinful quality is mitigated when he reasons that one has a responsibility to self-protect. However, his reasoning displayed an inconsistency for later during the interview he asserted:

When sometimes people are hitting us then it is our responsibility to protect us. That is why we use *violence* at that time.¹⁹³

While previously designating self-defence qualitatively non-violent, he is unable to sustain that statement for he edits self-defence back to violence. Could this be a symptom of a cognitive dissonance for the reason that he apparently can see self-protection as non-violent as

¹⁹⁰ Sangye, headmaster of a monastery school, in Swayambunath, Kathmandu, Nepal. 23 May 2012.

¹⁹¹ This opinion was shared by the majority of the group. Group discussion with Tibetan youths of Tashi Palkhiel refugee settlement, in Pokhara region, Nepal. 2 May 2012.

¹⁹² Denpa, NAN member, in Bouddha, Kathmandu, Nepal. 15 May 2012.

¹⁹³ Denpa, NAN member, in Bouddha, Kathmandu, Nepal. 15 May 2012.

well as violent at the same time?

Whether Denpa experienced cognitive dissonance remains the question but we can deduct that there exists a problematic nexus between helping (others or the self) and doing no harm, when the former is perceived to be only possible by means of doing harm. That this premise indeed arouses cognitive dissonance can be illustrated by elaborating on one example:

Actually sometimes non-violence and compassion, love you know, sometime a little difficult. For example, you have a student, a very naughty student: not obedient to teacher, not wanting to study and do not want be good. That time, if you are all the time love to him and compassionate to him and non-violence, than he becomes bad and bad and one day he loses his life. That time you must control him, *with hit and slap*. This will be better for his life. (...) Still he does not want to listen to you, does not want to keep your advice then sometimes use a *little bit force* and try to turn [him]. This looks [like] rough action, *looks like malice action, but not exactly, not real malice*.

Sometimes I try to generate a very good motivation love and compassion and then I hit my students. This action may look like violence but motivation is non-violence. This is very different. Indirectly he gets a good advantage from me; if I scold him and hit him, because I hit him for himself –I have a different motivation; I want him to become good I want to save his life. If he doesn't follow the right way he gets more and more suffering so I want to turn his life the good way. So sometimes I beat him forceful, like forceful, but this is from a good motivation. (...) The action may look like violence, but the motivation makes it non-violence.¹⁹⁴

In Geshe's statements we can discern all the elements that, as argued, are decisive in the emic qualification of behaviour as non-violent. He indicates that his intention is good; he wants to, metaphorically, save the future life of his student. Further, his action (hitting the student) which is situated in his capacity as teacher has a good outcome in his *perception*, for it will be beneficial for the student's future life.

However, when it comes to the two qualitative characteristics of non-violence (helping and not harming) we can hypothesize a real possibility of cognitive dissonance. At one side he

¹⁹⁴ Geshe, headmaster of a monastery school, in Bouddha, Kathmandu, Nepal. 14 May 2012.

perceives the malicious (i.e. harmful) *form* of his act which, being a Buddhist monk, conflicts with his ideal of non-violence; he ‘never’¹⁹⁵ harms other beings. The psychological conflict this arouses is then made salient in his concluding remark wherein he asserts that his action ‘looks’ like malice while it is ‘not real malice’; in his line of reasoning because the intention and outcome are good. Pleading against a cognitive dissonance is the fact that we can presume the presence of his cognition of good intention through the context in which he commits the action, namely his position as a teacher who wants to prevent his student from throwing away his life. However, we cannot say the same for the outcome, which is inherently unknown to him; in effect he adds the cognition that it will be beneficial for that student. Exactly here the cognitive dissonance shows its face; he can only change what he actually sees as harmful (thus going against non-violence) into an qualitatively non-violent action by means of a mentally constructing the supposed good outcome. Subsequently, this added cognition enables Geshe to retain that the ‘malicious’ looking act of hitting, is essentially ‘not real malice’ for it has a good effect, in other words it does no harm. In this way he exhibits how the presumably present ‘good intentions’ are not decisive for his psyche to transform the malicious act into a non-malicious act (i.e. violent into non-violent). Instead, he adds a cognition, which is the *unknown* outcome, and so sustains a congruent position that enables him to say: ‘the action may look like violence, but the motivation makes it non-violence.’

Concluding, many exiles placed emphasis on both intention and outcome *affiliated* to the deed, instead of separately judging intention, modes of behaviour and outcome, in order to arrive at a qualitative evaluation of behaviour. Additionally, we can see that the emic concept of non-violence cannot be defined for it is inherently the reciprocal relation between event and the position of the actor in a context that define how exiles qualitatively conceptualize non-violent behaviour. Further, the qualitative evaluation is complicated by the nexus between the two identified emic characteristics of non-violence which conflict with each other when the need to help converges with the inability to do harm. Then the question poses itself whether violent¹⁹⁶ acts conducted in the context of the struggle, with its fundamental goal of ‘doing good’ for Tibet, are seen as non-violent? Accordingly, I now turn to exile narratives on

¹⁹⁵ Question: ‘Why is non-violence important?’ Answer: ‘Because I am a human being, a monk and a Buddhist. So we never use violence and do harm to other beings.’ Geshe, headmaster of a monastery school, in Bouddha, Kathmandu, Nepal. 14 May 2012.

¹⁹⁶ Violence is defined here following Galtung’s definition as “the cause of the difference between the potential and actual” (Galtung 1969:168). In other words, burning oneself can be called a violent act for the reason that the actor potentially would have lived longer but this potential becomes no actuality due to the suicide by means of fire.

three instances of violent contentious action; the Tibetan guerrilla (starting in the 1950s and terminated in 1974), so called non-violent protests in Nepal which are accompanied by clashes with the police and sometimes the throwing of stones, and lastly the acts of self-immolation in Tibet and in exile.

3.4 TRANSFORMING IDENTITIES AND COGNITIVE DISSONANCE

Many narratives of exiles on violent actions conducted in their struggle, existentially transformed the identities of the actors who employed them and so could indicate a cognitive dissonance. Three issues feature dominantly in this transformation, which in line with the variables and characteristics that defined the emic conceptualization of non-violence, qualitatively impact upon the violent nature of actions conducted in the Tibetan guerrilla campaign, contemporary protests and to a lesser degree the self immolations in Tibet. The three issues instrumental in this transformation are; 1) the ascription of *reactive* identities¹⁹⁷ to the actor who indulges in violent action, 2) the *responsibility* for the violence that emerges, and 3) the *agency* of the actor who employed or indulged in violent action. These three topics are interrelated for the identity of the actors becomes reactive to the receiver of the violent actions, which mitigates responsibility for the actions to the latter due to the irrational nature of the actor's choice to act in a violent way. Looking at these issues in narratives on violent contentious action strikingly shows how cognitive dissonance is possibly present in the minds of study participants, in particularly through the tendency to transformation the identity of the actors. Often this is particularly focussed on the *rational* identity of the actor, who in his reactive acting becomes almost an *irrational* being.

However, the transformation taking place in the narratives on the self-immolations is profoundly different from those in the former two for it does not apply to the identity of the actor per se, but on the way the outcome of the deed is identified, or rather denied by some. Accordingly, in regard to the self-immolations, the analysis will shortly describe how the three issues mentioned above are indeed present in exile narrations on self immolations, but then focussed on exiles who displayed irrefutable evidence of dissonance for the reason that their views show the psychological reflexivity on which cognitive dissonance theory is based, namely the changing of cognitions.

¹⁹⁷ A reactive identity entails that an identity held or ascribed to someone is “deeply subservient to relations with others” (Sen 2007:92).

3.4.1 THE GUERRILLA CAMPAIGN

Starting with exile perspective on the violence employed during the guerrilla campaign shows how these activities, from emic perceptions, are in line with the emic conceptualizations of ‘non-violence’. Exiles namely mitigated the ‘sinful’ characteristics of these deeds by means of endowing a reactive identity upon the resistance fighters vis à vis that of the Chinese invaders. One could assume that lay and secular Buddhists, as demonstrated before, are ideologically strongly opposed to the use of violence, and therefore would presumably refrain from employing it. However, besides lay Tibetans also many monks took up arms when the resistance was incepted during the 1950s. When questioning how this could happen, since taking up arms was presumably posing an ideological conflict with Buddhist doctrine and the wish to do no harm, many¹⁹⁸ (ex-fighters as well as ‘ordinary’ exiles) depicted their actions as forced on them by the Chinese:

It is true that we have to follow this [non-violent] ideology but you also know that the Chinese forcefully killed the Tibetan people, any Tibetan people. They killed many Tibetans and even looted the very precious jewels and other precious things. Chinese army was not attending [differentiating] between impartial persons; they wanted to capture all our country. (...) In order to preserve the country, defend that culture and nation, *we had to do like that*. At that time we couldn’t stay like that [non-violent], we couldn’t accept all those things (emphasis added).¹⁹⁹

At that time my dad and thousands of Tibetans took up arms and tried to protect the Land. (...) They tried to protect country; they fought for Tibet, that doesn’t mean that they fought for their own region. (...) Timing was like that; the Chinese were bombing and destroying the monasteries. When the monasteries were destroyed how

¹⁹⁸ ‘Obviously I am a Buddhist follower so it’s my religious obligation to follow that, not to kill not to harm others not to tell lie, definitely. But sometimes, despite wanting to apply those things, sometimes we cannot fully follow because, especially [in regard to] the Chinese armies and troops. Because we did not make enemies with Chinese troops; the Chinese attacked my country and became our enemy. That’s why sometimes we have to forget, that philosophy of the Buddhism, *we have to involve in that kind of violent activities*’ (emphasis added). Orgyen, ex-Khamba, Jampaling old-age home for Tibetan guerrilla fighters, in Pokhara region, Nepal. 3 May 2012.

‘I think that they [the guerrillas] are great. A son was led to kill his own father. He was forced [by the Chinese] to pick up a weapon and pull the trigger towards his parents. Till when can we be patient? *We are also human beings*. As human beings we will be patient till the limit, if that is crossed we will be not [non-violent]. *We cannot face that*’ (emphasis added). Denpa, NAN member, in Bouddha, Kathmandu, Nepal. 15 May 2012.

¹⁹⁹ Gyaltsab, ex-Khamba, Jampaling old-age home for Tibetan guerrilla fighters, in Pokhara region, Nepal. 3 May 2012.

you can sit and do praying? You *have to protect* your own people and own country, that's how they start taking guns (emphasis added).²⁰⁰

The Chinese already started to use force so *how can you stay non-violent?* You are a soldier; you have become a government soldier. You want to keep your land, who can sacrifice your land easily? Monks same, even monks, all soldiers, they could not sacrifice their land under the Chinese government, particularly under the force [of the Chinese]. That time all the Tibet people get angry (emphasis added).²⁰¹

We can, not surprisingly, see how in these statements the Chinese are positioned as the instigators of the conflict. However, when it comes to the responsibility for the taking up arms by the Tibetans, the emic perspectives consistently portrayed the fighters as almost not responsible for their decision to do just that; they *had* to. In other words, it *naturally* followed from what was being imposed upon them, something clearly illustrated by the words of Samten; 'at that time we [the Tibetan guerrilla's] forget religion and other things, *that is the law of nature*' (emphasis added).²⁰² Further, atrocities that aroused the need to pick up arms are in turn strongly connected to good intentions: protect. When linking this intention back to the earlier delineated emic conceptualization of non-violence, it ought to be not surprising that some could uphold that guerrilla's relatively abided to the non-violent way, although many admitted the violent quality of their struggle as well:

I would not say it is violence because their *goal* was to protect their own people and the country. This is *not a bad thing* they have done, they tried to solve it in accordance to the best possibilities they had on their hand (emphasis added).²⁰³

I cannot deny this kind of action is violent. But this action of violence *was caused by the Chinese people*. That's why the Tibetan guerrilla the Tibetan fighters, did like this thing. *In one sense it is violence but in another sense it is not violent* (emphasis

²⁰⁰ Ngawang, daughter of ex-Khamba fighter, president of the Regional Tibetan Youth Congress and Tibetan elderly home worker, Jawalakhel Tibetan refugee settlement, in Lalitpur, Nepal. 11 May 2012.

²⁰¹ Geshe, headmaster of a monastery school, in Bouddha, Kathmandu, Nepal. 14 May 2012.

²⁰² Samten, son of an ex-Khamba fighter, member of the Regional Tibetan Youth Congress and Tibetan elderly home worker, Tashi Palkhiel Tibetan refugee settlement in Pokhara region, Nepal. 27 and 28 April and 6 May 2012.

²⁰³ Ngawang, daughter of ex-Khamba fighter, president of the Regional Tibetan Youth Congress and Tibetan elderly home worker, Jawalakhel Tibetan refugee settlement, in Lalitpur, Nepal. 11 May 2012.

added).²⁰⁴

The goals or intentions could be the vital variables that make the armed guerrilla campaign qualitatively non-violent from an emic perspective. However, when Samten places the cause of the violence on the Chinese he touched upon the factor of choice; from the etic perspective of the author the most crucial aspect through which many exiles solve the contradiction wherein they see something on the one hand as violent but non-violent on the other hand.

Many exiles including ex-fighters, while not being ambiguous about the reasons *why* arms were taken up, recited equivocal answers to the question *how* the guerrillas were able to pick up arms while being ‘non-violent’ Buddhists. In other words, while the incentives and intentions were clearly voiced, these said nothing about the *decision* to take up arms, as cryptic descriptions illustrate:

Before I was monk so I had to follow all Buddhist philosophy and ideology. It was quite difficult to change my ideology, *which was not my wish it was my compulsion that I had to do like that*. Before I was religious minded but after *I had to use weapons* not for bad intent, but for getting my country back from the Chinese authority. (emphasis added).²⁰⁵

It is true that they fought, but they did not fight to dominate China and to kill the Chinese without reason: they fought to liberate the country; *they were compelled to do this*. From a religious perspective this is called violence but from a socio-political perspective I must say this is not violent. Terrorist are violent but *we were compelled*: not only to protect and liberate the country but also for our religious freedom and identity. They acted violent in one sense but for the poor people *it was not a choice* (emphasis added).²⁰⁶

Actually it was the time. Time said everything, in that time he [her father] had to take

²⁰⁴ Samten, son of an ex-Khamba fighter, member of the Regional Tibetan Youth Congress and Tibetan elderly home worker, Tashi Palkhiel Tibetan refugee settlement in Pokhara region, Nepal. 27 and 28 April and 6 May 2012.

²⁰⁵ Orgyen, ex-Khamba, Jampaling old-age home for Tibetan guerrilla fighters, in Pokhara region, Nepal. 3 May 2012.

²⁰⁶ Rinchen, chanting master in local monastery, Tashi Palkhiel Tibetan refugee settlement in Pokhara region, Nepal. 7 May 2012.

the gun, *he had no choice* (emphasis added).²⁰⁷

The idea that the guerrillas were compelled or had no choice was reiterated more often: youths in Tashi Palkhiel even brought up a concept exactly voicing this; *Mhajbur*, meaning ‘no choice’ or acting under ‘pressure’ in Hindi.²⁰⁸ Diagonally opposed to this perception and demonstrating that some guerrillas indeed felt they had a choice, can be inferred from the expression of agency Tenzin, a fellow former guerrilla, ascribes to himself when saying “we had *decided in our hearts* that we would go to Norbulingka²⁰⁹ to fight a war.”²¹⁰ A remark slightly different in connotation when compared with ‘no choice’, in which agency of the actor is less present through the notion of ‘have to’; instead of acting from their own will, the stories present the actors agency as subjected, almost as victim to the situation. Many exiles, deducted from the opinions presented above, display this tendency to detract agency, or *free choice*, from the so called ‘freedom fighters’²¹¹ who reacted in a violent way to the occupation of Tibet; instead of freely choosing to take up arms they were *compelled*, a word which implies a degree of force or coercion. Their intention was to protect and therefore they were not violent, in the words of Dorjee:

There is no choice if the other side uses violence: you mean self-defence is violence? The other side used violence, Tibetans defended the taking of their houses, their land their family. All uprisings in the 1980s and 1990s were non-violent. The other side uses violence and forces us to defend, which is not violence.²¹²

3.4.2 VIOLENCE ACCOMPANYING NON-VIOLENT PROTESTS IN NEPAL

Similar to the narratives on the guerrilla period, we can see the same issues (reactivity,

²⁰⁷ Ngawang, daughter of ex-Khamba fighter, president of the Regional Tibetan Youth Congress and Tibetan elderly home worker, Jawalakhel Tibetan refugee settlement, in Lalitpur, Nepal. 11 May 2012.

²⁰⁸ Group discussion with Tibetan youths of Tashi Palkhiel refugee settlement, in Pokhara region, Nepal. 2 May 2012.

²⁰⁹ Norbulinka was the summer residence of the Dalai Lama in Lhasa up to 1959.

²¹⁰ Tenzin, interview #80, Tibet Oral History Project.

²¹¹ Samten, son of an ex-Khamba fighter, member of the Regional Tibetan Youth Congress and Tibetan elderly home worker, Tashi Palkhiel Tibetan refugee settlement in Pokhara region, Nepal. 6 May 2012. Denpa, NAN member, in Bouddha, Kathmandu, Nepal. 15 May 2012.

²¹² Dorjee, HURON associate, in Kathmandu, Nepal. 26 April, 2012.

responsibility and agency) reappearing in some narratives on the violence that sometimes accompanies Tibetan protests.²¹³ Many exiles, when asked whether violence did occur during exile protests initially followed Ngawang assertion: ‘whatever we do, we do it in non-violence.’²¹⁴ However, when probing deeper, other stories emerged:

Whatever prayer we do, His Holiness [the Dalai Lama] picture is always there. When we threw the banner with his picture from the building, then the police came on top [of the building] and began removing the picture. Then the peaceful prayer turned out violent; *became violent because the police removed it* and started kicking it²¹⁵ and beating old people and woman with children. Young people that where fighting they were fighting not because of personal anonymity but because they see the policeman beating the old person. The people couldn’t take it; that’s how the crowd started to protest. Whenever any NGO organize anything, they always try to do it non-violence. But somehow it always turns out violent (emphasis added).²¹⁶

Sometimes when Tibetans demonstrate *it looks like fighting but it is not*. Tibetans [are a] little bit violent *because police beat the woman*; man to man is ok. We say stop but if they [the Nepalese police] not stop we try to go and challenge; if they do unfair we have to go for them. We are *allowed* to shout and fight when people are treated like animals. If this is violence or not I do not know (emphasis added).²¹⁷

Clear parallels between the emergence of armed resistance to the Chinese in Tibet and the inception of violent actions in non-violent protests are observable in these narratives. From an emic perspective it is again the behaviour of the opponent (the Nepalese police) which drives the exiles into a violent reaction; actions that are legitimized by the intention to protect the old people, woman and children. The violent conducted by exiles thus becomes a mere reaction to

²¹³ Violent action in Nepal took form as throwing stones (10 March 2008 and 11 November 2012) the storming of the Chinese embassy in Hattisar, Kathmandu (8 May 2008) and scuffles with the Nepali police (16 April 2008, 17 April 2008, 10 March 2008, 6 July 2011). Further I spoke sometimes with the study participants about the riots in Lhasa which took place in the shadow of the Beijing Olympics in 2008 (ICT 2010:48).

²¹⁴ Ngawang, daughter of ex-Khamba fighter, president of the Regional Tibetan Youth Congress and Tibetan elderly home worker, Jawalakhel Tibetan refugee settlement, in Lalitpur, Nepal. 11 May 2012.

²¹⁵ Just like in the Middle East showing the sole of one’s foot is taken as a sign of disrespect in Nepal. The phrase ‘started kicking it’ thus could be interpreted as a big insult, especially when the depiction is of ‘His Holiness the Dalai Lama’

²¹⁶ Tenzin, assistant-director carpet factory and master of ceremony, Jawalakhel Tibetan refugee settlement, in Lalitpur, Nepal. 16 and 19 April 2012.

²¹⁷ Dalha, former TWO associate and currently shop owner, Pokhara 29-04-2012

the violence enacted by the police which is seemingly held responsible.

Although one can perceive some hints that responsibility for the emergence of violent action is transferred to the opponent, after all the exiles 'react', there are more concrete examples of this phenomenon. Following statements suggests that it is not only the etic perspective which shows this; some exiles literally abdicate responsibility for violent behaviour and transfer it to 'out-group' members:

Sometimes Nepali people join the peaceful demonstrations and protests and *they* throw stones (emphasis added).²¹⁸

Sometimes the Tibetan people do violent but *they come from elsewhere* and are paid by the Chinese to make trouble (emphasis added).²¹⁹

Last year in Kathmandu, we organised one demonstration program. Inside our group, a number of poor people (send by the Chinese people) *they began to throw the stones* to the armed police [force]. (...) Only the people that were send by China used violence, we believe. *It may happen even inside the Tibetan people, being emotion, that they throw the stones to Nepalese bullies, Nepalese cops. But we do not think so.* Because we have some proof some information: remaining inside Bouddha Stupa area, I have heard that a number of, two or three, Tibetan families they were funded by the Chinese government and they were playing the role of spy. They give information about what is going on inside Kathmandu valley and outside Kathmandu valley. (...) These people might send some other people to participate and create some problem. The Chinese [do not] want to see our demonstration being peaceful (emphasis added).²²⁰

Though we can take these accusations as possibly grounded in reality (there were more rumours of Chinese spies²²¹), Samten indicated that exiles may be involved in violent activities as well, although he does not believe that. Remarkably, he relates their involvement directly to being emotional, something also present in some of the earlier accounts (especially

²¹⁸ Dalha, former TWO associate and currently shop owner, Pokhara 29-04-2012

²¹⁹ Group discussion with Tibetan youths of Tashi Palkhiel refugee settlement, in Pokhara region, Nepal. 2 May 2012.

²²⁰ Samten, son of an ex-Khamba fighter, member of the Regional Tibetan Youth Congress and Tibetan elderly home worker, Tashi Palkhiel Tibetan refugee settlement in Pokhara region, Nepal. 27 and 28 April and 6 May 2012.

²²¹ Tachen Gambo for example said that there were 'spies, thousands of spies' in the Kathmandu valley. Tachen Gambo, ex-Khamba and shop owner, in Bouddha, Kathmandu, Nepal. 14 April 2012.

if one interprets ‘compulsion’ to be an emotion) and in turn closely connected to self-ascriptions of the Tibetan identity (as argued in chapter two). That this emotional dimension is further of importance in the emic view on how violent action can take place is often²²² attested and similar to the following statements:

So when His Holiness’ picture is taken away, people get angry and then they want an answer from the police; why they are doing this. That is how it starts. It is not like the people automatically go to the police and fight. It is not so that every time the youngsters are going to fight with the police. Sometimes. Because sometimes *when they are angry they cannot think at all* (emphasis added).²²³

When they beat us we lose our tolerance. *Emotional people lose everything*. When you have so much strong feeling, you lose your commitment and your control. Our side is also making lots of mistakes; once people are emotionally, *nobody can conquer* (emphasis added).²²⁴

Sometimes youths feel *very hot* [angry], and many *pressure from inside*. It is *natural*; sometimes they *could not control their emotions*. Then they think the best way is the take on the police with stones. We inform the protesters that they should not hit back; they should not throw back stones. You should remain calm; raise your voice but do not react to the police. That is what we inform the protesters, and tell them that it has to be non-violent as *much as they can* (emphasis added).²²⁵

Especially illustrating is this last view, for it captures how the actor, when crossing over from non-violent protest to violent activities, loses responsibility for his acts; emotions exempt

²²² ‘You cannot say: everybody every people always follow through non-violence; it is very difficult for them, they cannot control. Because Chinese police killed your mom your father your family members, it is so clear, *how can you control your anger*’ (emphasis added). Geshe, headmaster of a monastery school, in Bouddha, Kathmandu, Nepal. 14 May 2012. ‘The monks may not have been fully practised and forgot our identity and their monkhood. We want peace but when nothing changes we *become angry and lose control*. Only some can control themselves in those circumstances’ (emphasis added). Rinchen, chanting master in local monastery, Tashi Palkhiel Tibetan refugee settlement in Pokhara region, Nepal. 7 May 2012.

²²³ Ngawang, daughter of ex-Khamba fighter, president of the Regional Tibetan Youth Congress and Tibetan elderly home worker, Jawalakhel Tibetan refugee settlement, in Lalitpur, Nepal. 11 May 2012.

²²⁴ Dondup, president of the Regional Tibetan Youth Congress and Tibetan elderly home worker, Tashi Palkhiel refugee settlement, in Pokhara, Nepal. 28 April 2012

²²⁵ Tenzin, president of the Regional Tibetan Youth Congress president and student, Tashi Ling Tibetan refugee settlement in Pokhara region, Nepal. 30 April 2012.

rational thought and the actor appropriates the identity of a being driven by natural impulses. One is seen as rational, able to practice restraint, only till the emotional threshold is reached after which follows violence: they must try to control themselves until this is impossible. Accordingly, from this emic view violence becomes an act of natural causality, devoid of any agency or intention; there is no more choice to be made when the unconquerable force of nature takes over.

3.4.3 SELF-IMMOLATIONS, THE PROOF OF COGNITIVE DISSONANCE

When it comes to emic views on self-immolations in Tibet and Nepal we can discern the same tripartite structure so ominously present in narrations on the guerrilla's and violent actions accompanying 'non-violent' protests. Often²²⁶ the actions of self-immolators are placed in a reactive position to the actual reality of the Chinese occupation in Tibet, and said to be conducted to show the world the suffering of Tibetans and precipitate international support:

When you have nothing left in your life, people are so desperate they commit suicide. They are committing suicide in the name of six million people, not for themselves because all Tibetan now what happens. All the monasteries are educated with the communist philosophy. So the Tibetans, being religious followers of the Dalai Lama, cannot accept these kinds of things. *They are not given a choice*; they are forced to do this tragic re-education, how the Chinese 'beautifully' call it. They feel pressure a lot, because of this situation it has led to these desperate acts [i.e. self-immolations] of the

²²⁶ 'They are not let to practice their religions as we can here. So their toleration limit is crossed. Sometimes the Chinese security personal blocks their food and water supplies. They are not allowed to practice freely and they are learned whatever the Chinese want them to learn. As being a monk they have to study Buddhism, so if they are not let to study Buddhism then what is their purpose? Again they are tortured; it is better to burn out than to fade away.' Denpa, NAN member, in Bouddha, Kathmandu, Nepal. 15 May 2012.

'People giving up their life is all about the pressure from china. They do not have the right to do what they are doing. If you do not have the right to do what you do it is better... that's why they self-immolate themselves' Ngawang, daughter of ex-Khamba fighter, president of the Regional Tibetan Youth Congress and Tibetan elderly home worker, Jawalakhel Tibetan refugee settlement, in Lalitpur, Nepal. 11 May 2012. 'Those who are living [in Tibet] they are dying thousand times a day; they are dying and dying. The ones who immolated just die one time, that is finished; he is gone. Those ones who are living [in Tibet] now are dying moment after moment.' Sangye, headmaster of a monastery school, in Swayambunath, Kathmandu, Nepal. 23 May 2012.

'The decade long suppression makes the minds change of people. After so much and long pressure the people kill themselves.' Tenpa, working in customs, Tashi Palkhiel refugee settlement in Pokhara region, Nepal. 2 May 2012.

'The Tibetans who are self-immolating in Tibet most of the people say that they are doing it because they cannot bear the violent and brutal rule of the Chinese. It is better to self-immolate to stay under [the rule of the Chinese].' Tenzin, assistant-director carpet factory and master of ceremony, Jawalakhel Tibetan refugee settlement, in Lalitpur, Nepal. 16 and 19 April 2012.

monks and the nuns' (emphasis added).²²⁷

They are not doing this willingly actually: they know that doing such things are not good, that those go against Buddhism. They thought this is the only way to show the problems that we are facing. *They are not doing it willingly.* They have had enough living under those conditions: the harsh rules of the Chinese government (emphasis added).²²⁸

Accordingly, many²²⁹ exiles ascribed self-immolators the good intention of not wanting to harm others, an evaluation that makes their act in accordance with non-violence. Many followed Orgyen's line of thought:

Immolation is not violent because it doesn't have negative intention towards the Tibetan people and doesn't harm others. *That is a compulsion; it is compulsion to do like that.* After self-immolation we, the remaining people, we pray and pray and pray because he did that not for himself but for the country, for the positive purpose. That's why he will definitely be no sinner (emphasis added).²³⁰

This reactivity to Chinese treatment, and accordingly the compulsion that decreases responsibility for their violent deeds, is once again depending on the inability of the actors to freely decide to act; many exiles *seemed* convinced that the self-immolators didn't have a choice as observable in earlier quotes. However, in this regard one can also notice how some display a linguistic contradiction. For example Samten initially sais they 'chose a way to commit self-immolation', but later places this agency on 'compulsion':

²²⁷ Samten, son of an ex-Khamba fighter, member of the Regional Tibetan Youth Congress and Tibetan elderly home worker, Tashi Palkhiel Tibetan refugee settlement in Pokhara region, Nepal. 6 May 2012.

²²⁸ Tenzin, musician and teacher in the local Tibetan school, Tashi Palkhiel refugee settlement, in Pokhara region, Nepal. 5 May 2012.

²²⁹ 'First thing because it is not violent; the self-immolation that they are doing, not all self-immolations, self-immolations that Tibetans are doing in Tibet are a form of non-violence.' Sangye, headmaster of a monastery school, in Swayambunath, Kathmandu, Nepal. 23 May 2012.

'I would say that is non-violence. Self-immolations is basically hurting oneself. It is not like you are intentionally hurting someone else. I feel that is non-violence.' Sonam, student, in Thamel, Kathmandu, Nepal. 17 May 2012.

'Non-violence means not to create problems for others, not to kill others. That's why I commit suicide myself, it means I am not disturbing others life. I disturb my own life, that's not violent it is non-violence.' Samten, son of an ex-Khamba fighter, member of the Regional Tibetan Youth Congress and Tibetan elderly home worker, Tashi Palkhiel Tibetan refugee settlement in Pokhara region, Nepal. 6 May 2012.

²³⁰ Orgyen, ex-Khamba, Jampaling old-age home for Tibetan guerrilla fighters, in Pokhara region, Nepal. 3 May 2012.

Tibetan people living in Tibetan they have only one right that is giving breath and taking breath, just respiration system. Except that, they do not have other rights. (...) That is why a person who cannot tolerate, who cannot bear that kind of injustice and problems created by the Chinese government. Finally *they chose a way to commit self immolation*.

Self-immolation is not a good thing in the name of Tibetan religion, in the name of Tibetan Buddhism. But that is not our wish that is not our desire to do as a fashion, as a hobby. *That is our compulsion* (emphasis added).²³¹

Although this instance could be based on a semiotic misinterpretation of the author, other statements display a same indecisiveness when it comes to free choice:

In Tibet I do not think that they have the choice, really *I do not think they have a choice*. Those who are not died [i.e. living] they are dying more times, every moment they are dying; all the torture all the things. So for them [the self-immolators] *there is no much choice* (emphasis added).²³²

While Sangye marginally contradicts himself when talking about no choices and not so much choice, Ngawang's view on this matter clearly displays two conflicting cognitions:

They [the self-immolators] *have no choice*: everyone loves their own life. They made a very big decision: firing their own self. *They choose it*, even though they know how much it is going to hurt their body. They are in Tibet, they know the situation so well, that's why they self-immolate; *they thought of a best choice to give up their life* (emphasis added).²³³

Appealing as these instances are of a presence of the psychological tension required for cognitive dissonance, they do not show conclusive evidence that enables verification of the theory. Therefore, I will turn to how one study participant displayed an incontrovertible

²³¹ Samten, son of an ex-Khamba fighter, member of the Regional Tibetan Youth Congress and Tibetan elderly home worker, Tashi Palkhiel Tibetan refugee settlement in Pokhara region, Nepal. 6 May 2012.

²³² Sangye, headmaster of a monastery school, in Swayambunath, Kathmandu, Nepal. 23 May 2012.

²³³ Ngawang, daughter of ex-Khamba fighter, president of the Regional Tibetan Youth Congress and Tibetan elderly home worker, Jawalakhel Tibetan refugee settlement, in Lalitpur, Nepal. 11 May 2012.

manifestation of cognitive dissonance through denying the objective reality of death.

The author, puzzled by how many exiles could partially deny the violent quality of self-immolation, repeatedly asked why killing oneself did not directly frustrate the fundamental ethic characteristic of non-violence (i.e. do no harm) and so would not become violence. Often this was not surprisingly attributed to the positive intention and the outcome due to the purported motivation of the self-immolators to help spread knowledge about Tibet. However, three²³⁴ exiles exhibited clearly a cognitive dissonance, one of them exactly showing how his cognitive dissonance reconciled the conflict that occurred when violent action is employed to help others. Here presented is the most coherent and lucid example:

Author's question: Is self-immolation violence?

Geshe's answer: No, it is not violence, this is hundred percent peaceful.

Author's reply: But it is suicide; killing one self does go against doing no harm?

Geshe's answer: *This is not suicide, the word suicide means something different.* They fire themselves but it is not suicide. Suicide means you are suffering, you cannot survive in the world, and your problem is very big. You cannot control yourself then you suicide yourself, that is benefit to your life. They suicide..[corrects himself] fire themselves; they do not benefit their own life, they lose their life for the country. It looks like suicide but is not violence. It looks like suicide, you see suicide: he kills himself, but different motivation, different purpose, different goal. Suicide means kill themselves; their action is the same as suicide, but different result different purpose different goal. So we can say this is not violence (emphasis added).²³⁵

²³⁴ Author's question: is self-immolation suicide?

Tenzin's answer: Kind of suicide. If army [a soldier] is going in war and gets killed, that is also suicide: when he goes in war he knows he can be killed so it is also a kind of suicide. The self-immolators are a kind of soldiers. Denpa, NAN member, in Bouddha, Kathmandu, Nepal. 15 May 2012.

Author's question: Is putting yourself on fire violence?

Dawa's answer: Non-violence I think because they do not make problem for others India or China or other country; only problem for himself.

Author's question: Is putting yourself on fire is suicide?

Dawa's answer: Yes.

Author's question: You say putting oneself on fire is non-violence?

Dawa's answer: Suicide is violence. Dawa, carpet factory worker, in Bouddha, Kathmandu, Nepal. 18 June 2012.

²³⁵ Geshe, headmaster of a monastery school, in Bouddha, Kathmandu, Nepal. 14 May 2012.

Here we can see the thin line between the semiotic value of a word and the actual ‘reality’ it refers to from an emic perspective. The word ‘suicide’ can hardly be seen as having a different semiotic meaning than what it implies; an objective outcome, namely death, connected to a preceding *intentional* individual action, namely self-inflicted harm. The word is not an abstract concept open for interpretation: it describes the reality of a causal event. Consequently, Geshe experiences psychological tension for he cannot interpret the word without acknowledging its objective meaning. Suicide, the sin, conflicts with his ‘virtuous’ perception of the martyrs’ deeds, their self-immolation. This results in a conflict between his beliefs, which have determined the act of self-immolation to be non-violent, and the concrete cognition of self-inflicted death, which he sees as sinful for it is violence. This incongruence between his beliefs and what he perceives can consequently only be mitigated by means of cognitive dissonance. Accordingly, he *contextualizes* the objective causality the word ‘suicide’ implies, and so adds cognitions through which he can sustain the mental image of self-immolation as virtuous and non-violent; consequently positioning suicide as its antithesis.

Concluding, when synthesizing this finding with the emic variables and characteristics of ‘non-violent’ behaviour, we find the crux of the cognitive dissonance possibly experienced by other exiles as well. The knowledge generated from the narrative-analysis of past and present contentious actions, illuminates how acts, ‘appearing’ to be violent, can be judged qualitatively as non-violent depending on the reciprocal relation between first the context in which the actors is situated, and secondly the identity the actors begets in that context. Therefore, the concept of non-violence was impossible to capture in an emic definition; usually the definition of a concept determines the context, but in the case of the emic view on non-violence, it is the context in which the behaviour appears that defines the concept of non-violence, and determines the quality of an action accordingly.

CONCLUSION

Socio-economical factors make that Tibetan exiles in Nepal are strongly imbued with a sense of Tibetanness, an identity strongly entangled with a need to remember, and struggle for their ancestral homeland. The socio-economical circumstances under which exiles live their lives conserves their out of place quality as stateless nationals and refugees, and so prevents them from full (social) integration in Nepali society, a condition that arguably arouses and solidifies the wish to return to a freed homeland, Tibet. A wish further nurtured in young exiles by means of the Tibetan education system and orally transferred history which teaches the historical entitlement on Tibet, said to be sovereign once and inherently not part of China. Further, the generations born in exile are made aware of the suffering Tibetans in Tibet endure by means of morally coloured history that should arouse a feeling of responsibility vis à vis their country and fellow Tibetans. In this way young exiles are animated to become ‘the future seeds of Tibet’ for they are exposed to the moral obligations that could drive behaviour aimed at bringing injustice taking place in Tibet to an end.

Buddhism, the cornerstone of the cultural identity of exiled Tibetans, is indirectly enchaind with the struggle for it must not purely be seen as a religion but as a state of mind. For lay people it represents what could be called a religious tradition that embodies a set of shared moral values focused on altruism. Adherence to Buddhism, and thus following these values, seems to be instrumental in establishing a feeling of belonging to the Tibetan collective among exiles. Moreover, Buddhism as a system of moral guidance combined with the knowledge about the hardship endured by fellow Tibetans in the occupied homeland, forms a highly influential factor that perpetuates engagement in initiatives aimed at benefiting the *national* community of Tibetans.

The cultural identity of exiles additionally merges with the struggle by means of two invented traditions, Uprising Day and the Pawo-Pamo tradition, that apply to the commemoration of the invasion of Tibet and the sacrifices made by Tibetans in the struggle for their homeland. Contrasting to Uprising Day as a relatively established practice, the Pawo-Pamo tradition seems to be just recently instituted as reaction on the many self-immolations in Tibet. This is corroborated by empirical evidence that suggests it is still in a socialization process; the tradition takes different forms in different places and emic perspectives on its character, aim and contend are diverse and sometimes conflicting. However, the traditions are both inherently linked to actions contesting the Chinese occupation and so intimately place the struggle in the cultural repertoire of Tibetans living in exile. They could even be partially

meant to remind of the struggle and stimulate exiles in contributing to the cause. It is therefore not surprising that the empirical evidence presented, signals that the self-immolators as martyrs become cultural symbols of resistance in their capacity as cosmic heroes fighting for the restoration of the natural order of things. Additionally, the findings produced in this thesis suggest that some younger exiles are indeed susceptible to the message of these traditions for they subscribe that they have the moral plight to take part, or at least contribute to the struggle in some way.

Many of the elements described above converge in the manner exiles perceive their Tibetan identity from an emic perspective. Buddhism, par excellence, together with primordial symbols form the basis on which many exiles ascribe themselves a Tibetan identity. Nevertheless, a Tibetan identity is held by individuals who are brought up and raised in Nepal and so disconnected from Tibet itself. Though it was said that adherence to the Tibetan cultural practices was one of the main elements that made exiles Tibetans, it was clear that especially youngsters displayed signs of assimilation in Nepali culture. This led the author to conclude that, from an etic perspective, some exiles seemed to show that their Tibetan identity was not self-evident anymore. This observation, combined with the often expressed wish to return to the homeland, makes it not surprising that a refugee identity, despite its negative connotation, almost seemed to be cherished and clung on too by some exiles.

Moreover, these observations were interpreted (from an etic perspective) as feelings of inauthenticity, feeling that could only be mitigated through two constructed cognitions, namely a mental pain and a sense of duty to the collective. The first cognition seemed to expel this etically perceived lack of authenticity through the construction of an ambiguous *physical* connection to this identity, the pain of being a refugee. Additionally, it was evident that many exiles affixed their Tibetan identity to deontological demands or ethical feelings of 'responsibility' that focussed on altruistic action in respect to 'the community'. Applying reversed psychology, these actions were interpreted by the author as a verification mechanism through which exiles reinforced their feeling of Tibetanness and so possibly contributed to the suppression of feelings of inauthenticity. In other words, it was not 'being' a Tibetan that endowed a feeling of responsibility on the exiles; instead the emic feelings of responsibility and duty were interpreted (from an etic view) as verification of *truly* belonging to the national community of Tibetans. From these observations followed that exiles who felt a 'responsibility', constructed their Tibetanness in concordance with, and through the actions performed in servitude to the community. Accordingly the answer to the question 'how to be

a Tibetan' should be sought in the performance of this identity; when exiles enact their duty or responsibility to 'the community' they in effect perform Tibetanness and 'appropriate' this identity through action. In this way it may be clear that participating in protests and other (collective) contentious activities could be seen as individual contributions to the benefit of the collective and so a way to re-establish a Tibetan identity in exile. This was especially noticeable in the manner ordinary, daily life activities were sometimes labelled as part of a communal struggle; almost as if the need to struggle had ingrained psychological demands, which in turn aroused a compulsive need to be involved in some way or another.

Feelings of belonging not only stemmed from an individually felt obligation to enact deontological demands, but are also actively nurtured in the exile born generation by means of cultural symbols of resistance. The reciprocal relationship between community and individual, solidified through enactment of individual duties, is further established, almost imposed, by older generation exiles by means of a social convention; a convention that endows a relational obligation on the new generations and indicates that the struggle is far from over. Predominant in this convention is the Pawo-Pamo tradition; the martyrs are elevated as role models who performed the ultimate sacrifice for the collective; they gave even their life for the community. Presented as the ones who sacrificed everything, they demand gratitude and respect, symbolised in multiple and diverse proceedings of the Pawo-Pamo tradition. Younger exiles from a young age on hear stories about Chinese conduct in Tibet are so presented with the martyrs as virtuous resisters; a dynamic which seems to be meant as conditioning rites the passage or what I coined the convention to struggle. Subsequently, from childhood on they are stimulated to pull their weight and contest the Chinese occupation of Tibet. Admittedly this research was far too limited to ascertain the effects of this social pressure to contribute; however it appears as if it already had profoundly impacted on some exiles, young and adolescent, in the few years this tradition has been part of the cultural practices of exiled Tibetans.

While a sense of altruism and a felt need to contribute to the wellbeing of a community can hardly be seen as negative values, they become possibly dangerous in the Tibetan context when synthesized with their emic conceptualization of non-violence. As deduced from the emic narratives on violent actions, many exiles determine the definition of non-violence along the context in which an action is conducted. This thus entails that the quality of an act, violent or not, becomes not an objective condition but a contextualized subjective value judgement. Conjoined with Buddhist compassion that urges helping others, paralleled by a tendency to impregnate young exiles with a convention to struggle, in this line

of etic thought, could have serious consequences as demonstrated by the already growing number of self-immolation ‘attempts’ in South Asia.

Considering the contextualized definition of non-violence, how should its ideal prevent the blowing up of train tracks? Taking it further, what will prevent young generations from walking this line, since it does not harm anyone? Admittedly, this research cannot say anything about where and when the construction of Tibetanness *causes* the actual enactment of such actions, it however gives reason to believe that the enactment of unspecified ‘actions’ seem to become integral to *being* Tibetan, and so a lasting phenomenon. When considering that the emic views attest an indefinite continuation of the struggle, we can discern some important questions to ponder on. The most important one being; what will happen in the aftermath of this unprecedented wave of self-immolations when they do not have any tangible effects?

APPENDICES

APPENDIX: A. SELF-IMMOLATION EVENTS AMONG THE DIASPORA IN SOUTH-ASIA:

27 April, 1998

Thupten Ngodup is the first known Tibetan to self-immolate at the site of an indefinite hunger strike in New Delhi, India. He was the first Tibetan to receive (post-mortem) the laurelling title '*Pawo*' (Tib. brave male) and to honour him a martyr statue was erected in Dharamsala.

2 November, 2011:

A middle aged Tibetan woman named Sonam Choedon attempts to set herself on fire on the second day of the Global Action campaign in Jawalakhel based Tibetan refugee settlement, Kathmandu. That same day Nepal police arrests 10 women and 8 men who were suspected of planning to put them self on fire in Bhanimandal based Tibetan refugee settlement, Lalitpur.

7 November, 2011:

A Tibetan youth named Migmer Tenzin, sets himself on fire in front of the Chinese embassy in New Delhi, India. He survives after the Indian police extinguished the flames.

10 November, 2011:

A middle aged Tibetan monk named Buthak, sets himself on fire near Bouddhanath Stupa, Kathmandu. He survives after the 'bystanders' extinguished the flames.

26 March, 2012:

A Tibetan youth and member of the TYC who fled Tibet 5 years ago, named Jampa Yeshe, puts himself on fire during a Tibetan rally in New Delhi, India. The TYC is planning to erect a martyr statue for him.

2 April, 2012:

A Tibetan youth named Dhondup Phuntsak while wearing a 'Free Tibet' t-shirt jumps of a bridge connecting Howrah and Kolkata, India. Before jumping he had send a text message with information about his plan self-immolate to Rubi Mukherjee, a member of an NGO that works with Tibetan refugees in India.

APPENDIX: B. TIBETAN CONTENTIOUS ACTIONS AND POLICE REACTIONS IN NEPAL

Actions involving the New Age Network are marked with an *.

Number of arrest must be held as indicator and are not necessarily absolute.

10 March, 2008

Tibetan rally headed for the Chinese embassy in Baluwat (Kathmandu) to mark the Tibetan Uprising Day and demand liberation of Tibet and free movement between Nepal and Tibet. The protestors clashed with the police and pelted stones at them after the latter blocked the rally at Chuchepati. Sarbendra Khanal, superintended at the metropolitan police Kathmandu said that the officers rained *lathis* (bamboo sticks) on the refugees.

155 Tibetans arrested and detained.

***17 March, 2008**

Tibetan protestors clash with Nepalese police during a protest outside the UN complex in Pulchowk (Kathmandu) were they demanded an end to the killing in Tibet and cancelation of the 2008 Olympics. Clash ensued when the police tried to disperse the refugees. Five security personnel, including one inspector were injured.

59 Tibetans arrested and detained.

***25 March, 2008**

Tibetan rally held outside the Chinese consular and state-run Xinhua news offices by around 150 protestors.

100 Tibetans arrested and detained.

***28 March, 2008**

In the morning twenty-five Tibetan students tried to stage a demonstration in front of the UN complex in Pulchowk (Kathmandu). Nineteen of them sought refuge inside the complex by climbing over the wall when police began arresting them.

6 Tibetan students arrested and detained.

In the afternoon eighty-three Tibetan protestors staged another protest in front of the UN complex in Pulchowk (Kathmandu) and demanded that the global body exert pressure on the Chinese authorities to stop the crackdown against Tibetans in Lasha, the capital of Tibet.

***30 March, 2008**

Tibetan demonstration in front of the Chinese embassy in Hattisar (Kathmandu). At least 84 Tibetans arrested and detained.

***31 March, 2008**

Tibetan demonstration in front of the visa section of the Chinese embassy in Hattisar (Kathmandu). They protested against the crackdown in Lasha, the capital of Tibet. Two persons including a policeman were hurt when refugees tried to resist the police action. 57 Tibetans arrested and detained.

2 April, 2008

Tibetan demonstration headed towards the Chinese embassy.
71 Tibetans arrested and detained.

Sherpa Association of Nepal expressed concern about the use of force to control the peaceful demonstration of Tibetan refugees and issued a press statement wherein the association condemned 'the inhumane activities against peace-loving Buddhists'.

3 April, 2008

Nepal Tibet solidarity Committee (NTSC) announced on 1 April that it was putting off its demonstrations in Kathmandu from 7 April in view of the approaching Constituent Assembly (CA) election in Nepal.

***15 April, 2008**

Tibetan demonstration in front of the visa section of the Chinese embassy in Hattisar (Kathmandu).
128 Tibetans arrested and detained.

***16 April, 2008**

Tibetan demonstration in front of Chinese embassy in Hattisar. Protestors demanded that the Chinese government stops the killing and cultural genocide in Tibet, provide treatment to all those injured in recent Tibetan protests, allow the UN, human rights organizations and journalists to visit Tibet and direct talks with the Dalai Lama. The demonstration ends in a scuffle with the Nepalese Police.
116 Tibetans arrested and detained

***17 April, 2008**

Tibetans staged a demonstration in front of the Old Chinese embassy building. Protesters demanded that the Chinese government stop the killings and cultural genocide in Tibet. Demonstration results in a scuffle with the police and the largest number of Tibetan arrests ever made in Nepal up till this date.
500 Tibetans arrested and detained.

28 April, 2008

About 3,000 Tibetans (mostly monks and nuns) held a demonstration away from the

centre of Kathmandu. This was the first time since the near daily demonstrations began on 10 March that the police did not stop the gathering. They had orders to allow the protest to take place as long as no anti-china slogans were chanted. The protest began in *Swayambhu* and moved to the United Nations Human Rights office where they handed a statement urging the world body to investigate alleged killings and other Human Rights violations in Tibet.

6 May, 2008

Dalai Lama's envoy rubbishes China's terror charge which accused the Tibetan Youth Congress as connected to Al Qaida. The envoy stated "it is absolutely baseless. Tibetans are by nature non-violent and peaceful and have nothing to do with terrorism".

***8 May, 2008**

Tibetans staged a demonstration in front of the Chinese embassy in Hattisar waving flags and chanting slogans like "We want peace in Tibet". The embassy was subsequently stormed by the protestors.

Over 200 Tibetans arrested and detained.

***11 May, 2008**

First large woman's protest, place unknown. Protesters were shouting anti-Chinese slogans wore black armbands and had their mouths gagged with cloths. 562 Tibetans arrested and detained, of which 535 women.

12 May, 2008

Zhang Xiang Li, Chinese embassy to Nepal, urges the government of Nepal to take action against "The separatist Tibetans demonstrating in Kathmandu." "The activities of these monks and nuns should be clearly defined and they should not be allowed to participate in political activities".

He further criticised the United Nations: "United Nations staffers are present at demonstrations. This is a serious violation of the UN charter".

***15 May, 2008**

Nepal Tibetan solidarity forum called on all protesting Tibetans to refrain from staging anti-China protests for a limited period in relation to the devastating earthquake in Sichuan province (China) on 12 May, 2008.

20 June, 2008

Hundreds of Tibetans took to the streets in a silent march from the Tibetan Refugee Reception Centre to *Swayambhu* to commemorate World Refugee Day.

Three Tibetan leaders were arrested under the charge of provoking anti-Chinese activities in Nepal.

- Kelsang Chung, director of Tibetan Refugee Reception Centre.
- Ngawang Sangmo and Tashi Dolma, senior leaders of the Tibetan Woman's Association.

27 June, 2008

50 Tibetans arrested and detained.

***8 August, 2008. Opening day of the Beijing Olympics**

Tibetans staged a demonstration outside the visa and trade section of the Chinese embassy, in the words of a Tibetan student, to “give the millions of people who will watch the opening (ceremony) as well as the hundreds of athletes taking part the message that there are no human rights in Tibet”. Some Tibetans had painted ‘Free Tibet’ on their faces or headbands. Eventually the mass tried to break through the police cordon surrounding the embassy leading to the largest number of arrests till this date.

1400 Tibetans arrested and detained.

***14 August, 2008**

Tibetans staged a demonstration outside the Chinese embassy, shouting anti-Chinese slogans and eventually tried to break through the police cordon around the embassy. 1068 Tibetans arrested and detained.

***14 July, 2009**

Small Tibetan protest took place in front of the United Nations complex in Pulchowk, Kathmandu.

15 Tibetans arrested and detained.

***14 August, 2009**

Small Tibetan protest took place in front of the United Nations complex in Pulchowk, (Kathmandu). The protestors demanded justice for the killings in Tibet last year 25 Tibetans arrested and detained.

2 September, 2009

A Chinese delegation was greeted by a small group of Tibetan protesters shouting anti-Chinese slogans when the officials emerged from the Hyatt Regency Hotel in Kathmandu.

7 Tibetans arrested and detained.

1 October, 2009

The day of the 60th anniversary of the People's Republic of China sees 700 security personal fielded by the Metropolitan Commissioner's Office to ward of Tibetan protests and protect Chinese embassy and nationals. Tibetans protested in many locations across

Kathmandu; Hattisar, Thamel, Jawalakhel, Gaushala, Sohakhutte, Bouddha, Kamal Phokari and others.

38 Tibetans preventive arrested and detained.

At least 75 Tibetans arrested and detained from across Kathmandu.

2 October, 2009

Preventive arrest and detention of two Tibetans.

6 July, 2010

Hundreds of police, deployed in monasteries and Tibetan settlements arrested and detained dozens of Tibetans, the latter being on their way to join the celebrations for the Dalai Lama's 75th birthday. Laxmi Prasad Dhakal, Kathmandu district administration chief, told that the exiles are allowed to celebrate the Dalai Lama's birthday inside monasteries and refugee settlements under the condition that there would be no sign of slogans or banners protesting against China.

At least 300 Tibetans arrested and detained.

***30 August, 2010**

Nepalese police held two exiled Tibetan leaders for possessing Pro-Tibetan pamphlets and allegedly indulging in anti-China activities. They were identified as Kelsang Nordup (33) and Tashi Dawa (23), the former being the president and the latter a central committee member of the New Age Network.

2 September, 2010

Nepalese government mobilized 600 security forces in Kathmandu to prevent anti-China demonstrations on Tibetan 'Democracy Day'.

10 December, 2010

Around 400 Tibetans gathered in Bouddhanath Stupa to perform a prayer service to commemorate the day on which the Dalai Lama was conferred the Nobel Peace Prize in 1990 and his efforts for the movement for freedom of the people of Tibet. Nepalese police had taken security measures around the Chinese embassy and Consulate as well as in the Tibetan areas of Bouddha and Swayambhu.

9 March, 2011

Nepalese police mobilised 1,500 security personal, including Armed Police Force, in Kathmandu and increased surveillance in and around the Chinese Embassy, Consular Section Swayambhu and Bouddha in anticipation of Tibetan Uprising Day (10 March). The local administration further issued a prohibitory order on sit-in, assembly and demonstration in these areas.

10 March, 2011

Scuffle between when the police baton-charged the hundreds of Tibetans who gathered at Bouddhanath Stupa to conduct a prayer marking the 52th anniversary of Uprising Day. Police took national flags, placards, banners and headbands with pro-Tibetan slogans from the scene.

15 Tibetans arrested and detained, another 20 were injured.

6 June, 2011

Tibetans were holding a candlelight vigil at Bouddhanath Stupa to commemorate Phuntsok , a monk who set himself on fire in Tibet on 16 March to protest against Chinese rule in Tibet. The Tibetans wished for Phuntsok eternal peace and protested against the Chinese excesses in Tibet.

12 Free Tibet activists (including 2 Nepalese citizens) arrested and detained.

6 July, 2011

Hundreds of Nepalese police, enforcing a ban on the celebration of the Dalai Lama's 76th birthday at the Swayambhu based Namgyal Middle Boarding School, ended up in a small scuffle with exiled Tibetans. Further, dozens of police were deployed in and around the Chinese embassy and Bouddhanath Stupa to prevent Tibetan mass prayers from turning into anti-China demonstrations.

3 Tibetan monks arrested and detained.

1 November, 2011. Protest as part of the Global Day of Action for Tibet

A Tibetan mass gathering in Bhanimandal based Tibetan refugee settlement (Lalitpur) to pray for and express solidarity with their comrades in Tibet and wish eternal peace for the monks who had self-immolation in Tibet, began protesting and shouting anti-Chinese and Free Tibet slogans. There were posters and banners on display with the Dalai Lama and the Tibetans that self-immolated. Moderate force was used to disperse the protestors after they began pelting stones at the police.

Tibetans gathered in Jawalakhel based Tibetan refugee settlement (Lalitpur) for a mass prayer, which morphed into a protest when Nepalese police tore down a poster of the Dalai Lama displayed next to a banner with the photos of Tibetans who self-immolated in Tibet. More than 100 arrested and detained.

2 November, 2011

In Jawalakhel based Tibetan refugee settlement Tibetans themselves foil a bid of a local Tibetan woman who tried to put herself on fire in front of the police who were keeping the camp under a curfew imposed as reaction to the protest the day before.

Further, Nepal police foils an alleged bid of 18 Tibetans to set themselves on fire in Lalitpur. The Central Police News Section stated that 18 Tibetans, including 10 women, were arrested when the police received intelligence that they had come out of Bhanimandal based Tibetan refugee settlement (Lalitpur) carrying jerry cans filled with kerosene for the purpose of setting themselves on fire in the afternoon.

18 arrested and detained.

10 November, 2011

A Tibetan monk tried to self immolate during a Tibetan mass gathering of more than 600 at Bouddhanath Stupa commemorating the Tibetans who self-immolated in Tibet. His attempt was foiled by bystanders who extinguished the flames. Shyam Lal Gyawali Chief of the Metropolitan Police Circle, Bouddha, said “we think it was a planned bid not to self-immolate, but to earn cheap popularity and pose a threat to security”²³⁶.

²³⁶<http://www.thehimalayantimes.com/fullNews.php?headline=Tibetan+sets+himself+on+fire&NewsID=308790>

APPENDIX: C THE PEOPLE'S UPRISING SONG²³⁷

RISE UP!

Decade after decade

We who have been oppressed by the enemy,
Cruelly cutting our flesh down to the bones.

In the year nineteen hundred and fifty nine,
The patriotic people of Tibet desperate and without hope,
Rose up for the sake of truth.

Rise up! Rise up! All Tibetans
People of the world rise up and support us.
Bear witness to the truth.

The protector of the land of Tibet,
The great refuge giver, the all-seeing precious jewel
Is the leader of all Tibetans in Tibet and in exile.

The blood-covered hands of the enemy executioner
Imperialist china. We will drive you out of Tibet.
Rise up all patriotic people.
Imperialist china. We will drive you out of Tibet.
Rise up all patriotic people... Rise up!

²³⁷ The lyrics reproduced here are copied from a Tibetan schoolbook used in Tashi Palkhiel. Original text was presented in English in: Thakchoe, Tashi (compiled by). 2007. *Tibetan Lyrics Book 3*. New Delhi: Vee Enn Print-O-Pac. page 8.

APPENDIX: D PAWO PAMO SONG²³⁸

Those martyrs who were willing to sacrifice their life for their country
Oh Chenrezig*, please look after them and bless them
And I wish for the freedom of our country and the Tibetan people

The 10th of March (1959) is the day when the Tibetan people stood against the Chinese rule
Millions of people sacrificed their life for the country willingly
We respect their bravery and we salute them
Our brothers and sisters, under the harsh rule of the Chinese government
Faced the challenges and organized so many programs against the Chinese occupation

With whole our heart we remember and salute them
All the people of the three provinces stood as one unity
Hands on hands they faced every difficulty for the freedom of Tibet
The path the martyrs have shown us we should never forget

* Chenrezig = (in Sanskrit, Avalokiteshvara), the deity who embodies wisdom and compassion.

²³⁸ The lyrics reproduced here are copied from a Tibetan schoolbook used in Tashi Palkhiel. Original text was presented in Tibetan and is translated twice by the author with the help of different Tibetan exiles. The original Tibetan text was presented in: Author unacknowledged. (n.d.) Dance Teachers Reference Book. Delhi: Tibetan Educational Office.

APPENDIX: E POSTERS OF SELF-IMMOLATORS IN TASHI PALKHIEL



Above: Poster of Yamphel Yeshi in Tashi Palkhiel.

Below: Dawa and Karma showing the poster of Golok Sopa in Tashi Palkhiel.



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