

Diversity & Unity in Exile

Nationalism and Cultural Compromise in the Tibetan Diaspora

**Master Thesis for the completion of the Masters in Cultural
Anthropology: Multiculturalism in Comparative Perspective**

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*“My forehead at
thy feet
I bow to thee
the freedom fighters of Tibet
who never gave up
on their dreams.”¹*

¹ Tsundue, *Kora – stories and poems*, p 5

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Chapter 1

The fourth world Tibetans and their nationalism

Globalisation and the nation-state

*"the nation-state, as a complex modern political form, is on its last legs"*²

Multiple scholars have been predicting the end of the era of the nation-state. Globalization is making the nation-state too little for dealing with big problems and too big for dealing with little problems³, globalization further challenges the notions of 'bounded cultures' and notions of national citizenship. Nation-states are, because of migration flows, no longer 'one people, one state'. Guéhenno argues in his book "The end of the Nation-State" that the nation-state and the future of democracy is coming to an end because of the transition from the former "institutional" to the coming "imperial" age, which, according to him, goes hand in hand with the contemporary globalizing world. A "globalized" world is a world where "the costs of transport and communications [are] zero and the barriers created by differing national jurisdictions [have] vanished."⁴ In other words, a world where nationalities and nation-states will lose their grip on the world, will lose importance and might slowly cease to exist. Bauman sees this development as well when he states that global flows of capital and finance are no longer within the control of national governments. Because of this, "many of the levers of economic policy no longer work"⁵ and therefore "the 'nation-state', it seems, is eroding or perhaps "whithering away"⁶. As globalization proceeds at a dizzying rate, "as a material global civilization encompasses the earth [...], worldwide integration in economics, technology, communication, armament, and tourism is accompanied by the collective and cultural disintegration of older political entities, in particular of the nation-state."⁷

If the importance of the nation-state is diminishing, then why are there still new national identities resurrecting? Juergensmeyer sees a clear resurgence of new forms of ethno-religious nationalism surfacing in today's 'sea of postnationality'. Although some scholars see this resurgence of nationalism in areas such as the former Soviet Union, the Middle East and South Asia as evidence that globalization has not reached all quarters of the globe, Juergensmeyer sees that "this paradox of new nationalisms in a global world can be explained [...] as products of [...] several globalizing forces."⁸ Juergensmeyer does agree with some of the scholars who claim that the nation-state is 'eroding' or 'fading' but he sees in this 'fading' of the nation-state an opportunity and a need for new nationalisms to erect. This opportunity arises according to him because "the old orders seem so weak and the need for national identity persists because no single alternative form of social cohesion and affiliation has yet appeared to dominate public life the way the nation-state did in the

² Appadurai, *Modernity at large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, p 19

³ Raven, *Globalia – een reisverslag*, p 20

⁴ Wolf, 'Will the Nation-State Survive Globalisation?', p 1

⁵ Bauman, *Globalization – The Human Consequences*, p 56

⁶ Von Wright in: Bauman, *Globalization*, p 56

⁷ Benhabib, 'Citizens, Residents and Aliens in a Changing World: Political Membership in the Global Era', p 85

⁸ Juergensmeyer, 'The paradox of Nationalism in a Global World', p 4

twentieth century.”⁹ And this is where we stand today. The nation-state might have lost a lot of its power, but it is still the most dominant way to ensure social cohesion, and it is still only the nation-state that can claim territory, that can have a voice in world politics, since it is the nation-state that “derives its legitimacy from serving as a sovereign entity for a nation as a sovereign territorial unit.”¹⁰ Theorists might claim that “the nation-state [...] is on its last legs”¹¹, I must say that the nation-state might still be 'running strong': “Until there is a surer sense of citizenship in a global order [...] ethnoreligious visions of moral order will continue to appear as attractive [...] to the problems of identity and belonging in a global world.”¹² Or, as Nietschmann states, “a nation is the world’s most enduring, persistent, and resistant organisation of people and territory”¹³, and the most predominant way to “legitimize statehood and claim rights to self-determination [still] is, in this contemporary world, through nationalism.”¹⁴

Malkki goes further still by stating that we not only think in the ways of the modern system of nation-states and nationalism, “but of a national order of things”¹⁵. By this she means to express how the nation-state has become an “apparently commonsensical system of ordering and sorting people into national kinds and types”¹⁶ and a “taken for granted exercise of power”¹⁷.

The fourth world

This resurrecting of new nationalisms as Juergensmeyer sees them is also noticed by fourth world theorists: “Indigenous nations everywhere are demanding the right to self-determination. They are asserting their sovereignty as distinct and autonomous nations of peoples.”¹⁸ The fourth world is the name given to “the indigenous peoples descended from a country's aboriginal population and, who today are completely or partly deprived of the right to their own territories and its riches. The peoples of the fourth world have only limited influence or non at all in the national states to which they belong.”¹⁹ The theory of the fourth world has been developed in acknowledgement of the limitations of the 'three worlds schema'. This schema is based on a conception of a “hierarchy of States delineated as the ‘Three Worlds’ [...] based on contrasts of ideology [...] and contrasts of wealth [...]. However, indigenous nations are not recruited to their political situation on the basis of either ideology or their economic well-being.”²⁰ Instead they are “peoples and political movements in the same moment of space and time”²¹. In other words, the people in the fourth world are deprived from interaction as equal members in this 'three worlds schema'. They can't truly participate since they haven't got a nation-state of their own. In

⁹ Juergensmeyer, 'The paradox', p 8

¹⁰ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nation_state (visited on 17-06-2009)

¹¹ Appadurai, *Modernity at large*, p 19

¹² Juergensmeyer, 'The paradox', p 16

¹³ Nietschmann in: Seton, 'Fourth World Nations in the Era of Globalisation - An Introduction to Contemporary theorizing Posed by Indigenous Nations', p 5

¹⁴ Kolas, 'Tibetan Nationalism: The Politics of Religion', p 61

¹⁵ Malkki, *Purity and Exile - Violence, Memory and National Cosmology among Hutu Refugees in Tanzania*, p 5

¹⁶ Malkki, *Purity and Exile*, p 6

¹⁷ Watts in: *Malkki, Purity and Exile*, p 6

¹⁸ Seton, 'Fourth World Nations', p 1

¹⁹ Dunbar Ortiz in: Sylvain, 'Disorderly Development: Globalization and the Idea of “Culture” in the Kalahari', p 395

²⁰ Seton, 'Fourth World Nations', p 1

²¹ Brough in: Seton, 'Fourth World Nations', p 1

this day and era where the nation-state is still the only form to participate in international politics, being part of the fourth world can be hugely problematic. Being a nation without a state seems to be a displacement in the contemporary 'national order of things'.

In this light it is not surprising that nations throughout the fourth world are seeking self-determination in the language of nationalism. When a nation is 'completely or partly deprived of the right to their own territories and its riches' it will start to search for ways to legitimize its struggle, and its only way of doing this is to use "nationalist arguments' [that] are claims to ethnic nationhood as a way of legitimizing claims to an independent state."²²

In a globalized world, people, news, money, indeed everything seems to travel fast. But it is not only the news that travels, also the ideologies behind it. Globalization enables ideologies to spread over the entire world, and thus enables people to learn and adopt other ways of highlighting their struggles. The spread of ideologies ensures that more and more people around the world get to learn the language of international politics. This is why it might be possible that in the future even more people will start to argue their struggle through the concept of nationalism. In this vision, it is globalization which feeds into nationalism. And it might mean that in the near future, more and more people in the fourth world will start to translate their struggle in the language of nationalism. Or, as Bauman states it: "Paradoxically, it was the *demise* of the state sovereignty, not its triumph that made the idea of statehood so tremendously popular."²³ These new nationalisms "owe their contemporary appearance and political salience to the hegemony of the nation-state as the modern model of political organisation."²⁴

One nation in the fourth world, the Tibetan nation, is one of those resurrecting new nationalisms. Tibetans started to present their case to the world in terms of nationalism. Anand sees this way of translating their struggle through nationalism as a modern phenomenon: "the need to present one's own community as a nation is a contemporary phenomenon."²⁵ It is modern, since "[c]ontemporary expressions of Tibetanness [...] [are] more a product of the processes of modernisation, colonialism and displacement, than of some historical nation."²⁶ And it is on this group of people and this nation, that I will focus in this thesis. I have conducted my fieldwork for this mastersthesis amongst the Tibetans in a large Tibetan settlement in North-India; Dharamsala-McLeod Ganj.

But before I elaborate on my fieldwork location and data, I will explore in this chapter why the Tibetans are, according to me, part of the fourth world and why they started to express their struggle through the language of nationalism. I will also explore some of the theoretical concepts which I used during my fieldwork before I will continue to my findings and my main arguments in the next chapters.

²² Kolas, 'Tibetan Nationalism', p 63

²³ Bauman, *Globalization*, p 64

²⁴ Wimmer, *Nationalist Exclusion and Ethnic Conflict – Shadows of Modernity*, p 9

²⁵ Anand, '(Re)imagining nationalism: identity and representation in the Tibetan diaspora of South Asia', p 273

²⁶ Anand, '(Re)imagining nationalism', p 274

The 'fourth world' Tibetans and China

China claims that Tibet is a part of China, and that China has had control over Tibet since the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368). China considers Tibet as a province, as a region within the People's Republic of China (PRC). The Tibetans in exile claim that Tibet is an independent country, occupied by China. One of the main disputes between the supporters and opponents of Tibetan independence is about the status of Tibet before 1950, especially in the period between 1912 and 1950, which would prove the fact that Tibet used to be an independent country or which would prove that Tibet was always a part of China. According to supporters of Tibetan independence, Tibet was an independent nation-state before the Mongol Empire occupied Tibet and was again independent between 1912 and 1951. Opponents of the Tibetan struggle say that the PRC rules Tibet legitimately, by saying that Tibet has been an indivisible part of China which was always exercising formal sovereignty and de facto power over Tibet.²⁷ An international commission of jurists have investigated the case and concluded that "from 1913 to 1950 Tibet demonstrated the conditions of statehood as generally accepted under international law. In the opinion of the commission, [...] Tibet [was] in practice [...] an independent State."²⁸ Goldstein, one of the main theorists in Tibetan history, states: "From [the overthrow of the Qing Dynasty] until 1951, Tibet functioned as a de facto independent nation, conducting all governmental functions without interference from China or any other country."²⁹ Many scholars agree that "[t]he Chinese argument that Tibet became a part of China under the Mongols is, on close examination, untenable."³⁰

The period in which Tibet was more or less independent, (from the beginning of and until the mid nineteenth century), is seen by China as a province rebelling . The invasion of Tibet by the 'People's Liberation Army' is seen as liberating the Tibetans from their feudal and backward system. According to Seton, it is often these kinds of terms that legitimize the deprivation of the rights of the people in the fourth world to their own territories and its riches. "The history of indigenous nations is often portrayed as 'peripheral' [and] 'backward' [...] by the dogma of colonialist notions of the 'progress' of 'civilisation'."³¹ Through the occupation of Tibet in 1950, the PRC turned the Tibetan people from being an independence nation in the 'three worlds schema', to being a nation in the fourth world, deprived from interaction as an equal member in this 'three worlds schema'. By choosing to call Tibetans who are pro- Tibetan independence the 'Dalai clique' which plots 'separatist activities', the Chinese try to portray them as separatist or terrorists. This is no uncommon practice according to fourth world theorists: "aggressive conflict between states is called war; a nation's defence against aggression by a state is called terrorism; and the aggressive invasion and occupation of a nation by a State is called development."³²

But it is not only the fact that Tibet used to be a self-governing, independent nation in history that supports the claim for an autonomous or even independent Tibet. The simple fact that Tibetan culture and its roots differs a lot from Chinese culture also supports this

²⁷ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tibetan_sovereignty_debate (visited on 19-06-2009)

²⁸ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tibetan_sovereignty_debate (visited on 19-06-2009)

²⁹ Goldstein, 'The Dalai Lama's Dilemma', p 84

³⁰ Norbu, 'Introduction: Tibet's independence', p 4

³¹ Seton, 'Fourth World Nations', p 2

³² Nietschmann in: Seton, 'Fourth World Nations', p 14

claim, “cultural preservation”³³ has therefore become one of the main concerns of the Tibetan exiles. “The differences between Tibetan civilization and Chinese civilization are vast. The Tibetan and Chinese languages are mutually incomprehensible”³⁴ explains the Tibetan exile writer Norbu. Moreover, the religion differs considerably. Both Buddhist religions have different roots, and “Tibetan and Chinese canons of Buddhist scriptures vary considerably.”³⁵ It is because of all these reasons that Tibetan exiles want to become their own nation-state, want to distinguish themselves from their 'occupying force'.

“Foreign rule is, in a world of nation-states, the worst of all evils. It contradicts the principles of both national representativity of government and equality before the law. In order to prevent foreign rule, no price is too high to pay and every citizen is called upon to prevent it.”³⁶

Tibetan nationalism

Since the failed people's uprising in 1950 against the Chinese occupation and the breakdown of this uprising by the Chinese forces in Lhasa (Tibet's capital city), Tibet came entirely under Chinese rule. This led to the fleeing of the Dalai Lama, the political and spiritual leader of the Tibetans in 1959, later followed by approximately 80,000 Tibetan refugees. This group of Tibetans has since then lived in exile around the world, most of them living in Nepal and India. Since their exile, the Tibetan diaspora has been struggling for either an autonomous, or an independent Tibet.

This struggle is often articulated or translated through political issues as nationalism, democracy and human rights. These issues are primarily Western concepts. The Tibetan case is thus articulated within a Western idiom, which is somewhat surprising since, according to Adams, Tibetan values bear more resemblance to Chinese values than to Western values. She argues that Tibetan values are, like Chinese values, more about the collective than the individual, what brings Tibetan values closer to Chinese than to Western internationalist values.³⁷ According to Kolas it is not necessary for the Tibetans to use this Western idiom, since “Tibetan buddhism, rather than secular nationalist ideology, provides vital idioms for the political discourse on Tibetan independence.”³⁸ Furthermore, she adds that “[t]here is no reason for Tibetans to argue in terms of nationalism, except towards an outside Western audience.”³⁹ Tibetans have thus learned the language of international politics in order to gain the attention and support of the international community, the 'outside Western audience'.

Another reason to present their case in international terms is that “the Tibetan exiles are concerned with distinguishing their political system from the system established by the Chinese government in Tibet”⁴⁰, in order to put more emphasis on their struggle for autonomy. To create distinguishing elements, the Tibetans have had to redefine their values and translate their values into a formerly unknown idiom. In representing their case

³³ Gellek, 'The role of buddhist institutions in the Tibetan diaspora', p 2

³⁴ Norbu, 'Tibet's independence', p 5

³⁵ Norbu, 'Tibet's independence', p 5

³⁶ Wimmer, *Nationalist Exclusion*, p 61

³⁷ Adams, 'Karaoke as Modern Lhasa, Tibet: Western Encounters with Cultural Politics', p 94

³⁸ Kolas, 'Tibetan Nationalism', p 51

³⁹ Kolas, 'Tibetan Nationalism', p 64

⁴⁰ Frechette, 'Democracy and Democratization among Tibetans in Exile', p 116

to the world, they have changed their idiom in order to create distinctiveness from China. “[T]he notion of individual rights becomes “owned” by the metropole and “free Tibet” activists while the notion of collectivism becomes “owned” by China”⁴¹.

The use of Western ideologies has not always been voluntary. Standards for communication within the political language are set by the most powerful participants; 'the West'. Facing their struggle, the Tibetan leaders began to realize that they would be forced to argue their case according to these standards. It is important to understand this, in order to realize why Tibetans started using the concept of nationalism in arguing their case. Before the Chinese invaded Tibet, the Tibetan people were not much of a unified nation. In fact, back then, identity was based on the main Tibetan regions and religious sects, there was no clear national identity (I will return to this subject later in this thesis). But a national identity, or nationalism, became important in the struggle for autonomy: “In order to gain recognition and support they would have to convince the world that Tibet had in fact been a 'state' according to the legitimate definition, with a permanent population, a defined territory, government, and the capacity to enter relations with other states. Closely related to the concept of 'permanent population' is the concept of 'nationhood'.”⁴² This statement made by Kolas is an important one. She recognizes the necessity of using the concepts 'state' and 'nationhood' for the legitimization of the claims the Tibetans exiles make to the Tibetan territory. These concepts are necessary to legitimize their claims to self-determination. The nation-state is *the* ordering principle in today's world and the “taken for granted exercise of power”⁴³. It is because of the existence of the international system itself that the nation-state has become so popular; “the United Nations, the OECD, NATO, the European Union etc. are clubs of nation-states that only accept similar entities as members – a considerable incentive to organise a state according to these principles, because only acceptance by the 'inter-national' community or, more tellingly, by the 'family of nations' would guarantee stability and continuity of the state form.”⁴⁴ But, for the Tibetans living under occupying force, more importantly, “the only institution of our times that is able to guarantee the minimal rights associated with the modern age: the nation-state.”⁴⁵ Thus, it is because of this that Wimmer sees the stateless people of our time as 'the pariah of the modern age'.

In the 'three worlds schema', the schema still used to order the world today, people have to be a state and a nation, thus a nation-state, to be able to claim a territory. This means that the Tibetan exiles need to show that they were a state, serving a nation in a certain bounded territory. This way of legitimizing their case gave them a great task: they needed to become a nation, to develop a national identity in order to gain support for their claims towards a Tibetan territory.

Appadurai sees the relationship between states and nations as an embattled relationship: “It is possible to say that in many societies the nation and the state have become one another's projects. That is, while nations [...] seek to capture [...] states and state power, states simultaneously seek to capture [...] ideas about nationhood.”⁴⁶ Tibetans have to show that they were a 'state', which implies the concept of 'nation' as we stated earlier. But

⁴¹ Adams, 'Karaoke', p 80

⁴² Kolas, 'Tibetan Nationalism', p 59

⁴³ Watts in: Malkki, *Purity and Exile*, p 6

⁴⁴ Wimmer, *Nationalis Exclusion*, p 78

⁴⁵ Wimmer, *Nationalis Exclusion*, p 194

⁴⁶ Appadurai, *Modernity at large*, p 550

the concept 'nation' also implies the concept of 'state' because "nationalist arguments' are claims to ethnic nationhood as a way of legitimizing claims to an independent state."⁴⁷ The concepts seem to become somewhat puzzling. The statement of Appadurai, of the state and nation becoming each other projects, seems to be true. But this doesn't make the concepts less significant in this case. Theoretically there may be numerous reasons to condemn the concept of the nation-state, but for the Tibetans, it is still the only way to create support and attention, the only idiom available in front of the international audience. So nevertheless, the Tibetans will need to create 'nation' and 'state'.

"Displacement and deterritorialization in the contemporary order of nations always presents at least two logical possibilities. The first is that a liminal collectivity tries to make itself "fit" into the overarching national order, to become a "nation" like others."⁴⁸

McLeod Ganj: the heart of the Tibetan diaspora

Since their exile, the Tibetan diaspora has been trying to create 'nation' and 'state' through multiple nation building policies. The fact that they try to create this through nationalism linked to a country 'out of their reach' is something that interested me. How can you become a 'nation' and a 'state' when you are a host in your resident country, while the vast majority of your 'nation' is unreachable, living under another governing power? With these questions in mind I headed out to India, to McLeod Ganj, a small suburb of Dharamsala. This was the place where I hoped to find answers to my questions concerning Tibetan nationalism. I decided to go to McLeod Ganj because it seemed to be 'the beating heart' of Tibetan nationalism; this is the place where the biggest agglomeration of Tibetans outside of Tibet live, it is where the residence of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, the spiritual and political leader of the Tibetans, is situated and it is the home town of the Tibetan government-in-exile. Subsequently, every year it attracts thousands of Buddhist pilgrims and tourists affiliated with the Tibetan cause, and literally dozens of Tibetan NGO's are located here. "Frequently referred to as 'Little Lhasa' [or little Tibet], Dharamsala has become the centre of Tibetan diasporic geography."⁴⁹ Because of all these reasons it seemed to me the perfect place to conduct the fieldwork for this master thesis in Cultural Anthropology. The main question I had in mind leaving for McLeod Ganj was:

"To what extent does a form of shared nationalist cultural compromise still exist when a diasporic community is divided into groups who envision their 'myth of homecoming' in dissimilar ways?"

I cannot say I came home with a satisfying answer to this question. The big division I expected to encounter, the division between different political standpoints; those who want to fight for an independent Tibet and those who want to negotiate towards an autonomous Tibet, didn't appear to be as big as I expected. I did however encounter another or actually, two other divisions I did not foresee. Those divisions will be my main focus in this thesis.

⁴⁷ Kolas, 'Tibetan Nationalism', p 63

⁴⁸ Malkki, *Purity and Exile*, p 4

⁴⁹ Yeh, 'Exile meets homeland: politics, performance, and authenticity in the Tibetan diaspora', p 662

As a theoretical concept, as seen in the main research question, I've used the concept of 'cultural compromise', a concept of A. Wimmer. In his book 'Nationalist Exclusion and Ethnic Conflict – Shadows of Modernity' he explains; "A cultural compromise [...] entails a certain way of defining the borders between us and them, a blueprint for organising exclusion and inclusion. The realisation of these principles through institutions of boundary maintenance is what I call, following Max Weber, a process of social closure. It can lead to the establishment of ethnic groups, nations, social classes, [...] and so on. [...] A cultural compromise emerges when the actors sharing a communicative space can agree that certain values are valuable and that certain modes of classifying the social world make sense."⁵⁰ In the contemporary society, nationalism is seen as the most important form of cultural compromise⁵¹. In this master thesis I will investigate to what extent cultural compromise exists in the context of diaspora and if it bridges the divisions inside the diasporic community. A cultural compromise is often designed and encouraged by state institutes through, amongst others, nation building policies. Although the Tibetan diaspora has no official 'state', since they are a 'stateless nation', they do have state institutes to some extent such as the government-in-exile with its multiple departments and offices throughout India and Nepal.

Fieldwork

My research has been shaped mainly by participant observation; participating in many activities as a participant as well as an observer. I've been trying to integrate as much as possible in the community. Considering the limited time, and simply by not being an exiled Tibetan, I realized that I would never be able to integrate entirely. Still, I have been able to participate in the community to a great extent. I have participated in demonstrations, candlelight vigils, political gatherings and national holidays. I have done some volunteer work for the Tibetan Womens' Association (TWA). This work mainly consisted of writing articles and helping to organize multiple forms of political activities and gatherings, which gave me a good look 'behind the scenes'.

Every Saturday I participated in the 'Talk Tibet' meetings, where exiled Tibetans met to discuss all sorts of subjects considered to be important for the Tibetan freedom struggle. I conducted 17 (semi-)expert interviews with people working for Tibetan NGO's or the Tibetan government-in-exile, and with people who were considered 'new arrivals' and 'political prisoners'.

All conversations were held in English. Sometimes this was a difficulty, and therefore I did use a translator on a few occasions. Fortunately the Tibetan schools in India have a high standard of English teaching, and therefore I have not experienced too much trouble language wise. Looking back at my fieldwork I consider the friendships I established as my most important information resource. Meeting people weekly (or sometimes even daily) creates a bond which made it easier for me to talk about sensitive subjects. Becoming friends created a closeness whereby I could really look below the surface. This was helpful to me, since I do feel that some people in the Tibetan community are too concerned with their reputation in the international community, which resulted in giving 'socially acceptable answers'. But I also have to admit that the younger, more politically schooled Tibetans are nowadays more and more critical of their situation and the role they have in it. Talking to

⁵⁰ Wimmer, *Nationalist Exclusion*, p 8

⁵¹ Wimmer, *Nationalist Exclusion*, p 53

some of these young, politically active Tibetans has really opened my eyes and inspired me to dig deeper, and to change my research focus.

A part of participant observation is reflecting on your role as researcher. One of the most prominent reflections is that I hardly established any friendships with girls or women. It was also because of this lack of female input that I choose to volunteer at the Tibetan Womens' Association. The gender aspect in this interested me a lot, but I choose not to deepen this aspect much, since it would mean an entire extra research topic. It did make me think of my role as a researcher. Since I was not single and very clear about that, the Tibetan boys and men with whom I 'hung around' with, soon lost interest in me as a possible girlfriend. To get in touch with more Tibetans I did go to restaurants and the town pub, which was not something most Tibetan girls do. My role soon changed into being 'one of the guys'. I believe it made my research easier, since it gave me the freedom to (almost) act as a guy, but by still being a girl, it also left the options open to engage with the Tibetan girls and women.

All the names in this thesis have been changed to ensure anonymity to those who wanted to stay anonymous. Those who didn't mind me using their names have nevertheless also been protected by false names to ensure the safety of everyone who took part. The Tibetan names have been changed into Western names.

In this chapter I have given extensive theoretical background information and practical information relating to my fieldwork and my research. In the next two chapters I will try to combine my fieldwork notes and all the information I gathered with existing theories. The next chapter will focus mainly on the difficulties of creating a cultural compromise, and the divisions in the exiled community. In chapter three I will focus on the opposite; the focus will be on 'unifying elements' within the community, on how the cultural compromise seems to succeed. In chapter four I will try to combine the divisions from chapter two with the unity from chapter three, and finally I will present my conclusion.

Chapter 2

Divisions in exile

India, McLeod Ganj, April 2009:

"I'm a bit late for a goodbye party for one of my friends. The party is being held at the most central place in town, McLo's, the most popular hangout place of McLeod Ganj amongst Indians, Tibetans and tourists alike. It is actually the only pub-like place in the entire area and also the only place still open after 11 o'clock (very late by Indian standards). When I finally show up in the room with too many paper lamps hanging from the too low ceiling, I find myself in an awkward position. I see that my friends are divided over three tables, prominently apart from each other, in separate groups. Where should I go? I don't know what to do, and I feel that I might disappoint people if I decide to stay on one table only. So I decide to keep on moving around, from the first table to the second, to the third, and so on. This party gives me a strange feeling. We are all there for the same party but obviously there is no mingling.

When two of my friends sitting remain sitting at the back of the room, and when I get tired of moving around, I ask them to go and sit with me at one of the other tables. They are hesitating, and tell me that they are fine just where they are. But I push a little, I want to have some fun and I think that the party will be much better if people start talking to each other a bit more. After a lot of rejections the two boys finally listen to my request and they join me and the other group. When I want to introduce them to the others they tell me they already know each other. They give each other a nod of the head and then they continue to ignore each other again. The groups stay divided. A bit closer, but still, no mingling going on here. I give up trying to get people to talk to each other, and go back to dividing my attention equally amongst all present friends.

A few days later I run into one of my friends who was also present at the party. We start talking about the party and I tell him what impression it gave me. I tell him that the whole situation of the separate groups was very strange to me and I ask him why he was hesitating so much when I invited him over to the other table. Normally, this friend always tries to give me a nice and sunny picture of the cohesion amongst the Tibetans, but now he answers honestly: "Well, I don't really hang out with them, you know. Those people from Amdo always want to get things the easy way. I don't like that." It is a phrase which sticks in my mind. Especially since it came from him, he, who always tries to speak positively about everyone and everything. When I think it through a little I recall that the one table where I was sitting was filled with newcomers, escaped from Amdo. The guys who I invited over were born in India, and their forefathers were from Kham. Apparently that was reason enough not to talk to each other. During some conversations with other people later on in my fieldwork I find out that Tibetans from Amdo seemingly have a reputation for being "lazy long haired guys who hang out with Westerners for money and do nothing but make trouble and drink beer". Interesting..."

During my fieldwork in McLeod Ganj this was one of my first obvious and visible encounters with regionalism. I never expected the regions from Tibet to be this influential in exile. Because of this encounter with regionalism and some others, I decided to change my main focus on the divisions between political standpoints (the Dalai Lama's middle way policy for autonomy versus the supposedly more radical plight for total independence) to regionalism and to the differences between exile-born Tibetans and the so-called 'newcomers'; refugees born in Tibet. This change was partly because I did not find huge divisions between the two different political standpoints as I expected there to be, but this change in the focus in my research was mostly motivated by the surprise these encounters

gave me, such as the one mentioned above. During my literature research before my fieldwork I did read here and there some small parts about regionalism, and Yeh especially writes about differences between 'exile-born' or 'exile Tibetans' and 'newcomers' or 'new arrivals'⁵², but these parts were never long, and they never gave me the impression that this had a big influence within the exiled community. But, after establishing some friendships with Tibetans from all parts of Tibet who were born both in India and Tibet, I realized that regionalism was far more influential, and sometimes even more visible and obvious, than I had ever imagined. My new research question changed to:

“To what extent does a form of shared nationalist cultural compromise still exist when a diasporic community is divided by regionalism from the home country and when divisions between 'exile born' and 'newcomer' occur?”

Before being able to answer this question I will first explore the originalities of regionalism and how nationalism was supposed to overcome this regionalism. Furthermore I will combine in this chapter some examples from my fieldwork with some existing theory, before coming first of all to a partial answer to my research question.

Regionalism

“Nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness: it invents nations where they do not exist.”⁵³

Before the Chinese invaded Tibet, the Tibetan people were not much of a unified nation. In fact, back then, identity was based on region and religion, there was no clear national identity.⁵⁴ Historically, political rule in Tibet did not cover all the three regions now seen as 'Tibet' by the government-in-exile; U-Tsang, Kham, Amdo. Political rule actually “did not exceed beyond U-Tsang (now the Tibet Autonomous Region), while Kham and Amdo (now part of Chinese provinces Qinghai, Sichuan, Gangsu and Yunan) were ruled by various small principalities with often overlapping influence.”⁵⁵ This is why Melvyn Goldstein invented the distinction between 'political' and 'ethnographic' Tibet; political Tibet was U-Tsang, ethnographic Tibet also included Amdo and Kham. “What bound the people in the regions was not an allegiance to one temporal authority, but certain commonalities of culture and religion.”⁵⁶ Duska also emphasizes the fact that Tibet was never entirely under Lhasa rule: “there was no immediate sense of pan-Tibetan nationalism. If the Eastern regions of Kham and Amdo were resistant to Lhasa based political power, Lhasa was unresponsive to their pleas for support in the early years of uprising against Chinese brutalities there.”⁵⁷ The fact that Amdo and Kham did not want to be under Lhasa rule, and that Lhasa did not at first help the Khampas during the first attempts by China to occupy Tibet makes me wonder how only 'certain commonalities of culture and religion' can be the

⁵² Yeh, 'Exile meets homeland', p 649

⁵³ Gellner in: Eriksen, *Ethnicity and Nationalism – Anthropological Perspectives*, p 96

⁵⁴ Kolas, 'Tibetan Nationalism', p 53

⁵⁵ Anand, '(Re)emagining nationalism', p 274

⁵⁶ Anand, '(Re)emagining nationalism', p 274

⁵⁷ Duska, *Harmony ideology and dispute resolution: a legal ethnography of the Tibetan diaspora in India*, p 104

basis for nationalism covering all the three provinces. According to Anand (2000) it is the interaction between modernity (the salience of the nation-state in the international community), Chinese colonialism and the experience of exile that gave political meaning to the common identity elements. Would these combining elements of modernity, colonialism and exile not have occurred, the few common elements between people from U-Tsang, Kham and Amdo could easily not have become important. In other words, in Anand's line of argument the basis for Tibetan nationalism could just as easily not be there under other circumstances. Duska emphasizes the necessity of the rise of nationalism, the need for shared identity elements because of exile: "Tibetan history has been marked by political intrigue across sectarian, regional, and class divisions. [...] The trauma and the stressed circumstances of the early years in exile exacerbated these divisive tendencies and disputes were legion. [...] Forgoing social cohesion and a pan-Tibetan identity anchored in religious norms was as vital to the psychological survival of the community, as humanitarian aid was to its physical survival. Regaining the homeland also required clearer, less fractious narratives if the goal was to attract the needed support of well-wishers."⁵⁸ Nationalism became a necessary instrument in the struggle against the occupying force China for Tibet and in order to form some sort of resistance, the people from Tibet needed to form more of a unity than ever before.

But the need for nationalism didn't ensure that everyone immediately acted upon it. Talking about regionalism with a Tibetan man who works for one of the many NGO's in McLeod Ganj he says: "*[regionalism] is an issue in the sense that it harms our unity. Because Tibet is so huge, there are differences between places. Some haven't really been under the rule of Lhasa, there was no political centre before the Chinese invasion. Like in Kham they had their tribes, people were bonding with their tribes. This whole group then came in exile. Now each group has their own interests. Sometimes there are differences between your interests and the nations' interests. In the beginning of exile, some tribes would have their own settlements, their own monasteries, they didn't want to be under the government-in-exile in those years.*"⁵⁹

"*[T]he regions still have a strong influence here, especially amongst the newcomers. It's like the people of one region help each other out. If someone is not doing good, people from the same region feel that they should help him. Also in the government-in-exile, there is a strong regionalism. People in the government-in-exile only give jobs to others from their region.*"⁶⁰ The fact that regions in Tibet still had huge influence in exile is also noticed by some writers like Yeh: "the Tibetan government in exile worked hard to forge a national Tibet identity to supersede divisive regional and sectarian identifications [...]. In exiled communities today there are still undercurrents of regional divisiveness, but, like 'Kham for the Khampas' movements [...], they are largely papered over in the transnational nation-building project of the Tibetan government in exile [...]. Tibetans in exile insist today that, "For more than two thousand years, Tibet ... existed as a sovereign nation". As Renan [...] has observed, "To forget and ... to get one's history wrong, are essential factors in the making of a nation".⁶¹ Yeh emphasizes in this fragment the 'creation of a nation', or as Gellner puts it: "Nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness: it invents nations where they do not exist."⁶² The fact that nations are created where there

⁵⁸ Duska, *Harmony ideology*, p 83

⁵⁹ Interview with Carlos, 16-04-2009

⁶⁰ Interview with Kaspar, 13-04-2009

⁶¹ Yeh, 'Exile meets homeland', p 651

⁶² Gellner in: Eriksen, *Ethnicity and Nationalism*, p 96

were no nations before is highlighted by some of the most influential social scholars (Anderson 2006, Gellner 2006) and therefore it is not surprising that this is also the case for the Tibetans. The 'making of a nation' needs to some extent the creation of a shared history, to supersede the divisions in history to be able to create unity in the nation. "[N]ations continually re-invent themselves and, in so doing, attempt to distance themselves from elements of the past that are inconsistent with present value schemas to be promoted."⁶³ The question remains if all this 'creating' and 'inventing' was done in such a manner that it blurred the regionalism from before in such a way that it is superseded with cohesion and unity in the Tibetan community.

The fact that "the 'imagined community' of Tibet as a *nation* and the belief that Tibetans should thus have a unique nation-state [...], emerged strongly only in the early 20th century, after the 13th Dalai Lama fled to India [...] and especially after the 1951 incorporation of Tibet into the People's Republic of China"⁶⁴ shows that the nation-building of the Tibetans as a nation has only started quite recently. "*It was only the 13th Dalai Lama who really declared Tibet to be one independent country. In exile he saw lots of countries having their own flag, so he started to create the Tibetan flag and our national anthem.*"⁶⁵

The Tibetans only started to develop nationalism shortly afterwards, and therefore it might not be so surprising that some of the prior affiliations (like regionalism, sectarianism) are still of substantial influence. Obviously, nation building policies need time to embed and to be totally internalized in a people.

In McLeod Ganj, the prior affiliations are still visible in daily life. The government-in-exile for example, has its parliament divided in groups of representatives based on the provinces of Tibet and Buddhist sects. People in exile can only vote for the representatives who originate from the same province of Tibet as they do. Especially for the younger generation born in exile this is sometimes puzzling since they themselves have no personal embodied experience with this affiliation, but are somehow still bound to the province their forefathers originate from through these policies. Furthermore, lots of restaurants and three shops in McLeod Ganj are owned by, for example, 'Amdos and therefore mainly visited by other Amdos. Most places mainly seem to attract people who originate from the same place or province as the owner and/or its staff. Some new restaurants even seem to only attract new arrivals where other restaurants proudly display that their restaurant is run by 'exile brothers', and therefore attracts the 'exile-born' youth (more about 'new arrivals' and 'exile-born' in the next paragraph). With this background information, it might not seem surprising that several stereotypes have come to the surface in the exiled community. Stereotypes "make it possible to divide the social world into *kinds* of people, and they provide simple criteria for such a classification. They give the individual the impression that he or she understands society, and stereotypes are crucial in defining the boundaries of one's own group."⁶⁶ Within the exile community I discovered some steady stereotypes:

- * *Khampas (people from Kham): criminal, harsh businessmen, tend to rip you off, fighters.*
- * *Amdos (people from Amdo): poor, lazy, irresponsible, partying, jobless, dreaming of going to the West.*
- * *Lhasa/ U-Tsang people: up-tight, looking down on people from Kham and Amdo, city people, always get the best jobs, too decent.*

⁶³ Duska, *Harmony ideology*, p 120

⁶⁴ Yeh, 'Exile meets homeland', p 650

⁶⁵ Conversation with Adam, 20-05-2009

⁶⁶ Eriksen, *Ethnicity and Nationalism*, p 25

* *Newcomers: animals, no manners, dirty, uncivilized, stupid.*

* *Exile-born: Stuck-up, better established, lost their roots, not Tibetan any more, Indian.*

The fact that these stereotypes seem to be persistent throughout the time being in exile seems to make the nationalist project more and more problematic. But, as Eriksen also notes, we should keep in mind that “actual interethnic relations may very well diverge from stereotypes as they are presented in conversations; that there may be a discrepancy between what people say and what they do.”⁶⁷ Still, as we can see in the next fieldwork note, stereotypes are indeed influential to how people interact with each other.

The 'exile-born' and the 'newcomers'

India, McLeod Ganj, may 2009:

After getting to know the first bits and pieces of how people from some Tibetan regions don't hang out with Tibetans from other regions I still have some things I don't understand. I start a conversation about the topic with one of my Tibetan friends; Ronald. He is a calm, friendly long-haired boy from Amdo with a lot of time on his hands since he quit the transit school, a school specially for newcomers. He can't find a job and is therefore quite lucky that some Amdo-friends let him live with them and sleep on their couch. He was bored today and invited me over on a sunny rooftop terrace for some cold drinks.

“But tell me, how come, if you are from Amdo, why do you refuse to join me to go to the other tearoom? Those guys working there are from Amdo as well, right?”

“Yes, but they are all from a very different, a very specific region in Amdo. I'm not from there at all.” Ok. I know Tibet is a huge country. I know the provinces are very vast. But this puzzles me. I ask him what kind of people he does and doesn't get along with. “Mostly I hang out with people from Amdo, or sometimes also with people from Kham. But I don't like people from Lhasa actually. They are quite uptight..” “Does it matter to you if they are born in Tibet or India?”

“Oh yes. I don't really meet a lot of exile-born people, they are really different, more Indian-like you know.” When we talk a bit further about differences I tell him about another Tibetan friend of mine, a 'Khampa' born in India. Suddenly, in the middle of our conversation, my friend says: “yeah... but you have to know that they are not really Tibetan.” And, once again this afternoon I am surprised. I ask why, he answers: “They're born here, they're Indian.”

Later a friend of Ronald, another guy born in Amdo, joins our conversation. They start talking about the disadvantages of being a 'newcomer' and of being from 'Amdo'. They agree; being from Amdo and being a newcomer is the lousiest background to get anywhere in this place.

The guy who has just joined us tells me that when he first arrived here he was searching for housing. “When the landlady talked to me she heard my accent and asked me if I was a newcomer. I told her yes. She responded with: “I never rent to newcomers.” Can you believe that? They all think we are too poor to pay rent.” Ronald agrees. He has been in similar situations. He says it is even more difficult for him, because he has long hair. “Only Amdos wear their hair long like this, so right away they know I'm Amdo, and people would rather rent to Khampas or people from U-Tsang.” And then they leave, leaving me alone on the terrace, puzzled and amazed in the sunshine. I decide to order an ice coffee, somehow I feel I really need it...

⁶⁷ Eriksen, *Ethnicity and Nationalism*, p 24

As seen in this fieldwork note, Ronald saw most Tibetans born in exile as 'not really Tibetan'. The fact that he came from Tibet made him 'more Tibetan' than the Tibetans born in India according to him. This tension between people arriving from Tibet and people born (or already living long-term in) exile, and their discussions about who is 'more Tibetan' has also been noticed by a few scholars. Yeh calls these kinds of discussions questions about authenticity; "Tibetans [...] draw on different strategies for establishing their authority to speak as Tibetan. Tibetans from Tibet draw on the embodied knowledge and experience of homeland, whereas 'exile Tibetans' seek to re-centre authentic Tibet-ness away from the physical territory of the homeland and toward other geographical spaces – particularly Dharamsala."⁶⁸

Newly arrived refugees "have experienced the complexities of change in Tibet, it seems to them that the 'old arrivals' wish to freeze Tibet in time and to deny modernity to the majority of Tibetans living in Tibet. [...] [E]verything that is viewed as authentically Tibetan derives from what older Tibetans remember from a time before 1959."⁶⁹ This 'freezing' of culture is a deliberate action of the government-in-exile and is called "cultural preservation"⁷⁰ of Tibetan culture. "For most Tibetans the image of traditional Tibet [...] represents the core of their nation and the source of their profound motivation to preserve their culture."⁷¹ Preserving the culture and "preserving memories of Tibet is crucial for maintaining the vision of 'Free Tibet' as a common cause."⁷² This preservation of a culture based on memories of Tibet before 1959 thus creates an increasing tension between 'old' and 'new' refugees because of an "[increasing] difference between Tibetans from Tibet and those living in exile."⁷³

Lyons describes this observation in other diasporas: "Whilst things in the occupied homeland may have 'moved on', the diasporan communities will tend to desperately cling to pre-diasporan customs and structures, because they view themselves as the custodians of the national heritage [...]."⁷⁴ According to Yeh and Anand, the Tibetan diaspora, especially the Tibetan community in India, Dharamsala, also see themselves as 'the custodians of the national heritage': "the exile community's view of themselves as the defenders and preservers of Tibetan culture (particularly in Dharamsala)"⁷⁵ when they "claim that they have preserved the authentic Tibetan culture that existed before it was destroyed in Tibet, and transplanted it to Dharamsala, a temporary home preserving a historical culture in its pure form before an inevitable return to the homeland."⁷⁶ Dharamsala is therefore also called "Little Lhasa of India"⁷⁷ and "Dharamsala [...] is often referred to as the authentic centre of Tibetan identity in opposition to the destruction implied by the Chinese occupation in Tibet."⁷⁸ According to Yeh, "Tibetans have begun to see [...] [Dharamsala], rather than Lhasa, as the center of Tibetan symbolic geography and as the locus of authentic Tibetan culture. Being from Dharamsala, not Lhasa, becomes the

⁶⁸ Yeh, 'Exile meets homeland', p 649

⁶⁹ Yeh, 'Exile meets homeland', p 661

⁷⁰ Gellek, 'The role of buddhist institutions', p 2

⁷¹ Gellek, 'The role of buddhist institutions', p 12-13

⁷² Anand, '(Re)emagining nationalism', p 278

⁷³ Anand, '(Re)emagining nationalism', p 283

⁷⁴ Lyons, 'Diasporas and homeland conflict – Draft', p 8

⁷⁵ Yeh, 'Exile meets homeland', p 654

⁷⁶ Anand in: Yeh, 'Exile meets homeland', p 661

⁷⁷ Anand, '(Re)emagining nationalism', p 276

⁷⁸ Hess, 'Statelessness and the State: Tibetans, Citizenship, and Nationalist Activism in a Transnational World', p 94

mark of pure Tibetan-ness.”⁷⁹ It seems as if the locus for authenticity of culture is recentered, away from contemporary Tibet towards Dharamsala.

A lot of exile-born Tibetans see themselves as being 'more Tibetan' since they have preserved the 'real' culture. But as seen in my friends' statement, most 'newcomers' see themselves as more authentically Tibetan, since they really came from Tibet. The problems with newcomers and exile-born don't go unnoticed by the community. In interviews during my fieldwork quite a lot of people told me that the Tibetans were united. But becoming more and more integrated in the community I started to doubt if those people were telling me the truth, because they wanted to give me a 'nice' picture of the Tibetan community, a socially acceptable answer.

In March I had an interview with Simon, a Tibetan working for two NGO's. He told me that a lot of Tibetans pretended to be united:

“This problem will come out. We pretend to be, and sometimes we really are, united. But there is a big difference in ideologies between exile-born Tibetans and new arrivals. The newcomers have gotten known with Chinese things, ways. We keep on accusing each other of being ‘sarjor’ [recent arrivals] or ‘shichak’ [born in India], calling each other bad names like that. ‘They’ do not understand our way of speaking Tibetan, we do not understand their way. They are mostly uneducated, and they don’t understand Indian law. Exile-borns see themselves more as real Tibetan. Newcomers tend to hang out more in their own regional groups. [...] These differences will maybe become a problem later on. That’s my greatest worry actually, because there is a huge difference between people who were born in Tibet and people who were born in India. We should unite more, we need better communications. It is important to understand the problem [...]. We need to solve this internally.”⁸⁰

The fact that newcomers come across as different from the exile-born is usually seen as proof of Chinese indoctrination. “[W]hen exiles, particularly the younger generation, find themselves face to face with the new arrivals and with their unfamiliar and hence 'Chinese' habits, mannerisms, and clothes the image of their fellow Tibetans as pure and uncorrupted quickly gives way to a belief that they have been brainwashed by their upbringing under Chinese rule. The fact that Tibetan identity in exile has been constituted in opposition to China contributes to both the scorn and suspicion of the 'Chinese' appearance and behaviour of new arrivals who, because they are different, are seen as less than authentically Tibetan.”⁸¹ But even worse than being seen as brainwashed, some new arrivals are suspected to be spies for the Chinese. Even during my stay in McLeod Ganj a 'Chinese spy' was caught and the story was covered in 'Tibetan Review'⁸², a magazine widely distributed in Dharamsala. To what extent the idea of 'Chinese spies' is real or not is hard to say, but it is apparent that as a result of being seen as 'brainwashed' or as a 'spy', “many new arrivals report that they feel like outsiders among Tibetan exiles in India.”⁸³

Tibetans born in India are also referred to as 'shickak', or 'indjo', and newcomers are sometimes referred to as 'sarjor'. As seen in the interview with Simon, those names, despite their literal meaning being a neutral one, are seen as 'bad names', as name-

⁷⁹ Yeh, 'Exile meets homeland', p 662

⁸⁰ Interview with Simon, 29-03-2009

⁸¹ Yeh, 'Exile meets homeland', p 653

⁸² Tibetan Review – The monthly magazine on Tibet – February 2009

⁸³ Yeh, 'Exile meets homeland', p 654

calling. "The [...] reaction to the new arrivals' unfamiliar bodily stylizations is scorn and embarrassment. These attitudes [...] are primarily directed at new arrivals from rural backgrounds; they tend to be looked down upon [...]. Young Tibetan exiles often refer to the new arrivals (*sarjor*) as being *kacha*, or 'raw' in Hindi, which is a reference to their unfashionable clothing, haircuts, and musical tastes."⁸⁴

The bizarre thing for me was that most of the exile-born Tibetans I spoke to thought of the newcomers as being 'too Chinese', but they didn't seem to realize how much they themselves had absorbed the Indian (and Western) culture. One day in the beginning of May I went to a concert organized by TIPA (Tibetan Institute for Performing Arts), one of the main institutes that tries to preserve Tibetan culture, in this case in the form of performing old Tibetan dances and songs. After a few traditional Tibetan songs, a young Tibetan boy who was clearly quite drunk, stands up in the muttering crowd and shouts out loud: "*I am born here, I don't know that stuff, I want Indian music!*"⁸⁵. Only a few days after this request for Indian music I find myself at a friend's house playing instruments with a big group of Tibetans. After three Tibetan songs which were hardly sang along to since no-one knew the lyrics anymore, they decided to sing Indian songs. They were loudly sang along to, and the rest of that evening the only thing I heard was Indian song after Indian song. In this light it is understandable for a newcomer to say about exile-born; "*they are not really Tibetan. [...] they're Indian*"⁸⁶.

The exile-born find it hard to see newcomers as authentically Tibetan. The idea of cultural preservation made the Tibetans in exile believe that they have preserved the 'real' culture in freedom. And a "difficulty for young Tibetans born in exile is posed by the fact that Tibetans from Tibet seem 'too Chinese', despite their embodied experience with the homeland which they themselves have never seen."⁸⁷ Preserving culture and questioning its authenticity not only creates problems in a nation between the people from the homeland and the people in diaspora, but it is also theoretically problematic according to Anand: "The entire project of preserving a culture and civilization is theoretically problematic since it considers culture as something that can be identified, mapped, practised and preserved. Such a conceptualisation of culture essentialises and naturalises what is socially and politically constructed and contested."⁸⁸ And, as is seen in this chapter, culture continues to be influenced, on the one side Tibetan culture is influenced by Chinese culture, but in the diaspora Tibetan culture is just as well influenced by Indian and Western culture.

The huge differences between the newcomers and exile-born clearly creates divisions in exile. When I talk to a young Tibetan who holds controversial ideas about his community, he tells me about the newcomers and exile-born:

*"They hardly mingle here. They all have their own circle of friends, they hardly communicate. So if we would have the freedom, how would we be able to communicate? [...] It is a problem for our freedom struggle. United we can stand and divided we fall. It's like from the beginning we had to face billions of Chinese, while we are only 6 million. To give a good 'punch' to them we need to be united. Now the only thing we do is a little 'tickling'. [...] The change we need is unity, we are lacking it."*⁸⁹

⁸⁴ Yeh, 'Exile meets homeland', p 658

⁸⁵ During a TIPA concert at 09-05-2009

⁸⁶ Conversation with Ronald, 20-05-2009

⁸⁷ Yeh, 'Exile meets homeland', p 662

⁸⁸ Anand, '(Re)emagining nationalism', p 278

⁸⁹ Interview with Kaspar, 13-04-2009

The Tibetans: a failed nation?

*"I think the biggest struggle for the Tibetan people is to become united."*⁹⁰

When processes of nation building are not already in progress before the state arises, the state will probably never become well-functioning, since the nation will remain too diverse, there will be a lack of cultural compromise. Scholars call this a failed nation (when a nation doesn't become a unified people because of the absence of cultural compromise), which will lead to a failed state (the state will not be able to rule the people properly, and might become subject to separatism).

Did the Tibetans succeed in creating a cultural compromise? Or are the divisions formed by regionalism and the division between newcomers and exile-born the proof that there is no basis for a Tibetan cultural compromise?

As already described in Chapter 1, the Tibetans needed to develop nationalism to be able to make claims to their territory. To convince China to give the Tibetans a greater form of autonomy, those who choose to participate in the struggle for autonomy or independence need to create a basis for nationalism. "Those making the demand must try to convince a majority of their own internally diverse members through public dialogue and consultation that they are not a province, region, or minority of some kind, as the current form of recognition has it, but a distinct nation or people, and that this is worth fighting for. They must also persuade the larger society of which they are part, with all its internal diversity, and then persuade it into negotiations to change the current constitutional relation to some form of greater autonomy and lesser association."⁹¹

It is the idea of a 'free Tibet' in the future, the myth of 'homecoming' that created 'the imagining of a nation'. Imagining a collective future in Tibet led to imagining a community, a collective, national identity. But, next to the already existing divisions in exile as described earlier, this basis too is a 'shaky' one; "While the commitment to Tibet is a common goal, definition of means and ends is hotly debated."⁹²

The Tibetans might have started off their nationalism on bad grounds anyhow. According to Wimmer, cultural compromise needs to be interpreted as "the outcome of a successful compromise of interests between different social groups: an exchange of the guarantee of political loyalty for the promise of participation and security."⁹³ But in the current situation of Tibet being occupied and the Tibetan diaspora only being 'visitors' or 'refugees' in host countries, there is hardly any security offered from the state to its people. This is for Wimmer one of the reasons for cultural compromise to fail, or not to come into existence at all. "Nationalist discourse [...] gives expression to the interests of a wide variety of social groups. It is for this reason that it could impose itself as cultural compromise accompanying social closure along national lines. However, when the exchange of political loyalty for participation, security and freedom fails, an encompassing national identity overarching ethno-regional distinctions is unlikely to emerge."⁹⁴ It becomes clear that the Tibetans do not have this exchange, since for them obviously, there is no security or

⁹⁰ Interview with Kaspar, 13-04-2009

⁹¹ Tully, 'Reimagining Belonging in Circumstances of Cultural Diversity: A Citizen Approach', p 164

⁹² Duska, *Harmony ideology*, p 120

⁹³ Wimmer, *Nationalist Exclusion*, p 32

⁹⁴ Wimmer, *Nationalist Exclusion*, p 66

freedom whatsoever offered in exchange for loyalty or participation. It is because of this that I wonder if the Tibetans started their nation building process in a very difficult period. Their reason to start with nationalism, the occupation, their joint enemy, might as well be the reason for them to become a 'failed nation', since it created a situation where this exchange necessary for the cultural compromise, seems to be unreachable.

The biggest concern in this situation, when the cultural compromise is likely to fail, is that people have more affiliation towards other identities like the regional or religious identities which were the main affiliations in Tibet before nationalism. Or, as Tully states: "One of the most difficult problems facing culturally diverse political societies is to develop a sense of belonging to the association as a whole. These societies tend toward fragmentation and disintegration because the members often develop a stronger sense of belonging to their overlapping linguistic, religious, ethnic, indigenous, regional [...] associations than to their larger political society."⁹⁵ When this happens, when the people of a nation affiliate more with, for example, their region, and when people act upon this affiliation as seen in the Tibetan diaspora where the regionalism still is very influential, this can work contrary to nation building. "A contrary development is to be expected when state elites include in their clientelist networks mainly persons from their own ethnic or regional background and exclude others, thus relegating them to 'their own people' for access to the collective goods of the modern state."⁹⁶ This problem can also be seen in the Tibetan diaspora where some people can't get housing, since they are from a different region, and where people tend to only give jobs to people from the same region (as described before).

If you combine this regionalism with the problem that the Tibetan government is not able to distribute security or freedom to its people, Tibetan nation building seems to become more and more problematic. The fact that Tibet is a fourth world nation, and therefore has a hard time participating in the 'international family of nations' is also far from beneficial since "[s]tates located at the periphery of the world system often cannot distribute enough collective goods to motivate the citizens to shift their expectations of solidarity to the central state to adopt the nationalist discourse. In other words, the nationalist cultural compromise does not happen."⁹⁷

Can we therefore state that the Tibetan cultural compromise failed, that their nation failed? I think it needs to be said here that divisions such as regionalism are not specific only to the Tibetan case. Every nation-state has its regions and some nations embrace multiple ethnicities. In every country in the world people are divided and act upon their affiliations, even if they are not (only) national. "The increasing diversity and insecurity of identity-related differences in an era of globalization fuel the demands for their political recognition and protection. What does follow is the now commonplace observation that no identity is ever quite identical to itself: it always contains an irreducible element of alterity. Identity is multiplex or aspectival. Accordingly, "diversity" or the multiplicity of overlapping identities and their corresponding allegiances is the first characteristic of identity politics."⁹⁸ When according to Tully the element of alterity is irreducible, can we say that diversity is here to stay forever, is diversity indominable? I believe that indeed, diversity will remain, despite even the best nation building policies. For the Tibetans, this question therefore remains if, on top of their divisions and multiple affiliations, their national affiliation is dominantly on

⁹⁵ Tully, 'Reimagining Belonging', p 152

⁹⁶ Wimmer, *Nationalist Exclusion*, p 67

⁹⁷ Wimmer, *Nationalist Exclusion*, p 67

⁹⁸ Tully, 'Reimagining Belonging', p 159

the forefront, or that they nevertheless became a failed nation. Because “cultural diversity [...] has to be recognized and accommodated in a form that does not infringe too deeply on, or undermine, the identity of the nation or people, for this is the reason self-governing institutions of nationhood are demanded in the first place.”⁹⁹

Or, as Anand describes it, alternate affiliations or identities are able to exist alongside of the national identity because all identities are 'created', 'imagined': “Spatial distribution, economic differentiation, regional and sectarian backgrounds, generational gaps; all of these structural forces compound to the category of diasporic Tibetan. Thus, a unified homogeneous Tibetan-in-exile identity is more of a rhetorical device and imaginary construct than some verifiable reality. At the same time, it is naïve to dismiss any consideration of the identity question on this ground only, for all identities are, in the last instance, products of imagination.”¹⁰⁰

In order to answer the question as to whether the cultural compromise did indeed succeed or if the Tibetan nation failed I decided to re-centre my focus from all that divides the Tibetans towards the 'binding elements' in the Tibetan diaspora. The question whether or not the Tibetans are 'failed' as a nation will therefore return in the next chapter which is dedicated to these 'binding elements'.

⁹⁹ Tully, 'Reimagining Belonging', p 164

¹⁰⁰ Anand, '(Re)emagining nationalism', p 272

Chapter 3 Unity in exile

Public priority

“But we are all united in the cause.”¹⁰¹

“It is certainly possible to bring a group of people together to agree to defend and promote one aspect of their identity, such as language, nationality, or indigenusness, across their other identity related differences, and this identification can be sustained for generations. [...] What the multiplicity of overlapping identities entails is [a] characteristic of identity politics: the public priority granted to one identity at any time”¹⁰².

Despite their differences and divisions, do the Tibetans in the Tibetan diaspora grant their public priority to the Tibetan identity, to their nationality? Can the affiliations with regionalism, sectarianism or with 'exile-born' or 'newcomer' become second-place, after the preceding national affiliation?

Duska writes that the Tibetans have been able to leave behind these diverse affiliations and that the Tibetans have “embraced an abstracted, homogeneous identity defined by Tibetan Buddhism rather than specific sects, and by territorial re-imagining of Greater Tibet rather than specific regions of origin.”¹⁰³ According to her, this homogeneous identity came about through a resistance to a common enemy and had to be consciously nurtured by the community's leaders. The fact that the Tibetans started to present themselves as one nation under the threat of the occupying Chinese force has been noticed by multiple scholars, and seems to be almost a natural phenomenon: “when a people become politically mobilized, claiming the right to self-determination, [...] they appear to form nations. When faced by threats from common enemies a people politically organize and mobilize against these threats.”¹⁰⁴ It was only under Chinese threat that nationalism arose. “For the first time all Tibetan people were united in common purpose and shared values, which helped to identify the common enemy.”¹⁰⁵

As described in the previous chapter, it was the need to go into exile that ignited Tibetan nationality. This idea, that exile ignites nationalism, has been described by Lord Acton. Quoted by Anderson, Lord Acton even believed that 'nationality' arose from exile. He saw 'exile' as the “nursery of nationality, [because while being in exile,] men could no longer easily dream of returning to the nourishing bosom that had given them birth.”¹⁰⁶ In this line of arguing, the homeland, or in Anderson's terms, the 'heimat', is the most important aspect of nationalism. Anderson describes nationalism in exile as “long-distance nationalism”, where exiles' “political participation [is directed] towards an imagined heimat”.¹⁰⁷ This is also very clearly the case in Tibetan nationalism, political participation is directed towards the struggle for regaining autonomy of the 'homeland' or 'heimat'. This

¹⁰¹ Interview with Tobias, 19-03-2009

¹⁰² Tully, 'Reimagining Belonging', p 160

¹⁰³ Duska, *Harmony ideology*, p 107

¹⁰⁴ Seton, 'Fourth World Nations', p 7

¹⁰⁵ Shakya in: Duska, *Harmony ideology*, p 104

¹⁰⁶ Acton in: Anderson, 'Long-distance Nationalism: World Capitalism and the Rise of Identity Politics', p 2

¹⁰⁷ Anderson, 'Long-distance Nationalism', p 11

struggle ignited nationalism, because it needed nationalism for legitimizing the struggle itself. Even for the Tibetans who have never been in Tibet, who were born in exile, the struggle for autonomy and Tibet as homeland are the key figures of nationalism. "Born in exile, "return" to Tibet is as much a part of an imagined future as it is for their parents."¹⁰⁸ This imagined future, or 'envisioned homecoming' has become the basis of the Tibetan nationality: "Well-educated Tibetan youth have a strong sense of national identity that is not linked to physical occupation of their homeland. Rather, it is linked to a patriotic desire to someday regain their independence or autonomy for Tibet."¹⁰⁹ Imagining this future, this 'homecoming' has strong resemblance with Anderson's theory of 'imagined communities', where he puts emphasis on "the attachment people feel for the inventions of their imaginations."¹¹⁰ Imagining a collective future in Tibet led to imagining a community, a collective national identity.

The aspiration of homecoming, one of the most important concepts for the 'conflict-generated diaspora', is according to Anand a problematic one, "since there is a growing realization among the migrant population that the goal of returning to Tibet is too far-fetched in the foreseeable future. However, instead of diminishing their longing for the homeland, this realization seems to have increased the importance of the construct of homeland. Indeed, the intensified yearning for the homeland functions as therapeutic for many who know they may never return."¹¹¹ So even though the return to the homeland seems remote, the homeland remains the key concept within the identification of the diaspora: "As the intrinsic value of territory diminishes, as day-to-day activities focus on the new place of residence, the homeland's symbolic importance and salience to identity may grow."¹¹² Since the homeland is of such importance to the Tibetan diaspora, it shapes their activities: "The concept of homeland is inherent in the diaspora identity and therefore serves as a focal point of diaspora political action and debate."¹¹³ Beyond shaping politics in the diaspora, the dream of homecoming seems to become a requirement for organizing the diaspora: "Holding on to the myth of return provides a justification for the perpetuation of the diaspora and its organizational structure and leadership."¹¹⁴ Or, "to not be concerned with the cause of Tibetan independence or autonomy is, for most exiles, anathema to being Tibetan."¹¹⁵

My personal experiences within the Tibetan diaspora support the idea that the homeland shapes the activities within the diaspora. Every week there were political meetings, screenings of Tibetan documentaries, candlelight vigils, demonstrations et cetera, all with the focus on Tibet. The entire community seemed to be politically active for a 'free Tibet'. In these activities, there seemed to be little or no importance ascribed to the 'other' affiliations like regionalism. People seemed to unite, and seemed to grant their public priority to the nation, to 'being Tibetan'.

¹⁰⁸ Hess, 'Statelessness and the State', p 93

¹⁰⁹ Hess, 'Statelessness and the State', p 88

¹¹⁰ Anderson in: Kolas, 'Tibetan Nationalism', p 62

¹¹¹ Anand, '(Re)imagining nationalism', p 275

¹¹² Newman in: Lyons, 'Diasporas and homeland conflict', p 7

¹¹³ Lyons, 'Diasporas and homeland conflict', p 9

¹¹⁴ Lyons, 'Diasporas and homeland conflict', p 7

¹¹⁵ Duska, *Harmony ideology*, p 88

India, McLeod Ganj, February – May 2009;

“In the entire duration of my fieldwork in McLeod Ganj, I've participated in a total of seven candlelight vigils, and honestly, it could have been much more than seven if I would have joined them all. The vigils never ceased to amaze me and they always seemed to go on and on and on. For me, there is a special something to them.

The vigils are all quite the same, around six o'clock in the evening, people coming from all parts of town are slowly arrive at the little bumpy sand square. If you don't know something is going on you might think it's just some people gathering in little groups for 'cosy evening talks', just like the old men in my Dutch home town who are always hanging around in the main square.

The chance that you don't know about this upcoming vigil is quite feasible. There are no posters, the event is never really planned ahead. People just seem to know. Sometimes there is a car with a sound system driving around encouraging people to join, but no one really seems to be able to hear them in the midst of all the Indian street noises.

What seems to be 'just some people standing around' all of a sudden becomes a real procession. Out of nothing, as it seems, some red robed, bald headed monks and nuns start to form a line, chanting Buddhist prayers, holding the picture of His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama, waving Tibetan flags, carrying candles. And everyone follows. And always, yes, really always, the line seems to get bigger from only the people in the square. I never understand where all these people suddenly come from.

The vigils last three laps around the main streets of McLeod Ganj. Monks, nuns, old people, young people, boys, girls, an amazed tourist here and there... They all walk along, all of their faces lit in candlelight, chanting all along the way. No matter what their sect is, no matter what region they're from, no matter what kind of political conviction they adhere to, no matter if they're born here, in Tibet or in whichever part of the world... they all unite in the cause for Tibet, they all hold their candles for that country so close by, and yet so far away. For me, there is a special something to these vigils. They give me the goose bumps...”

Nation building

During vigils like those described above, public priority is granted to 'Tibetaness'. But, as I described earlier, Duska emphasizes the fact that this 'homogeneous identity' needed to be 'consciously nurtured by the community's leaders'.¹¹⁶ In other words, the community's leaders, or the government-in-exile, “must try to convince a majority of their own internally diverse members through public dialogue and consultation that they are not a province, region, or minority of some kind, as the current form of recognition has it, but a distinct nation or people, and that this is worth fighting for.”¹¹⁷ The government-in-exile has therefore carried out strong nation building policies.

Where the dream of homecoming seems to be the basis for Tibetaness, the Tibetan government-in-exile is the institutional focus in realizing this dream: “The idea of Tibetan uniqueness lies at the centre of the fight for an independent Tibet, which remains the focus of attention for most Tibetans in Dharamsala. The Tibetan government-in-exile, which includes a parliament elected by Tibetan refugees around the world, provides an institutional focus for claims to an independent, separate state.”¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ Duska, *Harmony ideology*, p 107

¹¹⁷ Tully, 'Reimagining Belonging', p 164

¹¹⁸ Singer, 'The Dalai Lama's many Tibetan Landscapes', p 241

One of the goals of the government-in-exile is “cultural preservation”¹¹⁹ of the Tibetan culture. “For most Tibetans the image of traditional Tibet [...] represents the core of their nation and the source of their profound motivation to preserve their culture.”¹²⁰ Preserving the culture and “preserving memories of Tibet is crucial for maintaining the vision of 'Free Tibet' as a common cause.”¹²¹ But preceding this feeling of a collective struggle was collective displacement, or refugeehood. Being displaced was the collective state all the exiles shared. This state of refugeehood is actually being encouraged and maintained by the Tibetan government in exile. “Tibetans in India have primarily remained stateless, foregoing the practical benefits of citizenship, remaining de facto refugees”¹²² This is a deliberative policy of the Tibetan government, in order to “maintain a separate identity”¹²³ to ensure cultural preservation. The idea behind this 'state of refugeehood' is that the Tibetan culture remains a distinct culture, which stresses the concept of nationhood. Gellek describes this 'refugee identity' as follows: “The politicized ambiguity of a refugee identity has been useful to the diasporic community in at least two ways: first it retains the political definition of Tibetans as a people without a homeland; secondly, by way of the first reason, it consciously directs development of nationhood by evoking (and re-evoking) the shared image and experience of refugeehood.”¹²⁴ Imagining the collective refugeehood thus enables the imagining of a community with a collective future. “For the Tibetan, the refugee paper is expressive of a cultural, ethnic and national identity, an allegiance to the past and a candid avowal of dedication to Tibet's future freedom.”¹²⁵

The Tibetan government-in-exile tries, through nation building policies, to become part of the 'family of nations'. To create resemblance with these countries, the government-in-exile installed democracy in the Tibetan diaspora. But democracy brought more to the Tibetans than only resemblance with other nation-states, it also brought about the dissolution of differences among the Tibetan people, and therefore became an important nation building policy. “Democracy (..) provides a unifying mechanism amid the regional and sectarian diversity of Tibetans. Importantly, there is near-unanimity among Tibetans that feudalism, theocracy, partimonialism, and nepotism all work against the prospect of a free Tibet.”¹²⁶ But the Tibetan government in exile did more than only install democracy in the nation building process. They have been trying to develop a Tibetan identity based on a combination of tradition and modernity; Tradition in remembering the homeland and preservation of the culture, modernity by ensuring the legitimacy of their struggle for the homeland on the international stage. “Through a range of new secular institutions, Tibetan culture and identity is defined and standardized. Tibetan textbooks and teachers likewise transmit a curriculum of 'Tibetanness'. In the name of preservation and tradition, notions of 'Tibetan' are being formed and transformed. As an elite strategy, the emphasis on Tibetan 'culture' and 'religion' is partly due to popular response, and partly a result of outside influences.”¹²⁷ These outside influences can be seen as the 'Western audience', to whom they have to legitimize the Tibetan struggle, but the outside influences have also got, to a great extent, to do with the 'spread of ideologies’¹²⁸. The “cherished image of an untainted

¹¹⁹ Gellek, 'The role of buddhist institutions', p 2

¹²⁰ Gellek, 'The role of buddhist institutions', p 12-13

¹²¹ Anand, '(Re)imagining nationalism', p 278

¹²² Hess, 'Statelessness and the State', p 79

¹²³ Gellek, 'The role of buddhist institutions', p 7

¹²⁴ Gellek, 'The role of buddhist institutions', p 12

¹²⁵ Goldstein in: Hess, 'Statelessness and the State', p 84

¹²⁶ Sangay, 'Tibet: exiles' journey', p 128

¹²⁷ Kolas, 'Tibetan Nationalism', p 57

¹²⁸ The spread of ideologies is described in Chapter 1 – the fourth world

personal form of Shangri-La [keeps the] Tibetans in exile [...] caught in this precarious balance between tradition and modernity, where the influence of foreign definitions of authenticity loom heavily on the construction of their identity. [...] For most Tibetans the image of traditional Tibet [...] represent the core of their nation and the source of their profound motivation to preserve their culture.”¹²⁹

The standardized ideas of Tibetaness are clearly being passed on through the Tibetan schools in the Tibetan settlements. Numerous Tibetans I've met during my stay in McLeod Ganj told me that they all learned the same stories about their people. They all learned, for example, the story that they have an 'R on their forehead'; meaning that they all are refugees, no matter how long they have been in India, not matter where they were born. Another encounter I had with the standardized culture passed on through the Tibetan schools was when some friends of mine tried to explain how Tibetan nationalism came into existence. One friend explained to me that Tibetans were descendants of the 'compassionate monkey' and the 'ogress', who had six children which resembled the six 'races' of Tibetans, who first became united under King Songtsen Gampo, who was the first to rule over all provinces of Tibet. Later on, when we talked about how history is passed on, another friend had to admit; *“this story is all school curriculum, we weren't taught this by our grandparents for example. Inside Tibet, people probably don't know all this.”*¹³⁰

Nationalism, national identity and history is being standardized and passed on through the schools in the Tibetan diaspora (nationally centralized education is an important factor in nation building, emphasized by scholars like Anderson (2006) and Gellner (2006)). Since the common enemy, the struggle, and from there the imagined homecoming is the core of Tibetan nationalism, the struggle needs to be kept alive in order for nationalism to stay alive. So, in addition to ideas about a national identity and history, grievances also need to be passed on: “one of the functions of diaspora networks and institutions is to ensure that the original cause of their displacement is remembered and the grievance passed on to the next generation.”¹³¹ That this grievance has been passed on to the younger Tibetans is clear when one sees all the young Tibetans participating in the candlelight vigils, the demonstrations, political meetings and when one sees the numerous youngsters working for Tibetan NGO's. “Tibetan education in Indian and Nepalese resettlement communities has resulted in well-educated youth who have a strong sense of national identity that is not linked to a physical occupation of their homeland. Rather, it is linked to a patriotic desire to someday regain their independence or autonomy for Tibet.”¹³² Even though the previous chapter showed that regionalism, and the division between the 'exile-born' and the 'newcomers' still exists, and that they are at times even hugely influential, to see how the Tibetans learned to see themselves as Tibetan and to see how they all, seem to strive for a 'free Tibet' shows me that in most cases, public priority is granted to 'Tibetaness'.

*“This is not to suggest that regional or sectarian loyalties do not persist, especially among the first and second generation of exiles, but it is evident that the youth of today have been socialized to think of themselves first and foremost as Tibetan.”*¹³³

¹²⁹ Gellek, 'The role of buddhist institutions', p 12-13

¹³⁰ Conversation with Adam and Paul, 20-05-2009

¹³¹ Lyons, 'Diasporas and homeland conflict', p 6

¹³² Hess, 'Statelessness and the State', p 88

¹³³ Duska, *Harmony ideology*, p 107

Unifying Rituals

*“Actually, the only thing that really binds all Tibetans together is Buddhism.”*¹³⁴

When questioning *the* binding factor that became the key element in unifying the Tibetans who earlier were divided into regions and sects, the answers I got were overwhelmingly similar. People told me it is Buddhism, some people told me it is His Holiness the Dalai Lama, others told me it was both. Buddhism clearly is an important similarity for all Tibetans. “Despite modernizing and secularizing changes in the Tibetan Diaspora today, Tibetan Buddhism remains a core feature of culture and identity. Its norms are the more powerful because they are fused with nationalist spirit in a way that was not the case in old Tibet.”¹³⁵

Although in the old Tibet people were divided into different sects, all these sects were connected to Tibetan Buddhism, which might be why Buddhism is still very much alive in the Tibetan diaspora. “Because of a close link between Tibetan nationalism and religion, most Tibetan national symbols are related to Tibetan Buddhism. In the opinion of the 14th Dalai Lama, Tibetan religion and consequently also religious rituals are ‘... helpful in keeping Tibetan patriotism alive’.”¹³⁶ And it is not only His Holiness the Dalai Lama who sees the profound role of Buddhist rituals for nationalism. “[T]he creation of a ceremonial calendar is a promising tool to evoke national sentiments among the members of a nation because ceremonies and rituals decrease differences among people.”¹³⁷ This decreasing of differences is something that is clearly seen in the candlelight vigils, which I described earlier in this chapter. All political actions in the Tibetan community are allied to Buddhism, like chanting prayers, carrying the picture of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, and all of these actions embrace Tibetans from all regions, with all sorts of backgrounds.

It is not only Buddhism, but even more so, the institute of the Dalai Lama within this Buddhism which is a national key symbol. As stated before, it was His Holiness the Dalai Lama who introduced contemporary nationalism to his people. Singer quotes the Dalai Lama: “Tibetans have the same language from Ladakh in North India to Sinjian in Western China-including the three regions of central Tibet, Lhasa, Amdo and Kham.” In each region he said there are different “songs, costumes, and a different dialect,” but the literary language, the religious language, [...] is historically considered to be Tibetan. Here he expressed a nationalist position [...]. The claim to a common language of Tibet reinforced the cause of unity and nationalism and, by speaking of Tibet in these terms, the Dalai Lama acknowledged his important role in affirming that cultural continuity.”¹³⁸ Roemer even goes further than this, according to her His Holiness the Dalai Lama carries more than just ‘an important role’, she claims that “[t]he core symbol of the Tibetan nation is the institution of the Dalai Lama.” And that “the significance of this office as the Tibetan national key symbol has not changed.”¹³⁹ And I fully agree with her. While living amongst Tibetans, it cannot go unnoticed by anyone that His Holiness the Dalai Lama is hugely influential and

¹³⁴ Conversation with Adam, 19-04-2009

¹³⁵ Duska, *Harmony ideology*, p 99

¹³⁶ Roemer, *The Tibetan Government-in-Exile – Politics at Large*, p 140

¹³⁷ Grodzins in: Roemer, *Tibetan Government-in-Exile*, p 141

¹³⁸ Singer, 'Dalai Lama's Landscapes', p 245

¹³⁹ Roemer, *Tibetan Government-in-Exile*, p 145

of great importance religiously as well as politically to all Tibetans. I haven't met any Tibetan who spoke with anything other than an utter respect for His Holiness.

“Personal loyalty to the Dalai Lama plays a key role in the government-in-exile's efforts to strengthen the sense of a unified Tibetan identity: ‘... faith in Buddhism and in [the] Dalai Lama's office has provided cohesion necessary for maintaining a form of ‘proto-nationalism’ within a broadly dispersed world society’.”¹⁴⁰

It is therefore not surprising that the national flag and anthem are both full of Buddhist symbols and prayers. The more secular or political holidays, like the Tibetan Uprising Day, are all filled with religious songs and symbols. The religious holidays, like prayer festivals, are not only about religion, but also spread the message of the Tibetan freedom struggle. Both seem to be deeply connected to each other. “[A]ll these exile Tibetan national ceremonies are created to support the close link between Tibetan secular affairs and religious symbolism, but also to evoke unifying feelings among all Tibetans.”¹⁴¹

It is therefore Buddhism, and within that the institute of the Dalai Lama, that are seen by many Tibetans as *the* unifying element amongst all Tibetans.

India, McLeod Ganj, 10th march 2009 - 50th Tibetan Uprising Day;

“We got up very early, as I don't want to miss anything and I intend to occupy a ‘good’ seat. Today is Tibetan uprising day, the day when His Holiness holds his annual speech and also the day when the biggest political demonstration is held.

When we arrive at the temple, there are already numerous people waiting outside, carrying Tibetan flags, some even painted the flag on their faces. When we rush inside, in the hope of finding a good seat, we find out that we are very, very late. Although the ceremony will not start for a while, the entire courtyard of the temple is completely packed. We all stand shoulder to shoulder, waiting for the ceremony to begin.

After waiting for a while I feel the anticipation increasing, nervousness is in the air. Everyone wants to get a view of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. It almost feels like children waiting to open their Christmas presents. It intrigues me a bit, everyone seems so eager to get a good ‘look’. Then a marching band starts to play, walking down the aisle. Now people start to push, and more than once people stand on my toes. And there he is; His Holiness the Dalai Lama. I see a happy smile on a lot of faces surrounding me. When His Holiness and his entourage of other high Lama's have reached the stage, the national anthem and another national song about those who died in the Tibetan freedom struggle are sung.

I have never liked people singing together like that. Even as a little girl in church I would hate the ‘sing alongs’, since most people are better at keeping their mouth shut, let alone the singing of our national anthem at a football match. But this is a totally new experience for me, and I am convinced this experience will not leave my memory any time soon.

This singing is different. This comes directly from the heart, I am sure. Everyone sings along, loudly. The song dims, then grows loud again, with bass tones and some high parts. Not being able to understand what they are singing, everyone who hears this must be able to hear that these people sing about pain they themselves have suffered, about agony. Singing these songs seems to unite them, as they share their pain together. In the parts that are softly sung, I even hear some sniffing, I look around me and see people crying. They stand with tears in their eyes, but with their shoulders upright, with their chests forward as a people who has suffered its share of beatings, but who has not been beaten yet. This ceremony is unifying for a fact. Even I, for a split second, feel Tibetan.”

¹⁴⁰ Anand, '(Re)imagining nationalism', p 282

¹⁴¹ Roemer, *Tibetan Government-in-Exile*, p 145

The 10th March ceremony “creates a feeling of unity among all Tibetans who are involved in the struggle against the Chinese authority in Tibet. It strengthens their energies and confidence to return once to a free Tibetan homeland.”¹⁴² The feeling of unity combined with the idea that “[m]ost Tibetans in exile are now socialized into thinking of themselves as a homogeneous group through schooling and group rituals such as the celebration of the 10th March Uprising”¹⁴³, creates the idea that the Tibetans are not a 'failed nation' at all. It makes one think that Tibetan nationalism has succeeded even despite its difficult starting point and despite its difficulties coming from being a 'fourth world' nation. When one looks around on such a 10th March celebration, it is easy to think of everyone present as all being 'Tibetan', since national symbols are seen all over the place. The Tibetan flag is displayed dozens and dozens at a time. The meaning and importance of national symbols like the national flag, the anthem and rituals is also emphasized by Anderson. He argues that the national anthem and the national flag for example are made to accentuate the differences between a nation and its neighbouring nation (Anderson 2006). The symbols and rituals clearly have unifying, bonding purposes. In McLeod Ganj I saw a picture of the national flag on every street I crossed, on houses, in shops, on clothing. In literally every Tibetan house that I have entered there was one or several flags displayed in striking places. It was obvious to me that all Tibetans, from whatever region they originated, identified with this nationalist symbol. The presence of these symbols in public and private spaces was so prominent to me that I have included a few pictures, taken in McLeod Ganj, on the next page to visualize this omnipresence.

In the next chapter I will dedicate myself once again to the question whether the Tibetans are a 'failed nation' or whether their nationalism has triumphed. I will go back to my research question:

“To what extent does a form of shared nationalist cultural compromise still exist when a diasporic community is divided by regionalism from the home country and when divisions between 'exile born' and 'newcomer' occur?”, keeping in mind the 'divisions' from chapter 2 and these 'unifying elements' from chapter 3.

¹⁴² Roemer, *Tibetan Government-in-Exile*, p 143

¹⁴³ Shakya in: Roemer, *Tibetan Government-in-Exile*, p 146

Symbols in public spaces



- Upper left: Tibetan boy during 10th March demonstrations, with the Tibetan flag painted on his face and his body wrapped in a Tibetan flag.
- Upper right: Tibetan lady listening to a speech during a candlelight vigil, holding an image of HH the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan flag.
- Bottom: 10th March demonstration, dozens of Tibetan flags displayed.



Picture upper left: Rachel Cusworth, Picutres upper right and bottom: Paula van den Dool.

Chapter 4

Conclusion

This thesis started with describing how, despite the fact that multiple scholars have been predicting the end of the era of the nation-state, new national identities are still resurrecting themselves today and how self-determination is still evident through the language of nationalism. In this contemporary world, political power and statehood is arranged in the “family of nations”¹⁴⁴, and not being able to take part in the “national order of things”¹⁴⁵ means being deprived of equal interaction in international politics and of making claims to ethnic nationhood and to an independent state. In other words, nationalism is not “on its last legs”¹⁴⁶ but still running strong, because there is “no single alternative form of social cohesion and affiliation [...] to dominate public life”¹⁴⁷. The Tibetans, like other new nationalisms, “owe their contemporary appearance and political salience to the hegemony of the nation-state”¹⁴⁸.

The Tibetans are a fourth world nation; “deprived of the right to their own territories and its riches [...] [and with] only limited influence or none at all in the national [state] to which they belong”¹⁴⁹ because of the occupation of the territory of Tibet by the People's Republic of China (PRC). It is since this struggle with China that the Tibetans have started to articulate their case through nationalism. Before the invasion of Tibet by China the Tibetans were in fact not much of a unified nation, there was no clear national identity¹⁵⁰: “Tibetans conceived of themselves primarily in relation to sectarian and regional affiliations.”¹⁵¹ But nationalism became an important aspect in their struggle for autonomy; “[i]n order to gain recognition and support they would have to convince the world that Tibet had in fact been a 'state' [...], with a permanent population, a defined territory [and] government”¹⁵². The Tibetans therefore had to create a 'nation' and a 'state' by means of nationalism and nation building policies to support their claims to Tibet as an independent state.

In this thesis it becomes clear that the affiliations that existed amongst the Tibetans before nationalism, affiliations to region or sect, are still hugely influential in the Tibetan diasporic community, despite the introduction of Tibetan nationalism. Social ties and relationships are often still based on the old regions from inside Tibet, and nepotism or regionalism is still quite active. The fact that these previous affiliations are still influential is not surprising since “the 'imagined community' of Tibet as a *nation* [...] emerged only strongly in the early 20th century, [...] and especially after the 1951 incorporation of Tibet into the People's Republic of China”¹⁵³. The Tibetans thus started to present themselves as a nation only shortly afterwards, which might mean that it takes more time for nationalism to be able to supersede these previous affiliations.

But it is not only old, pre-nationalistic affiliations that create divisions in the Tibetan diaspora, a new division took shape because of the exile of so many Tibetans; the

¹⁴⁴ Wimmer, *Nationalist Exclusion*, p 78

¹⁴⁵ Malkki, *Purity and Exile*, p 5

¹⁴⁶ Appadurai, *Modernity at large*, p 19

¹⁴⁷ Juergensmeyer, 'The paradox', p 4

¹⁴⁸ Wimmer, *Nationalist Exclusion*, p 9

¹⁴⁹ Dunbar Ortiz in: Sylvian, 'Disorderly Development', p 395

¹⁵⁰ Kolas, 'Tibetan Nationalism', p 53

¹⁵¹ Yeh, 'Exile meets homeland', p 650

¹⁵² Kolas, 'Tibetan Nationalism', p 59

¹⁵³ Yeh, 'Exile meets homeland', p 650

distinctions between the 'newcomers' and the 'exile-born'. Many 'newcomers' see themselves as authentically Tibetan since they are in fact 'from Tibet', 'exile-born' on the contrary, also think of themselves as authentically Tibetan since they were able to preserve the 'real' culture of Tibet, without the influences of China.

Yeh calls these discussions "questions of authenticity"¹⁵⁴. Next to these discussions about 'who is more Tibetan', the fact that there is a division between 'newcomers' and 'exile-born' is sometimes simply created through the fact that they don't recognize 'themselves' in the 'other'. The Tibetans born (or already living long term) in exile see the newcomers as being 'too Chinese', and consider them as being 'brainwashed' by the Chinese¹⁵⁵, while the new arrivals from Tibet see the people born in exile as 'being Indian', shaped by Indian and Western culture. Both of these groups have been influenced by other cultures, and since culture is continuously "socially and politically constructed and contested"¹⁵⁶, both of their 'cultures' will have undergone change and none of them will have been able to truly preserve the 'real' Tibetan culture.

Not only the divisions in exile are problematic for their cultural compromise; the Tibetans have had some arrears in creating a cultural compromise since being an occupied country, and being in exile created difficulties to ensure the "exchange of the guarantee of political loyalty for the promise of participation and security."¹⁵⁷ The reason for the commencement of Tibetan nationalism, the occupation and their joint enemy, has therefore also created huge difficulties for the Tibetans to create a cultural compromise. Next to this, the fact that the Tibetans are a nation in the 'fourth world' can be problematic as well: "[S]tates located at the periphery of the world system often cannot distribute enough collective goods to motivate the citizens to shift their expectations of solidarity to the central state to adopt the nationalist discourse. In other words, the nationalist cultural compromise does not happen."¹⁵⁸ If a cultural compromise fails entirely, the nation is called a 'failed nation'; a nation where the state is not able to rule the people properly and where the people haven't become a unified nation because of the absence of a cultural compromise, other affiliations (like regionalism) prevail over the national affiliation.

But, Wimmer (2002) and Tully (2002) as scholars, agree on the simple fact that diversity exists within a nation is not enough ground to come to the conclusion that the nation has failed, since every identity "always contains an irreducible element of alterity."¹⁵⁹ Cultural diversity, or alterity within the national identity, doesn't need to lead to a 'failed nation' or a failed cultural compromise as long as it "does not infringe too deeply on, or undermine, the identity of the nation or people"¹⁶⁰. Although the arrears at the start of their nation building project and the visible divisions in exile might be definite setbacks for Tibetan nationalism, it does not necessarily mean that they have become a 'failed nation'. Diversity is not problematic if it doesn't undermine the identity of the nation. If the national Tibetan identity is not undermined by other affiliations, if 'Tibetaness' is granted the public priority over the other affiliations like regionalism and the division between 'newcomer' and 'exile-born', there is still a chance that the cultural compromise has been successful. Looking at political meetings, festivities and religious rituals in the exile community,

¹⁵⁴ Yeh, 'Exile meets homeland'

¹⁵⁵ Yeh, 'Exile meets homeland', p 653

¹⁵⁶ Anand, '(Re)imagining nationalism', p 278

¹⁵⁷ Wimmer, *Nationalist Exclusion*, p 32

¹⁵⁸ Wimmer, *Nationalist Exclusion*, p 67

¹⁵⁹ Tully, 'Reimagining Belonging', p 159

¹⁶⁰ Tully, 'Reimagining Belonging', p 164

Tibetans from all different backgrounds are seen participating as equals, and all seem to grant their public priority to 'Tibetaness'.

Exile, which seemed to create difficulties like new divisions (between 'newcomers' and 'exile-born') and problems for the cultural compromise (no or little exchange of the guarantee of political loyalty for the promise of participation and security), has also become beneficial for Tibetan nationalism. Exile can be seen as the "nursery of nationality, [because while being in exile,] men could no longer easily dream of returning to the nourishing bosom that had given them birth."¹⁶¹ This dream of the homeland, and the myth of homecoming still shapes the activities in the Tibetan diaspora and keeps the Tibetans "united in the cause"¹⁶², united in their struggle and in the goal they strive for. The political activities and religious rituals have a unifying purpose and bring harmony and equality amongst all the exiled Tibetans, these rituals serve as homogenizing mechanisms. Within these activities and rituals the Tibetans find a common ground where their nationality triumphs.

Furthermore, the Tibetan government-in-exile has created stronger 'notions of being Tibetan' through a standardized curriculum of 'Tibetaness'¹⁶³, and several nation building policies. The government-in-exile is partially based on Tibetan Buddhism, since there is no separation of state and religion; His Holiness the Dalai Lama is not only politically the leader of the exiled Tibetans, he is also the religious leader of all Tibetans. According to me, not separating religion and state is beneficial for Tibetan nationalism since Buddhism and (within this) the institute of the Dalai Lama remains "a core feature of culture and identity"¹⁶⁴ within the Tibetan diaspora and His Holiness the Dalai Lama is seen as "[t]he core symbol of the Tibetan nation"¹⁶⁵. Because of this close link between politics and religion, political meetings and religious rituals overlap each other and become 'unifying rituals'. "[A]ll these exile Tibetan national ceremonies are created to support the close link between Tibetan secular affairs and religious symbolism, but also to evoke unifying feelings among all Tibetans."¹⁶⁶ Therefore Buddhism and the institute of the Dalai Lama, is seen by many Tibetans as *the* unifying element amongst all Tibetans.

We have seen that the Tibetan diaspora is divided through diversity, but that in most public situations their public priority is granted to 'Tibetaness'. Therefore I conclude that to a large extent cultural compromise surely and strongly exists, despite their multiple divisions. But what does it mean, that the cultural compromise seems to succeed during meetings, demonstrations and rituals, but that it seems to have failed in unofficial social occasions? The cultural compromise that the Tibetans have managed to create is a strong compromise based on their struggle, but this compromise also seems to be a very 'narrow' compromise. It seems to only supersede other affiliations in situations where their struggle or Tibetan Buddhism is the main topic. Tibetan nationality was created in a context of resistance (towards the Chinese occupation). Since the Tibetan cultural compromise seems so 'narrow', what will happen to this compromise if this context disappears? Or, on the other hand, if the situation remains like this for several more decades, for how long will the feeling of resistance, the feeling of a struggling nation remain strong enough to support

¹⁶¹ Acton in: Anderson, 'Long-distance Nationalism', p 2

¹⁶² Interview with Tsundue, 19-03-2009

¹⁶³ Kolas, 'Tibetan Nationalism', p 57

¹⁶⁴ Duska, *Harmony ideology*, p 99

¹⁶⁵ Roemer, *Tibetan Government-in-Exile*, p 145

¹⁶⁶ Roemer, *Tibetan Government-in-Exile*, p 145

this narrow cultural compromise? Looking at the future with such questions in mind, means ending this thesis on a slightly negative note concerning Tibetan nationalism. However I do hope for the best outcome for the Tibetan people and I do believe they fight for a just cause which deserves more attention and political support from the international community than it currently receives.

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