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Tibetan, but not from Tibet

A Minor Field Study on Tibetan Diasporic Identity in India

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Abstract

This paper is the result of a minor field study (MFS) on Tibetan youth in India. The main research question is: How does the second generation of Tibetans in India express their identity, and what implications does this have on their belonging to a diaspora? The aim of this paper is to present discourses within the Tibetan diaspora and how the second generation relates to these as well as creates its own. Theoretically it takes a constructivist point of departure and the empirical investigation was conducted through qualitative semi-structured interviews, personal communication and to a lesser extent focus group discussions.

First the paper goes through some of the critical literature on orientalist descriptions and myths on Tibet. These Tibetologists question the portrayal of Tibet as 'Shangrila', stating that it is a common, but orientalist, image not only in the 'West' but also among Tibetans in exile. The main theory applied is postcolonial diaspora theory focusing on hybridity and the empowering potential of diasporic belonging. The thesis concludes that although many respondents used stereotypes about themselves, such as 'Tibetans are compassionate', they also embraced cultural change and modern/foreign elements, such as questioning essentialist understandings of culture by expressing that Tibetan culture is not some *entity* they need to, or can, preserve.

Key words: Tibetan youth, diaspora, identity, postcolonialism, hybridity

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List of Abbreviations

CTA – Central Tibetan Administration (the Tibetan Government in Exile)

TCV – Tibetan Children's Village

TWA – Tibetan Women's Association

TYC – Tibetan Youth Congress

1 Introduction

Since the Dalai Lama's flight from Tibet in 1959, the Tibetans who followed him to India have established thriving communities in exile, on land that was given to them by the Indian government, to handle the temporary refugee situation. Today the Tibetans remain refugees and there are few signs indicating a possible return for the approximately 100 000 Tibetans living in India¹. The Tibetan government-in-exile (CTA), and the residence of His Holiness the Dalai Lama is located in Dharamsala, in the North Indian state of Himachal Pradesh. Here most of the Tibetan NGOs also have their main offices. The Tibetan Women's Association (TWA) and the Tibetan Youth Congress (TYC) are two examples. Telling descriptions of Dharamsala can be found in various guidebooks and web pages about northern India, like the following quote:

Western and Indian tourists and scholars come here to see the *rebirth of an ancient and fascinating civilization*. The high altitude and cool weather contribute physically to this *recreation of the original Tibetan* environment. Dharamshala pulsates with the *sights and sounds of old* Tibet. Though certainly more modern, life is basically Tibetan in character. Shops strung out along the narrow streets of McLeod Gunj sell traditional Tibetan arts and handicrafts and the aroma of Tibetan dishes lingers in the air. (Web: Himachal, italics added)

In the outskirts of this "original" Tibetan environment lies the largest branch of Tibetan Children's Villages (TCV) where about 2000 students are enrolled. TCV is an organization with a large network of affiliated boarding- and day schools as well as handicraft and vocational training centres, teacher's training and has branches from the northern states of Ladakh, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand to the south of India and the state of Karnataka, where the largest Tibetan settlements are found.² From March to August 2005 I had the opportunity to take part of life at TCV in Dharamsala, during six months of voluntary English-teaching to children in the Middle School. It turned out to be an extremely rewarding experience and has laid the background for my return to write this thesis. During my time at the school my interest awoke for the situation of the young people I met. TCV cares deeply about

¹ According to Sangay there are approximately 130 000 exiled Tibetans spread across about 25 countries. 70% of them live in India, 13 percent in Nepal and Bhutan, followed by 8 percent in North America, 4 percent in Europe, and the rest in Australia, South Africa, Japan, and Taiwan. (Sangay 2003:119) Tibetans are not recognized as refugees according to the UN 1951 convention, which accounts for them being practically invisible in statistics. The UNHCR *State of the World's Refugees 2006* surprisingly has statistics for Tibetans but only in Nepal, where 20 000 Tibetans are supposed to reside. (Web: UNHCR 2006:223) The Government in Exile labels Tibetans in exile stateless. (Web: Government in Exile)

² There are supposed to be around 50 000 Tibetans in Karnataka (Web: Dhondenling). They are spread out in basically four different settlements, miles apart: Bylakuppe, Dhondenling (or Kollegal), Mundgod and Hunsur. TCV is based on the same principle as regular SOS children's villages, where children stay in homes with around 30 other children of different ages along with their 'house parents' and attend the adjacent school from preschool to 12th class. TCV takes care of over 16 000 Tibetan children all over India and runs 3 hostels for Tibetan college students. (Web: TCV)

preserving Tibetan culture and traditions, which considering the situation of the Tibetan people is quite understandable. Meanwhile, I started questioning if it is possible to preserve a culture, and to do it without creating imprisoning stereotypes of the people who belong to it. In a more general sense, I felt that the Tibet once lost was desperately clung on to and imagined just as stereotypically among exiled Tibetans, as it is being and has been in the "west" for centuries³. However, with time I came to see that Tibetan culture in exile also was being contested and changed from within. This paper is a result of my interest to return and learn more about that.

1.1 Statement of Purpose and Research Question

I was intrigued by the discourses of Tibetan diaspora in India and how Tibetans born and raised in exile feel about issues regarding identity, culture and belonging - issues they have to relate to daily and in rather complex circumstances. These issues, I feel, are well suited for an interdisciplinary approach of political science, sociology and cultural studies. I have chosen to use diaspora theories from a postcolonial perspective, since I feel that this approach encompass individual as well as societal expressions of belonging and identity from a constructivist point of view – with a dynamic understanding of culture and change. However to include Tibetans in diaspora studies has met with some objections, as for example Dibyesh Anand mentions when he states that "even though recent theorists of diaspora largely neglect the Tibetans, this has not discouraged many Tibetanists from using the term. [...] we must ask whether the neglect of Tibetans in and by diaspora studies is benign or whether it is exemplary of the limitations of current conceptualizations". (Anand 2003:211) Thus, the purpose with this study is to put theories of diaspora in a Tibetan context, with an aspiration to expand, or add to, available theories and conceptualizations. Theoretically then, I will be dealing with the notions of *individual* Tibetan identity and the more general claim to the *social* phenomenon of Tibetaness, through the framework of diaspora theory.

My main research questions read as follows:

How does the *second generation* of Tibetans in India express their identity, and what implications does this have on their belonging as a diaspora?

1.2 Disposition

³ For a deeper discussion on western myths and imaginations of Tibet as a magical "Shangri-la" see e.g. critical investigations by Bishop (1989) Dodin and Räther (2001), Klieger (2000) and Lopez (1994 and 1998). I will only provide a brief overview here since I dealt extensively with this literature in my bachelor thesis, in which I conducted a discourse analysis on travel writing in Tibet.

This paper starts off with chapter 2 on theory and method, which is intended to offer the reader a detailed and informative insight into the preparations, considerations, theoretical value-base and methodological choices I have had to consider in order to conduct this field study. To analyze the situation of Tibetans in exile, I must first argue why they should classify as a diasporic group, since this has been a rather recent development and a somewhat contested issue. This discussion will be handled in chapter 3, after the section dealing with contemporary Tibetology. Chapter 3 will also present my main theory of a postcolonial approach to diaspora, and the notion of hybridity. Chapter 4 is devoted to presenting and analysing the results of the interviews and the thesis will be concluded in chapter 5.

2 Theory and Method

I think about identity as something being discursively created through the constant process of repeating and reinterpreting notions of tradition, history, language, religion and other cultural and social aspects of one's life. I do not believe in the researchers quest for an objective truth, or finding the "true" answer to theoretical problems. Rather, I believe in critically investigating the truths we commonly accept as knowledge, the norms and stereotypes indicating that something has been naturalised and no longer of interest to question. I have made use of theories about diaspora and identity as formulated by Stuart Hall (2005). He aims to understand how diaspora creates hybridity and can constitute a source of empowerment, rather than being a stale concept with certain criteria needed to be fulfilled, in order for it to be applied to specific groups. Furthermore Dibyesh Anand (2000 and 2003) has written a few articles on the issue of diaspora in a Tibetan context, which I have found to be valuable.

2.1 Previous Research

Previous research relevant for this paper is mainly found within contemporary Tibetology (dating from the end of the 1990s) and not in mainstream diaspora studies. Certain researchers originating from as varying fields as sociology, religion, political science and anthropology, have contributed with knowledge about this vast subject. In this paper I have chosen to let them be represented by mainly Donald Lopez (1998) and P. Christiaan Klieger (1997). Most of these authors, considered to belong to modern Tibetology, differ from early Tibetologists in that they try to refute, and create new understandings of, centuries' old essentialist and orientalist descriptions of Tibet and Tibetans. Since I do not expect most readers to be well informed about this topic, I find it necessary to provide a more detailed description, which I do in chapter 3.

2.2 Theoretical Considerations

Undertaking a field study has forced me to consider different theoretical and practical aspects than for a conventional paper, in the process of investigation as well as analysis. The general advantages of a field study can be said to be that it allows for

a practical, deep and theory developing approach as well as analytical openness. (Taylor and Bogdan 1998) However, the qualitative nature of my particular study based on semi structured interviews, can be criticised – as all qualitative studies – regarding reliability and applicability, since it is hard to generalise from the findings of a qualitative study, and especially one conducted under such a short period of time. I am aware of the fact that by choosing a qualitative method I cannot reach a large number of respondents but the most important to me is to gain deeper knowledge about the situation on an individual level, which I believe will indicate a discourse applicable in a more general sense on a societal level. I am hoping that my paper will be interesting for what it can say about certain Tibetans of the second generation of refugees living in India, as both agents and products of their society.

2.3 Methodology and Selection of Participants

My choices of methods, techniques and tools were guided not only by the research questions I wanted to answer but I also had to consider the time limits given. I had planned for a three-month stay during which time I would conduct primarily semi-structured interviews and to a certain degree undertake focus group discussions. Some time was also set aside for travelling. One of the reasons for choosing a participatory and qualitative approach is that I think that my study as well as participants will benefit from techniques that facilitate a deep and open-minded analysis. I do not want to be dogmatic about my method, but I reasoned that a quantitative method (e.g a survey) would have been difficult to arrange and would contribute less to the understanding of how individuals reason, experience and discuss about their identity. As I see it, the point of using semi-structured interviews is that questions are adapted according to the respondent and can easily be changed and elaborated depending on what she or he chooses to focus on. By being flexible, the interviewer can thus pick up themes that fixed questions might overlook, and importance would be placed not only on what is said, but also on *how* it is said and what is *not* said.

The target group was second generation Tibetans above the age of 18 (second generation meaning born or at least brought up from early childhood in India). In the process of choosing participants I had been advised by Jan Magnusson, professor in Sociology at Lund University, to consider youth who live in the more isolated settlements in the south. For that reason I decided to visit two different settlements, Dehra Dun in the north and Bylakuppe in the south. The study however started in Dharamsala and ended in the university city of Bangalore. This resulted in 9 semi-structured interviews, 4 personal communications, (the reason I do not count these as interviews is that I for various reasons did not/could conduct a full interview) and 2 group discussions with 7 and 3 participants each. Subsequently then, I have interviewed a total of 24 people (11 women and 13 men). Furthermore, I have had many conversations with friends and people who did not fit the target group that

naturally have added to the huge amount of information I have had to select from in the process of writing. I also tried to keep in mind that as an outsider I obviously bring my own presumptions and prejudice onto the field, even if I aspire to keep an open mind.

I came to realize that people are very 'nomadic' in the sense moving from one place to another within the exile community. So conducting interviews in Bangalore especially, being a university city, did not necessarily mean that the person was actually from there or even the vicinity. Also in Dharamsala and Dehra Dun, I would meet people from many different parts of India. It is therefore very hard to try and draw conclusions based on a comparison of where participants were born or brought up, and if there might be a local difference in identity-making, but my purpose was only to try and broaden the range of participants for sake of validity. I tried to ensure having equal gender representation, even if it was slightly easier to access males. I think this to some extent could be due to that men in general have more access to the public sphere and are therefore more used to conversing with foreigners. The gender aspect is a very interesting issue in Tibetan society, considering that it is popularly assumed to be more gender equal than other Asian societies, an assumption that has been criticised for being part of the mythmaking mentioned above. Unfortunately the scope of this paper does not allow for such a perspective.

Ethical aspects of working with youths as participants are also important to observe. (Taylor and Bogdan 1998) For this and several other reasons mentioned above and because of the possibly politically sensitive nature of the issue and of the future of Tibet, I did not approach individuals under the age of 18. Building trust and a good relationship with the interviewees before initiating interviews was important to me, since I did not want to feel like I was infringing upon anyone, by putting them in an uncomfortable position of having to say no or being part of a study they might rather not participate in. I was relieved to see that most participants were very supportive and wanted to help out as a way for them to contribute to the knowledge about Tibetans in exile and the Tibetan cause. This might on the other hand have had an ambiguous effect on interviews, in the sense that people might tend to say what they feel is expected of them on behalf of their community. The fact that I am a 'Westerner', and a young woman might also affect the kind of information respondents feel comfortable or willing to share. In any case, I still felt that this positive response contributed to achieving some kind of reciprocity, at least on an individual basis, by creating a forum for discussion. Unfortunately, in some cases time did not allow for repeated meetings, in which cases the only time we would talk was for the interview that lasted for about one hour. Usually I felt that I gained more from people I had met once or twice before deciding on an interview.

Some participants wanted to be anonymous while others did not mind exposing their names. However I have decided to alter all names into a single letter in alphabetical order and I have refrained from giving information about participants that could be considered too revealing. When referring to interviews in the text I have only marked quotes with the alphabetical initial and date. In the list of references the place

indicated is where interviews were conducted, not where the participant was from. The interview guide is given as an appendix, but should not be considered as a strict questionnaire.

2.4 Practical Considerations and Methodological Limitations

One issue to keep in mind, which was more or less impossible to avoid, is that there is an overrepresentation of former students of TCV among my interviewees. I do not really see this as a huge dilemma, since it is part of the reality I wish to examine. Dharamsala is the hub where official administration, most NGOs and a large "civil" community lives, but by placing a big part of the study outside of Dharamsala I was aiming to put less focus on this region of the exile community, which by many is said not to be representative of the life of Tibetans in exile in general⁴. However since this was the only one of the four "Tibetan" locations I visited for the second time, and probably because of its international atmosphere, it was the easiest place for me to find people to talk to. I recorded some interviews, for others I simply took notes and for some, I had to rely on memory and summarize shortly afterwards what had been discussed. The use of such different methods depended on the respondents' feelings about being recorded but was also due to spontaneous meetings with interesting people who I might not be able to meet again and to situations where I felt it would disturb the conversation if I pulled out my notebook. I would however make clear that people I talked to knew the purpose of my study and promise confidentiality if including their views in my paper. I noticed that many seemed a bit uncomfortable while being recorded, and I worried that some interviews ended up being a little strained due to this, which was another reason for not using a recorder in some cases.

After my first stay in a Tibetan community in India I had begun to realise the complexity of socially accepted behaviour and norms governing interpersonal relations there, just as in any community. As mentioned in *Development Fieldwork* a researcher needs to be considerate and respectful of participants' culture and traditions (Mikkelsen 2003). It is also important to understand how local context influences participants' willingness to answer sensitive questions or feelings of being exposed against ones will, for example what is taboo and what is acceptable to discuss openly. Something I was aware that I needed to pay certain attention to, working with young adults from the Tibetan community, was the certain code of conduct they abide by, their respect for authority and shyness (or the virtuous act of being humble) that could affect the research process and information gathering. In some cases, when I had to be introduced to people by an official or person of

⁴ This can largely be explained by the fact that Dharamsala and its surroundings have a lower Tibetan population than the south, and are more international since it has been very "westernized" by huge streams of tourists and foreign visitors.

authority⁵, it felt like the line between agreeing out of duty or personal wish was blurred. Several times participants also expressed their hope that they would be able to give good answers, and said others would probably be better at it, in spite of my assurance that everyone's answers were equally interesting to me. Living in isolated communities where everybody knows everybody there is a great deal of social control and little room for individuality for youngsters. One example of this is the common statement I encountered, that premarital relationships are quite frequently occurring among Tibetan youth in college when they stay in big cities outside of the family home (or away from the strict regulations of TCV). Even for older youth the social control can be rather strict.

⁵ I tried avoiding this, since I preferred asking for an interview only after having been able to talk casually. In some cases due to limited time I however needed to be put in touch with participants in a more formal way.

3 Tibetology and Diaspora Theory

As I mentioned in section 2.1 Donald Lopez and Christian Klieger have developed original conceptualizations for the contemporary understanding of Tibet and Tibetanness in exile. Lopez' concept 'prisoners of Shangri-la' deals with Tibet as an object of Western fantasy, that has made both Tibetans and Westerners into prisoners of the myth of Tibet as 'Shangri-la'— the idealization of Tibetans as "a happy, peaceful people devoted to the practice of Buddhism whose remote and ecologically enlightened land, ruled by a god-king, was invaded by the forces of evil." (Lopez, 1998:11). He suggests that the Tibetan elite in exile, and especially the Dalai Lama, actively have contributed to this image. Furthermore, Lopez' book is about 'rescuing' Tibet and Tibetans from this myth. Such idealization, he argues, has negative political effects in the sense that it is damaging for the Tibetan strife for an independent country. In the words of another scholar, George Dreyfus, "[p]ropping up Tibet as an ideal society marginalizes Tibet, threatening to remove this country from the arena of real political action so as to enshrine it in a realm of pure ideals and fantasies." (Dreyfus 2005:1)

Lopez argues that Tibet as a conventional nation did not exist before the exile in 1959, and this is something that I will come back to in my analysis toward the end of this paper. Lopez refers to the great regional differences existing in geographical Tibet (which used to cover about 1/3 of today's China) in religious practice as well as in language. In support of this idea can be mentioned that some Tibetan researchers like Tsering Shakya (2000) and Lobsang Sangay (2003) have emphasised this historical approach, telling a less idealized story of, what they have shown were, a feudal Tibet ruled by aristocracy and different monastic sects. Sangay explains that some Tibetans supported the revolutionizing ideas held by the Chinese Communist Party – that farmers and commoners were being oppressed in Tibet. For instance, the Dalai Lama states in an interview that he, in the late 50s, was trying to merge Marxist ideals of egalitarianism with the Buddhist notion of compassion, but failed to implement social changes due to the militant ideology of the Communist Party (Sangay 2003).

To offer the reader a background aiming to be as inclusive as possible, it is important to review the version Dreyfus, on the other hand, offers. He agrees with Lopez in the importance of critically investigating how Tibet is and has been imagined by the West. According to Dreyfus however, it is not so simple to state that expressions of Tibetan nationalism (derived from the idea of a unified rather than regionally diverse Tibet) began only after the exile, as some sort of orientalist appropriation of Buddhist modernism lead by the Dalai Lama, thus propagating the image of Tibet and its people as democratic, peace loving and environmentally friendly. Buddhist

modernism is explained as a movement within Buddhism that sought to respond to the negative colonial portrayal of Buddhism by presenting its tradition in modern and positive terms, as the following quote is meant to describe:

Within this discourse, Buddhism is in some respects depicted as a world religion on a par with other world religions, particularly Christianity: having its own founder, sacred scriptures, philosophical tradition, etc. But in other respects Buddhism is not considered as being just on a par with other religions, it is in many ways superior to them. Buddhism, it is claimed, is based on reason and experience and does not presuppose any blind acceptance of authority. As such, it is highly compatible with modern science, to whose authority it appeals. It is also a religion, if it can be so called, aimed solely at providing its followers with a path leading to the overcoming of suffering. As such, this path is strongly ethical (e.g., devoted to non-violence), and provides valuable resources for social action. (Dreyfus 2005:4)

Dreyfus comments that in the case of the Dalai Lama, his modern stance, even if inspired by Buddhist modernism, should not be considered as a typical version of it. Nor should his ideas be thought as tactics or western influence, in short, Dreyfus argues that the Dalai Lama should not be thought of as a 'prisoner of Shangrila'. One of the reasons, he says, is that Tibetan Buddhism *traditionally* includes notions we today would think are modern ideas. He states: "The Buddha's recommendation that one should investigate the teachings before adopting them – like testing gold before one buys it – is not, after all, a modern creation!" (ibid:10) Dreyfus' main criticism is that Lopez fails to consider the orientalist assumptions of his own analysis of Tibetanness. Personally, I feel that both Dreyfus and Lopez are lacking in some ways while providing useful conceptual tools in other ways.

Lopez suggests that Dalai Lama, as *the* spokesperson of the Tibetan people has offered both them and the West a version of Tibet as pure and fundamentally Buddhist in culture, and of Buddhism as essentially made up of the virtue of compassion. Furthermore the Dalai Lama has continuously (since the official stance he took in the late 1980s that Tibetans would settle for autonomy instead of independence⁶) proposed to create a zone of peace in Tibet – letting some minds wander to the fantastic story of the hidden kingdom of Shangrila, as created by James Hilton in his 1933 novel, *Lost Horizon*. Lopez is therefore concerned with "the way in which his [the Dalai Lama's] proposals appear to blend seamlessly with the pre- and post-diaspora fantasies of Tibet as a place unlike any other on the globe, a zone of peace, free of weapons that harm humans and the environment, where the practice of compassion is preserved for the good of humanity." (Lopez 1998:205)

Klieger's writing deals with the differences between idealized Tibetan self-presentation and the Western myth of Shangri-La. He argues that Tibetans, in order to gain access to financial and political help, have felt the need to suit Western ideas of Tibetan culture. In this he acknowledges a certain degree of agency to Tibetans in

⁶ "I have thought for a long time on how to achieve a realistic solution to my nation's plight. My cabinet and I solicited the opinions of many friends and concerned persons. As a result, on September 21, 1987, at the Congressional Human Rights Caucus in Washington, D.C., I announced a Five Point Peace Plan for Tibet. In it I called for a conversion of Tibet into a zone of peace, a sanctuary in which humanity and nature can live together in harmony. I also called for respect of human rights, democratic ideals, environmental protection, and a halt to the Chinese population transfer into Tibet." (Web: Dalai Lama)

exile, at least to the government and the elite. He explains this development with historical 'facts' that the Tibetan flight in the late 1950s coincided with liberal movements in the West. People in the West were directing more interest towards suppressed peoples and human rights abuses in developing countries. This interest, he states, started a demand for 'ethnic' arts and crafts and Tibetans started to manufacture carpets and thangkas (religious paintings) according to Western taste, which among other things lead to a creation of a hyperreal Tibet.

Klieger's classification of a hyperreal world can be explained as "a rather benign *caricature* of the real world". (Klieger 1997:59, italics added) The Tibetan hyperreality came to promote a certain message: "1) Tibet has traditionally enjoyed an [sic] historically different past independent of China and other countries, 2) Tibet possesses an unique culture, 3) Tibet, a sacred land, is the repository of the full complement of Buddhist teachings and 4) Tibet and Tibetans still exist, and thus must be restored to their rightful place." (Klieger 1997:66) In the hyperreal state time and space is halted, no changes occur and exile representations of homeland Tibet has come to resemble the fixed Western stereotype of Shangrila. I would like to exemplify this by quoting the actor Richard Gere, who has been devoted to both Buddhism and the Tibetan cause for decades and was interviewed by Orville Schell in his book *Virtual Tibet*: "Many of us constantly remind our Tibetan friends, 'You must maintain that sense of uniqueness and that genuine cultural commitment to nonviolence. If you pick up arms and become like the Palestinians, you'll lose your special status.' In other words, whatever they do politically has to be in keeping with who they are as a culture". (Schell 2000: 56)

Klieger has conducted extensive field research on e.g differences in expressions of gender between first and second generations in urban living environment in which he provides specific information on second generation of Tibetans in India (Klieger 2002). Åsa Tiljander Dahlström (2001) also conducted research in field and dedicated her dissertation to how the Tibetan diaspora per se creates conflict since internal unity is supposed, and she targeted a broad spectrum of the Tibetan diaspora, including old age people, newly arrived Tibetans and monks in southern settlements. Anand (2000) has briefly discussed the difference between second generation and newly arrived refugees when it comes to nationalist expressions and different 'versions' of Tibetanness. Anand has also investigated some common topics in considering Tibetans in exile as a diaspora and the overlapping of culture and politics in Tibetan diaspora. The topics, or categories, concern Tibet as imagined homeland, how Tibetan culture in exile is presented and the commodification of it, the rhetoric of return to the homeland, as well as the complex Tibet-West interaction where the Dalai Lama plays an important role. I will come back to some of them in chapter 4, when presenting my own findings, but the next section is devoted to theories of diaspora.

3.1 A Postcolonial Approach on Diaspora

After having provided a brief but hopefully informative background on some of the available theoretical reasoning on Tibet and Tibetaness, I find it necessary to clarify what the concept of diaspora actually means and how it can be applied to the Tibetan case. It seems most literature on diaspora begins with telling the original use of the term, referring to the dispersion of specific groups (Jews, Armenians). However, most authors refute this narrow meaning of the word, and talk instead of the need for a wider categorization. The term diaspora has thus been used and stretched to support various cultural and political agendas, which according to Rogers Brubaker has resulted in a "dispersion of the meanings of the term in semantic, conceptual and disciplinary space". (Brubaker 2005:1) What he sees as an alarming development is that the term diaspora now seems to be applicable to any group of peoples dispersed in space. His main concern however, seems to be that the term is losing its ability to offer a distinct definition and therefore might be of little use in academia. This concern might be justified, but personally I think that the reason for this increase in, and frequent use of, the term diaspora might indicate changes in the world that need to be addressed and conceptualized, not excluded from the theory.

The sociologist William Safran states that a group of people needs to fulfil certain criteria in order to be recognised as a diaspora. First of all "they or their ancestors must have emigrated from a place of origin to two or more distant or foreign regions; they keep a memory, a vision or a myth about their place of origin (original home); they don't think they are or can be fully accepted by those countries in which they reside; they consider their home countries to be their real and ideal homes to which they or their future generations will or should return when the circumstances allow; they think that they are obligated to the defence or reestablishment of their homeland and its security and wellbeing and finally their consciousness and solidarity as a group is strongly defined by continuous relations to the homeland". (in Clifford 1997:247) This definition however, can be criticised for focusing too much on the necessity for a group to fulfil various criteria in order to be classified as a diaspora. The 49 years Tibetans have lived in exile might, for instance, not be considered enough in a strict interpretation, even if all the other criteria are met. Would this mean that they should not be considered a diasporic group? I do not think so. The reason for Tibetans rarely being mentioned as a diasporic group might rather have to do with Tibet being a neglected topic in international politics, as implied by Lopez above.

However, to incorporate the Tibetans in exile within a diaspora framework, I have taken my point of departure in postcolonial theory as argued previously. I find postcolonial theory relevant since it offers a constructivist understanding of culture and identity as well as analytic tools for questioning power relations, cultural changes and their links to societal structures and discourses. We should also question the meaning of words like modern, Western, and traditional. The word modern, henceforth refers to actions or things pertaining to the current time and style. Words like 'West' and 'traditional' are used in lack of better terms, but I do not intend them to be understood as static. In the following section I will elaborate on Hall's postcolonial notion of hybridity in diaspora theory.

3.2 Diasporic Identity – A Matter of Hybridity?

Stuart Hall's version of "diaspora experience [. . .] is defined, not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity [...] by *hybridity*". (Hall 2005:241, my translation) Hall emphasizes hybridity and the empowering aspects of diaspora. His theory is based on the Caribbean diaspora, but I think it would be interesting to apply on the Tibetan case, since it too has been marked by much primordialism previously. Culture, according to Hall should be experienced from the group's differences rather than essentialist claims of similarities people in it need to share in order to belong. These differences constitute what the people really are, or have become, since it offers the possibility to move beyond essentialist assumptions and perceptions of people, habits and practices. The concept of cultural identity in this meaning is not a given beyond time and space, history or culture and it goes through constant changes. It is not some sort of origin we can return to. In this way Hall shows how colonial rule and the way black people's cultural experiences were depicted and distorted, within the dominating forms of art, was the result of a power- and normalisation politics. (ibid:233) This kind of inner expropriation of cultural identity deforms and paralyses the subjects and if one does not resist it might result in, as Fanon had said: "individuals without any kind of anchoring or ideal, colorless, stateless, rootless – a race of angles." (Hall 2005:234, my translation)

Another interesting aspect of hybrid identities is that difference lives alongside continuity. As an example Hall mentions how, upon returning to the Caribbean the "double nature" of similarity and difference would be striking. That it would be western at the same time as it is Jamaican. The original Africa does not exist anymore, nor would I say, does Tibet or any other original home. They have been changed by a mixture of political, religious and philosophical ideas, combinations of flavours, and creolisation of languages. In the Tibetan diaspora we see this by looking at how human rights values have influenced Tibetan Buddhism, Tibetan food blends with Indian spices and Tibetan colloquial language has both been standardized in exile and mixed with Hindi and English. Hall further warns us to maintain a critical stand against the 'West', which according to him, has a tendency to normalise and assimilate places (e.g. Africa) by trying to preserve them in a primitive and unchanged imagery. I hope that this thesis so far has succeeded in highlighting that even if orientalism is laid out in 'positive' terms, it is nonetheless imprisoning in the sense that it gives us the impression of a fixed and unchangeable reality. The 'West' has for centuries had the power of representing the 'Rest' through stereotypical images, whether they were of the idealising or degrading kind.

The notion of hybridity that Hall proposes should probably not, in spite of its appeal, be uncritically applied. After all it too is based on some sort of fundamental categories. It is based on the very structures that it claims to question. For there to occur a mix or creolisation, there has to be some *origins* that intermix. What I find useful and interesting however is the very idea that identity can be conceptualised in

a less primordial use of language, thus indicating that cultural crossovers can be empowering rather than uprooting, and that experiences of loss and discrimination should be turned into opportunities for acceptance and respect. I agree with Hall in that there can never be a return to our origins. This might be the whole reason behind the *mythmaking* that has been so prevalent in the Tibetan case, the longing, the searching and the waiting is hyperreal. It is not enough to look to the past to find a nation's culture since it "consists of all the cultural activities of a people that aim to describe, justify and praise those actions which have made it possible for this people to create their own image of themselves and thereby survive." (ibid:242, my translation)

How is diaspora then related to the concept of identity? The concept diaspora in the light of this discussion offers new options when it comes to understanding identity. Identity does not inevitably have to be determined by place or nationality, at least not fixed, primordial notions of these. People obviously need to have something tangible to identify with but what I am suggesting is that a dynamic and flexible identification process should be allowed for. In this way diasporas, as perceived by Hall, can challenge essentialist claims of identity by placing value in other forms of kinships than that of origin (nationality). However, as I see it, diaspora groups cannot automatically be thought to be exempt from feelings of either essentialism or nationalism, something the Tibetan case will exemplify. In the following chapter I will present my research findings with the ambition to place these in the theoretical framework outlined above.

4 Identity in the Tibetan Diaspora

According to Misra, India has accepted, more or less willingly, over 300 000 refugees out of which approximately 100 000 are Tibetan. (Misra 2003) India, stretching from the Himalayas in the north to tropical jungles in the south with over 1 billion inhabitants, is truly a patchwork of nations. Figures of religious, linguistic and ethnic belonging are a bit risky to use since they are highly contested, but it is said that more than 800 languages are spoken by a total of about 2000 ethnic groups, some of which are struggling for complete self-rule. (Web: Library of Congress) The geography of such a vast nation, with 28 self-governing states and 7 union territories, gives a clue to how people can disappear in the crowd, at the same time as their mere numbers facilitate ensuring their rights to their own language and religion. With this in mind it is easy to see how the Tibetans in exile have been able to preserve their culture and language, just as most of India's ethnic groups. Had they settled primarily in any other country this might not have been as easy. India may be chaotic, corrupt and still developing, thus not being able to offer the best opportunities or facilities⁷, but at the same time it might be precisely this that has allowed the Tibetans to keep their 'Tibetanness'. In the following I will try to show possible answers to my question, how the second generation of Tibetans express their identity and I will attempt to describe the implications of this.

4.1 "I'm Tibetan, but I'm not from Tibet"

A majority of people I talked to would respond to the question "Where are you from?" by stating their 'Indian' village or settlement, in one way indicating that as their source of identification rather than Tibet. "I am from the (Tibetan) settlement of..." would be a very common reply. However, I do not see this as a sign of not identifying themselves as Tibetans, but rather as an effect of the hybrid nature of their diasporic life. A young Tibetan says in his own short film: "I'm from India but I'm not Indian. I'm Tibetan but I'm not from Tibet." (Web: Radio Canada International) A similar sentiment was expressed by one of the young men I talked to in group N: "We were born in India but we're not Indian, we are Tibetan." (N, 15 November) In my experience Tibet was the main point of reference for respondents, and no one would say that they did not feel Tibetan. When asked how he felt about being Tibetan in India, F responded: "We still feel that Tibet is our country... that inner feeling is there... as our parents belong to that country, we feel that we are

⁷ Most of the financial aid to Tibetans comes from western donors and sponsors and not the Indian government

Tibetans.” (F, 22 October) The college students in group O however mentioned the problems they face in getting jobs because they do not have any citizenship and how they are met with restrictions when wanting to e.g. organize peace marches. ”India is the largest democracy in the world, but they are still under Chinese pressure.” (O, 16 November) One of the young women in group N said: ”I’m being brutally honest...but I don’t feel that my society is progressing. I don’t see anything Tibetan society has done politically for the past 50 years, to reach independence. Each and everyone is trying to be patriotic and all but ...there are a lot of steps to go through ... to do a hunger strike is not enough”. (N, 15 November) It seems political issues were intimately connected to the question of belonging, and of living in exile.

Much previous writing has shown that the act of leaving Tibet plays a significant role in the diasporic experience, an event that has been imprinted in the mind of most children born or raised in exile. As one of my interviewees put it: ”Most young Tibetans have a feeling for the Tibetan cause ... most have attended Tibetan schools where the issue is focused on, so we all have that in our mind.” (C, 9 October) Many of the young Tibetans in exile I talked to also seem to dream of living in Tibet. Of the people I interviewed a recurrent theme was the idea of returning to Tibet. They would use the word *return*, in spite of the fact that they actually never have been there. In group O participants expressed this feeling: ”We have been in India almost 50 years but I feel that it’s not so effective” and ”We need to go there [Tibet] and struggle from inside, otherwise I don’t think anything will happen” (O, 16 November). This was intimately linked to the question of how they imagined Tibet in the future, how they felt about the Middle Way approach as a successful strategy and about their personal ambitions for the future. Some were hopeful and optimistic about being able to see Tibet one day, others would be rather sceptical to the potential success of any kind of diplomacy, but still hoped to go there.

As mentioned by Anand the rhetoric of the homeland can be seen as a ”hyperreal” construction to keep the Tibetan identity in firm relation to the nation-state world order, as one people belonging to a distinct nation. The act of rooting outside of Tibet is thus a difficult issue. It is neither really allowed by the host nor wanted by the Tibetan government in exile. Furthermore it is difficult on an individual level as well. ”Finding roots in a country which you cannot claim as yours has been a dilemma for me, and I think it will continue to be a dilemma.” (M, 15 November) One example of this, M told me, was when after grade 12 he had taken an entry exam for college, but was disqualified in spite of paying the fee because he filled in his nationality as Tibetan. One young woman I interviewed said she didn’t feel at all that India was her country, in spite of being born there. ”We feel that we can be kicked out ... India is not giving citizenship [to Tibetans] but I wouldn’t apply even if I could.” (E, 19 October) She expresses mixed emotions over not being accepted but not wanting to accept her host country either. This might be considered as a kind of deliberate non-integration, but at the same time, it is also an unfortunate discriminatory reality. Every year, or six months depending on local authorities, Tibetans born in India who have been granted a so-called RC (registration card) – an identity document that e.g does not allow for international travel – have to renew

their residence status. These things constantly remind them of their rootlessness.

It remains a fact that Tibetans in India are not recognised as refugees, nor do they have the rights of citizens to own property and seek employment within the public sector. They are basically living on leased land, to be returned in about 50 years from now⁸. Even if huge monasteries and well functioning welfare offices, schools and old peoples' homes are running smoothly, life in exile for Tibetans seems to be a rather scattered existence. Due to employment opportunities within the community being rare, people often have to move from north to south and families live separated for years. Some respondents (A, B, F, G) expected to get, or already had, employment within the Tibetan community. In order to be considered for employment within the CTA for instance, proficiency in Tibetan language is necessary. Many young Tibetans born in exile, meanwhile, struggle with the Tibetan language, something many older teachers complained to me about, and many students I met felt ashamed of the fact that they were not able to read or write fluently in their mother tongue. Klieger noted in a field study of his, that Tibetan college students in Delhi placed English as their first *literary* language. (Klieger 2002) In my interviews only two mentioned language as an important marker of Tibetan identity, and later the same respondents would state that English however was much easier to learn for them personally. (F and G)

Employment within the Indian community is considered quite competitive. Only D, H, M and focus group N were optimistic about their chances on the Indian labour market. They all had a high level of education in common and identified strongly with their Indian-Tibetan birthplace. H however mentioned that there were large limitations for him, not having Indian citizenship. He also wanted to keep his job in an Indian firm nearby the settlement in order to be of use for the Tibetan community, rather than make more money in a bigger company somewhere else. When asked about their future, returning to Tibet would not come up. Respondent I said he wanted to work in the Tibetan community, "because my education was sponsored by TCV". (I, 28 November) The sense of needing to fulfil one's duty toward, and doing something to repay, the Tibetan community seems important for the choice of future occupation among many I have talked to. In group N, all were college students and also wanted to contribute to the Tibetan community but expressed it slightly differently. One of the young men thought that the best strategy was first "to gain expertise in our fields... from the Indian side...and then go back and use that to help our community." (N, 15 November) A young woman in the group said: "I want to change the way Tibetan society thinks, it's very narrow, I feel. Without education you can't do much...I want to change the education system even in Tibetan schools also. I'm not criticizing and all...but we usually don't allow the other to grow as a person." (ibid)

⁸ The southern settlement of e.g. Bylakuppe is built on land given on a 99 year lease from the 1960s, and recently the Dalai Lama discouraged people from investing too much money on new houses since they would not be able to reap the profit of selling later on.

4.2 ... To Preserve and Promote Their Unique Culture...

Some authors have focused on the way the Tibetan exiles have stressed the importance of their culture and religion, rather than national belonging as Jane Ardley expresses when stating: "The issue that persist here is why the Tibetan government in exile seem content to maintain that the most pressing danger is the destruction of Tibetan culture [and religion]. The answer is surely pragmatic: the Dalai Lama recognizes that no country stands to gain politically from fighting for an independent Tibet, and so pragmatically chooses to emphasise instead the importance of the survival of Buddhism." (Ardley 2002:167) This would allow us to see the complexity of discourses at play in and about the Tibetan diaspora.

From a branch of the CTA, a basic education policy for Tibetans in exile has been published. This is to guide the Tibetan education system in India and states that: "Tibetan people have a responsibility to themselves and to the whole world to preserve and promote their unique wealth of rich culture and traditions, which is of immense value to the entire humanity." (Web: Tibetan Children's Educational and Welfare Fund) It goes on to mention that the long-term goal of Tibetan people is, among other things, "... to transform Tibetan society into a non-violent society; and to lead other people onto the path of non-violence and compassion" (ibid). While reading this, the words of Dreyfus explaining modern Buddhism and Lopez' worry over its claim to superiority came to mind (see chapter 3).

I could tell by a clear majority of respondents, that Buddhism was the main common denominator for their description of what the most important Tibetan trait was. "Tibetan culture is mostly influenced by our religion" (N, 15 November). Some would say 'our religion', others specify Buddhism, but the majority would continue to describe those certain aspects of Tibetan Buddhism that they felt were typical for Tibetan people, such as compassion, non-violence, selflessness, being peace-loving and humble. "People consider Tibetans honest, religious minded, compassionate and kind hearted. ... Though we were born here [India] we have that Tibetan nature, passed from our parents." (G, 22 October)

Katrin Goldstein-Kyaga writes that "the concept of non-violence has become a significant part of Tibetan ethnic identity since the Chinese take-over of Tibet." (Goldstein-Kyaga 1999:21) She goes on to describe how language has lost its previous role as the most important signifier for Tibetan identity and that ethnic identity "is becoming more of an ideological conviction, where the concept of non-violence is significant." (ibid.) Maybe Tibetan youth feel more comfortable with other aspects of Tibetanness that are 'easier' to handle than a script (language) they rarely need to use after primary school or a vague sense of nationality (without the attributes that normally follow from belonging to a nation, like a passport for instance). Maybe concepts like culture and religion, and the ideas of compassion and non-violence, are more readily available for them in popular expressions of culture.

To use Hall's terminology, it is important to take into consideration all cultural activities that aim to describe those actions which have made it possible for the group "to create their own image of themselves and thereby survive". (see quote on p. 14 from Hall 2005: 242)

To E and almost all of my respondents, culture was perceived as something that "you keep inside you". (E, 19 October) She herself had many times received comments from elders that she shouldn't dress so Western, but she said that it mostly came from the older and uneducated generation born in Tibet. Almost all respondents would say similar things about culture being found on the inside. One young woman in Dharamsala stated that "the most important is that we should have a feeling in our mind and heart that we are Tibetan." (D, 18 October) She felt that it was necessary for the Tibetan community to modernize, that they lost their country because they didn't know anything about the western world.⁹ In general I found this too to be a recurrent response to my question whether or not Tibetan culture was facing a risk of being lost in exile. This was, on my behalf, a tricky question since I personally do not believe in an essentialist understanding of culture. Anyhow, by asking I wanted to see what reactions I would get.

It turned out that a few (mostly the politically active) protested against the essentialist claim it made. Some comments indicated a quite stereotypical understanding of Tibetan religion, in line with: "We should preserve some general things related to religion ... [that we can] put into practice in our daily lives...like helping developing world peace..." (N, 15 November) One of the young women in the same group complained that even though "everybody cares about being Buddhist, I don't think that everybody is really practicing Buddhism." (ibid) Another one of the young men disagreed with this statement, saying that "it is not necessary that whatever he [the Dalai Lama] says we need to follow, but we should do what is possible." (ibid) In his view, religious practice was changing and needed to adapt to the individual's prerequisites. Faced with the same question, respondent M felt that "there are certain aspects of Tibetan culture which we have to preserve, and certain we have to lose in fact. We can't just say that Tibetan culture is a whole we have to preserve." He continued to say that: "Globalization happens everywhere. You can't expect people to do the same thing for centuries, but I don't fear that Tibetans will lose their identity... if you scratch a little bit you find the loyalty for His Holiness and you will find that the Tibetans [...] are engrained very strongly with each and every Tibetan." (M, 15 November)

One political activist said that many young Tibetans confuse the concepts 'modernization' and 'Westernization', and that the Tibetan community need to modernize, but not Westernize. "Maybe a lot of Tibetan youth are wearing hip hop clothes and listening to Western music but if you scratch the surface they have a

⁹ During a contested time in the early 1900s, when Tibet was what many observers would label independent, the Tibetan government did not seek representation in the UN, and some say this was the reason China later was able to invade without protest from the international community. (see Shakya 2000)

strong Tibetan identity still.” (L, 10 October) He kept on talking about the Western tourists and students of Buddhism that come to Dharamsala to learn Tibetan Buddhism, and said that ”some Westerners come here only to get the nice and exciting parts and try to impose their ideas on us. They have this Shangri-la image of Tibetans. Some who come to study Buddhism don’t care about the Tibetan cause. When we ask them to sign petitions they say they’re not interested in that. That’s bad. They seem to like the accessories more than the real culture”. (ibid) K agreed with this and told me that she felt that many Westerners seem to think of Buddhism (or Tibetan culture in general) as a trend. “...like when Richard Gere wore prayerbeads on TV... then it became a fashion fly.” (K, 10 October) They complained that especially Westerners in touristy Dharamsala, would criticise them for not being Tibetan enough, dressing in baggy pants and listening to Western pop.

When I was talking to C, about Tibetan culture he said the changes occurring and the ‘loss’ of Tibetan traditions that many elders fear, was very much an ongoing process in exile, due to Western influences, media and internet. He however, thought that this was happening all over the world. He said that he could feel this change at times, when for instance watching films about Tibet before the exile such as *Kundun* (directed by Martin Scorsese). ”We couldn’t relate to what is happening there ... we also feel like we are non-Tibetans watching a Tibetan film.” (C, 9 October) He said he considered Westernization and modernization as almost the same, one deriving from the other and seemed positive to the changes it had brought with it, for instance modern education – something many Tibetans of the second generation place great value in.

4.3 Homeland and Host land – Dreams of Return or *Re-settlement* ?

In spite of the, rather expected, sentiment many seemed to have of returning to Tibet one day, I came to realize that another place appeared to be tempting more and more youngsters, that is “the West”. E had been to the US for work, just as an increasing number of Tibetans in India. I asked whether the trend of going to the West among Tibetans might have negative consequences, and she responded: ”We youngsters don’t want to leave because of money but because we don’t have passports and because facilities and education is better there...I earned good money in the US but came back, my children needed me. Girls are discriminated in all countries. I wanted to do certain things in my life, but I couldn’t [due to lack of societal and financial support]. It’s too late for me, but I want to make my daughter strong to face the world. There is no future in India for her.” (E, 19 October) On an individual level, not being able to set roots in the *place* you call your home might be upsetting and excluding. At the same time, this woman has a drive and ambition that goes beyond borders.

I heard several people say that almost every Tibetan family in India has at least one member abroad. This was noticeable in the southern settlements, where the majority of the people (who were still there) that I saw, were either retired or schoolchildren. When I asked about this, most said that they would go if they had the chance. Not necessarily to settle, but at least to save up some money or get a good education. (B, C, E, H and I) People leaving seemed to have started reasoning that since they can't go 'back' to Tibet, they have no reason to stay in India where their future is uncertain, salaries are low, discrimination and corruption prevalent and no rights are given. "There are more opportunities in western countries compared to India – itself a developing country." (E, 19 October) Group O discussed the increased political opportunities of living abroad, complaining over the restrictions they face in India.

One problem I was told however, was that so many of the ones who leave don't return. Both respondent B and I, who had stable jobs within the Tibetan community, said they could imagine going on a scholarship for further studies but would come back after some years. They felt that the Tibetans who left in the 90s set a bad example by settling abroad. "Now many want to go to earn money. Personally I feel this was a wrong decision [the CTA sending 1000 Tibetans to the US]. Students get distracted, waiting to go to the US [to join their families]. They lose their interest in the Tibetan cause. I call it a disease, not doing any good. The standard of living in India is not too good, so we don't get lost of the cause. Also we are closer physically and have more time, in the US they have to work so much. ... They are trying to get citizenship, so they don't want to be Tibetan." (I, 28 November) However, many respondents seemed to have a different opinion. They said that youngsters going abroad get more involved in politics, and with preserving their culture. "There is even more nationalism for them ... they are contributing [financially] to Tibetans in India." (H, 27 November) Both A and J said similar things. "Most of the Tibetans who are settled abroad take a huge interest in the Tibet issue." (A, 27 September) Several respondents mentioned how a Tibetan-Canadian was able to hoist a Tibetan banner in China without facing imprisonment since she held a Canadian passport. Maybe the second generation, being born in 'little Tibet' in India, will experience in the US what their parents and grandparents did when they first arrived in India – thus the West becomes their first experience of immigration and they might get as concerned as the first generation of Tibetans in India with preserving culture. The difference however will be that the second generation of exiles are educated and more politically aware, with ideals of democracy and human rights on their agenda.

4.4 Religion and Culture as Politics?

Tiljander Dahlström noted that "[s]omething which, in a Western context, is usually seen as secular values (political freedom and human rights) are in Tibet identified with the sacred." (Tiljander Dahlström 2001:172) This, as I see it, is an indication of how culture and religion in the Tibetan diaspora have become politics as Anand argues. (Anand 2003) What he labels the rhetoric of the homeland, to me, seems like

a political strategy in the sense that it creates a "hyperreality" to keep the Tibetan identity fixed against. The way I see it, to be Tibetan in India thus becomes political. The very act of labeling supposes a certain affiliation and in the Tibetan case, national, cultural and religious belonging has a highly political purpose. It seems very few Tibetans of the second generation can think about themselves without this larger political context in mind. The need to represent the Tibetan people, work for the Tibetan cause and preserve their culture appears to be a constant source of both pride and worry. Tiljander Dahlström notes that groups and individuals who do not recognise themselves in the supposed unity "creates (or are accused of creating) conflicts within the diaspora". (Tiljander Dahlström 2001:abstract)

The second generation doesn't have any first hand experience of oppression or torture, they haven't immigrated as adults and felt the strangeness of a new country, they have never seen their parents' land, and everything that is supposed to be special about it. On the other hand they have their own experiences of rootlessness and mixed cultures. They have legends and stories, memories told by aging grandparents, traditions passed down and, what binds all generations together, the common cause and strategy for their future existence. The strategy is, as mentioned, primarily based on a non-violence philosophy and a human rights rhetoric that most of my respondents would describe as an important, if not the main, part of their identity as Tibetans. Without this cause and its non-violent strife the Tibetan diaspora probably would not have been what it is today. However, as Lopez discusses (see chapter 3), the emphasise on non-violence and religion might have contributed to marginalize the Tibetans in exile politically.

I would like to return to Lopez argument that Tibetan nationality has been created in exile, and how the elite in exile has promoted a stereotyped understanding of Tibetan identity. We need to consider some nationalist claims made by the diaspora in order to see why he is concerned with this. One example is the rather homogenized culture that has been promoted as *the* Tibetan, when it actually was the culture of one Tibetan region (of Lhasa). Lopez would also refer to the Buddhist cloaked assertion of Tibetans being traditionally concerned with peace, the environment, the equality of women, and human rights in general. Also notions of geographical borders, political treaties, language, the national flag and so on have been highlighted as important elements of Tibetan identity only since the exile. Sangay explains that there is "a dawning realization among many exiled Tibetan leaders that democracy attracts talented and educated young people and also provides a unifying mechanism amid the regional and sectarian diversity of Tibetans. Importantly, there is near-unanimity among Tibetans that feudalism, theocracy, patrimonialism, and nepotism all work against the prospect of a free Tibet". (Sangay 2003:128)

Much of these expressions might have *developed* (not completely been created) as an effect of the exile situation, where the Tibetans realized that, in order to have legitimate claims to their land in the eyes of the international community, they needed to be a democratic nation-state with a homogenous population (a nationality). This building of a nation-state, as I see it, is a change that has occurred in most

nations in the world and should not be thought to be less sincere only because a diasporic group is addressing it. Dreyfus offers an alternate reading of the symbolic manifestations of identity, refuting assertions of human rights being a trade mark solely of Western secular values when stating that: "Democratic values are pivotal to many contemporary Tibetan nationalists because they are seen as modern incarnations of traditional Buddhist ideals" (Dreyfus 2005:14). He goes on to say that this should be seen as a new way for Tibetans to understand their political commitments, a way that is "not just an internalization of alien values but an artful synthesis produced out of a complex heterological dialogue in which all the elements involved in the process interact with each other, and in the process change" (ibid). From such a perspective, Tibetan identity can be understood in a context of difference and change, or hybridity.

5 Concluding Remarks

Throughout this paper and during the research in field I have tried to investigate how Tibetan youth express their identity and what implications this has on their belonging to a diasporic group. Even if I from the onset was assuming many young Tibetans to cling rather strongly to certain stereotypes, the picture is more multifaceted than that, and I have come to realize that the Tibetan diaspora encompasses hybridity in more than one way. Not necessarily in the sense of questioning stereotypes like "Tibetans are compassionate" but hybrid in their cross-cultural lifestyles and aspirations, such as combining 'traditional' ideals with 'modern' and creating a new end product. One example I have mentioned is how Tibetan culture in exile emphasises human rights, democracy and non-violence. The origins of these values are by some thought to be Western, and by others traditionally Buddhist. To me this indicates exactly the kind of hybridity I am referring to. Another example is how respondents would bring to my attention that they cannot be expected to follow everything taught by the Dalai Lama, but need to investigate for themselves and practice according to their prerequisites.

I believe that the culture created in exile must be affected by the loss of a homeland, which obviously emphasise the need for a strong and homogenised identity. At the same time culture change and it seems as theirs has. "There are certain aspects of Tibetan culture which we have to preserve, and certain we have to loose in fact. We can't just say that Tibetan culture is a whole we have to preserve." (M, 15 November)

I believe this paper has shed some light on how stereotypes of Tibetan identity in exile as unified or homogenous is more of a rhetorical device and discursive construct than a reality that can be proven true. Meanwhile, as Anand states, even though "Tibetanness is an imagined and contested construct, it has it's own effect on those who consider themselves Tibetans". (Anand 2000:272)

There clearly are certain fixed ideas of what being Tibetan should be and what Tibetan culture should consist of, promoted by the government in exile, through the department of education down to the TCV and other institutions. As mentioned in section 4.2, the education policy lays out as long term goals of the Tibetan people: "... to transform Tibetan society into a non-violent society; and to lead other people onto the path of non-violence and compassion". (Web: Tibetan Children's Educational and Welfare Fund) I would like to point out that as an outsider it is difficult to claim that I can determine what aspects of Tibetan identity should be seen as 'natural' and what are 'stereotypes', but my main point is that Tibetan identity in exile could be understood as hybrid, rather than any preconceived notion of 'Western', 'modern' or 'Tibetan'.

Based on the interviews I have conducted, I would draw the conclusion that the majority of respondents believe that a modern (some would say Western) way of life is fully possible to combine with their Tibetan identity. "Maybe a lot of Tibetan youth are wearing hip hop clothes and listening to western music but if you scratch the surface they have a strong Tibetan identity still." (L, 10 October)

In the foreseeable future there is little hope for Tibetans in gaining either autonomy or independence. For some the solution is to move to the West, either for financial or political reasons and what is perceived as increased possibilities: "There are more opportunities in western countries compared to India – itself a developing country." (E, 19 October) Others maintain the necessity of staying in India, mostly to keep the Tibetan cause in mind, but also because they have a financially secure future. Despite of the country of residence (even if it doubtlessly will have different effects on individuals) one thing remains the same – the diasporic experience. This experience could either be thought of as a cause for confusion and conflict, or a possibility for empowerment.

Considering the empirical material gathered for this paper, it could be concluded that religion is emphasised as a very important part of Tibetan identity. I am suggesting that we could see this as a successful resistance to the colonial act of "inner expropriation of cultural identity" that Hall warned if not resisted could lead to deformity and paralysed individuals "without any kind of anchoring or ideal, colorless, stateless, rootless". (see p.17 quote by Hall 2005:234) Tibetans might be stateless and rootless but from another perspective, they have managed to concentrate on the process of formulating ideals and anchoring themselves in this world – and thus they have created an empowering version of what to describe as their cultural identity.

While this paper has to come to its end, there is much more I would have liked to discuss, especially gender and democracy issues. If I was able to conduct further research on identity I would be interested in understanding more about the Tibetan diaspora residing in the West, especially in terms of political involvement. I would also suggest as further research, in the field of political science, an investigation of the structures of diasporic identity in relation to governance and emerging democracy in exile. This would be interesting since, as this paper has emphasised, Tibetans of the second generation express their identity much in terms of a merging of traditional and modern ideas, and strongly press for changes in their society, such as increased democratization. At the same time they are adamant to keep the guidance of the Dalai Lama as their spiritual leader. In a way it might be said that Tibetans in exile have chosen to democratize because their spiritual leader (who is trying not to be the political leader) has *advised* them to. In this sense they both challenge and add to the notion of democracy.

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Interviews:

- A, male, Dharamsala, 27 September
- B, female, Dharamsala, 4 October
- C, male, Dharamsala, 9 October
- D, female, Dharamsala, 18 October
- E, female, Dharamsala, 19 October
- F, male, Dehra Dun, 22 October
- G, female, Dehra Dun, 22 October
- H, male, Bylakuppe, 27 November
- I, male, Bylakuppe, 28 November

Personal communication:

- J, male, Dharamsala, 4 October
- K, female, Dharamsala, 10-18 october
- L, male, Dharamsala, 10-18 October
- M, male, Bangalore, 15 November

Focus groups:

- N, 5 women and 3 men, Bangalore TCV Hostel, 15 November
- O, 1 woman and 2 men, Bangalore TCV Hostel, 16 November

Appendix

Interview guide:

1. Could you tell me a little about yourself, your background, where you are from and so on?
2. How would you describe the most important element of your identity?
3. What would you say is the most important part of being Tibetan?
4. Do you feel that you belong to a community? If not, then why? If yes, what kind of community? What connects you with the rest of the group?
5. Do you feel concerned that Tibetan youth in exile are losing their culture? Why (not)/How?
6. How do you feel about being Tibetan in India?
7. What do you feel about modernization and/or Westernization?
8. How do you feel about your vocational or academic possibilities for the future in India?
9. Where would you want to be in 10 years? Can you tell me something about your hopes and dreams?
10. How do you imagine Tibet as a country in the future?
11. What do you feel about the independence struggle for Tibet?
(non-violence vs violence, middle path vs independence and so on..)