Re-imagining Nationalism: Exploring the Narratives of Tibetan Women in Canada

by

Tariqa Farrell Tandon

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Carleton University
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Tariqa Farrell Tandon
Abstract

This thesis focuses on Tibetan women’s narratives to understand how Tibetan nationalism is reconfigured and sustained in exile in Canada. Using the framework of Third World nationalism, this thesis examines the ways in which Tibetan nationalism embodies and departs from established theories. This thesis analyses the themes of authenticity, citizenship, and exilic nationalism to highlight the heterogenous understanding of nationalist movements. This thesis establishes how Tibetan women challenge official and academic narratives of nationalism to forge their own understanding of nationalism, by ‘doing’ their own forms of Tibetan-ness. Challenging core conceptual categories inherent in nationalist projects like authenticity, nation and citizenship, Tibetan women push back against ethno-nationalist frameworks to formulate new conceptions of nationalism. These new conceptions allow multiple narratives to coexist in the movement and demand a fluid understanding of nationalism which includes a broad base of people, including those that have been marginalized by orthodox understandings of nationalism.
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List of Abbreviations

CCP – Chinese Communist Party
CIA – Central Intelligence Association
CPPCC - Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference
CTA – Central Tibetan Administration (see TGIE)
IC – Identification Certificate
NPC - National People’s Congress
PCART - Preparatory Committee for the Autonomous Region of Tibet
PLA – People’s Liberation Army
PRC – People’s Republic of China
RC – Registration Certificate
SFT – Students for a Free Tibet
TAR – Tibet Autonomous Region
TCCC – Tibetan Canadian Cultural Centre
TCV – Tibetan’s Children Village
TGIE – Tibetan Government in Exile (see CTA)
TWA – Tibetan Women’s Association
US/USA – United States of America
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Introduction

This thesis focuses on Tibetan women’s narratives to understand how Tibetan nationalism is reconfigured and sustained in exile in Canada. Using the framework of Third World nationalism, this thesis examines the ways in which Tibetan nationalism embodies and departs from established theories. When looking at the case of Tibetan nationalism, the available existing frameworks of Third World nationalism are unable to fully capture the scope of the Tibetan nationalist movement. By using the case study of Tibetan nationalism, this thesis highlights how existing frameworks of Third World nationalism have been narrow in scope, discounting for the continuance of colonial rule in different parts of the world as well as the role played by the experience of exile and the diasporic community in creating, sustaining and promoting nationalist movements.

Tibetan nationalism is simultaneously a Third World as well as exilic nationalist movement. Straddling these two worlds, Tibetan nationalism is unique because it is a case of Third World nationalism that has been formulated and institutionalized in exile in India. Thus, Tibetan nationalism both embodies and departs from the established literature on Third World nationalism. With Tibet being occupied by another ‘Eastern’ state, the Tibetan nationalist movement challenges the false binaries of East versus West that have predominated the narratives of postcolonial theories. For Tibetans, colonialism is not a Western reality, but instead is being carried out by another Global South power.

Much of the literature on postcolonial studies have focused on the previous colonies of European states and the focus has remained on European colonialism (Loomba, 1998). The term itself suggests the contemporary histories and politics of the
world after the European colonialism (Loomba, 1998; Mukora, 1999). Chrisman (1994) argues that the Oriental/Occidental binaries erases the specificities of the histories of those continents and colonies that do not belong to the West/East axis, but they are nonetheless absorbed into it. Yet not many have de-centred the role of European colonialism to understand the new forms of colonialism that are being undertaken around the world, with Global South actors emerging as colonizers. While Loomba (1998) accedes that only a small part of the world, including Tibet, was never under formal European colonialism, she fails to acknowledge the ways in which China is carrying out a colonial project in Tibet currently.

These East/West binaries only work to erase the “coloniality of the (post)colonial nation-state” (Osuri, 2017, p. 2428). As Anand (2012) argues, China and India are engaging in new forms of imperialisms, where formal equality is guaranteed within a nationalist framework, but informal imperialism persists. Osuri (2017) notes that there is a “structural concealment of the relationship between postcolonial nation-states and their possible imperial or colonial arrangements” (p. 2430). Postcolonial states are disregarded as engaging in their own colonial projects, and colonialism is understood to be a relic and in the realm of European states only. Yet, as the colonization of Tibet highlights, colonialism continues to exist even today, and can be a project perpetuated by a postcolonial state.

Unlike other cases of contemporary settler colonialism, Tibet’s occupation highlights how the Global South is also participating in colonial projects, a reality often overlooked by postcolonial frameworks. Yet, the Tibetan nationalist movement has also
had to contend with appealing to the Western powers to justify their movement. Hence, the Tibetan nationalist movement also highlights that there is not a simple dichotomy between the colonizer and the colonized, but that there is a third actor, the Western powers, which also need to be considered in the framing of the nationalist movement. This thesis illustrates the different tensions that exist within the Tibetan nationalist movement between the colonized, colonizer and the broader international community.

Tibetan nationalism is unlike other contemporary Third World exilic nationalisms, like the Palestinian nationalist movement. The experience of institutionalized exilehood in South Asia has shaped much of the experience and pathway of the nationalist movement. Unlike other nationalists that have sought refugeehood in neighbouring states, Tibetans were able to establish official exilehood in South Asian states, especially India. This has allowed for the creation of settlements, as opposed to being relocated in refugee camps, which has in turn allowed for economic independence for the Tibetan population instead of reliance on aid. Official exilehood and the creation of the Tibetan Government in Exile (TGIE) has also allowed for the Tibetans to experiment with new forms of governance in an institutionalized fashion. Further, this institutionalized form of exilehood has limited the level of violence that can be carried out by Tibetan nationalists – their position in the settlements in India would be severely jeopardized if they were to engage in organized violence to promote their cause, and hence the movement has tended to remain relatively non-violent, as opposed to other contemporary nationalist movements (Misra, 2003. Tibetan nationalism challenges the current frameworks of nationalism that have been established and stands as a unique case in the international realm.
The experience of exile has also impacted the way that Tibetan culture has adapted and been hybridized. This thesis explores how the hybridization of culture has led to contested claims of authenticity to be made by different Tibetans across the globe. Hybridization has also exposed the falsity of claiming authenticity of culture, instead highlighting the dynamic and ever-changing nature of different cultures and traditions. The different experiences of Tibetans across the world are reconciled by mediating authenticity neither through location – thus, neither are those that remain in Tibet authentic, nor does the experience of exile make one authentic (Malkki, 1992; 1993) – nor through cultural markers. This thesis argues that, in the case of Tibetan nationalism, authenticity is mediated through action, specifically active participation against Chinese aggression in Tibet, thus termed ‘doing’ Tibetan.

Further migration to the West has only worked to complicate notions of authenticity as well as identity for Tibetans. This is because of the loss of the settlement experience of South Asia – Tibetans in the West are not resettled together, but rather are dispersed – as well as due to the increased access to citizenship that Tibetans have in the West. In order to recreate a Tibetan community in Canada, Tibetans, especially those that relocate to Toronto, have worked to create their own enclaves, such as in Parkdale (Logan and Murdie, 2014), even without official help from the Canadian government. This has given them a sense of belonging and heightened their identity as Tibetans in a distinctly new setting. Further, while many aspire to or have gained Canadian residency or citizenship, their identity as Tibetans remains unquestioned. As McGranahan (2018) posits, gaining citizenship in Western countries is seen as yet another way to foster Tibetan nationalism and to spread it to their new host nations. Thus, Tibetans reconcile
their new positions in Western nations and their pressures to adapt to new settings with their aim to further the Tibetan nationalist movement. This thesis examines the different claims made to citizenship, how Tibetans relate to notions of citizenship, and the ways in which nationalism is reconciled and sustained in a Western context.

Resettlement in settler colonial countries like Canada has made Tibetans reflexive about their own position in their new countries, as they attempt to reconcile their participation in another settler project while they fight against Chinese settler colonialism in Tibet (McGranahan, 2018). This inner reflexivity has led to radical Tibetan nationalist organizations, such as Students for a Free Tibet Canada, to tackle not only the issue of Tibetan freedom, but also on decolonizing their settler host nations and building solidarities with indigenous groups in Canada (‘Jamyang’, 2018). Thus, the Tibetan nationalist movement’s use of transnational themes and language, such as indigenous rights, helps it appeal to a larger, worldwide audience while also helping Tibetans reconcile their reflexive dilemmas of contributing to another settler project.

Theories of nationalism, including postcolonial and Third World frameworks of nationalism, have often silenced women’s narratives, erasing their efforts towards the nationalist movement. Postcolonial nationalism has relied on the image of the nation as mother, and women as mothers to the nation (Loomba, 1998), to minimize the active role women have played in anticolonial movements. As Sinha (2000) notes, Chatterjee’s (1992) framework has discounted the agency of women in the public domain of the nationalist movement. Rather, the ‘ideal’ woman works to maintain the ‘inner’ realm of the traditional culture and does not participate in public forms of anticolonialism.
Feminists have begun to theorize the different ways in which women contribute to the nationalist project (Jayawardena, 1986; Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1989). Much literature has also arisen out of Palestine to amplify and archive women’s voices and activism against Israeli colonialism.¹ In contrast, sparse literature is available, as will be explored in Chapter 2, that centres the role that women have played in the Tibetan nationalist movement. Thus, this thesis is an attempt to add to the existing literature on Tibetan women’s participation in the nationalist movement. In this effort, this thesis aims to highlight Tibetan women’s voices and document their active participation in the Tibetan nationalist movement and against the Chinese occupation of Tibet.

**Research Questions**

Situating my project at the intersection of the literatures of Third World nationalism, gender and nationalism, and Tibetan nationalism, I aim to understand Tibetan nationalism through these various lenses, in the specific context of the Tibetan women situated in Toronto, Canada. Thus far, no academic study has focused only on Tibetan women in Canada and their contribution to the Tibetan nationalist project. The questions this project seeks to ask are: How do Tibetan women in exile interpret, reimagine and sustain Tibetan nationalism? How does Tibetan nationalism through women’s perspectives challenge current frameworks of Third World nationalism?

The Research Project

For this project, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 14 Tibetan women residing in Toronto, Canada, and I asked them questions relating to their personal histories, identity, Tibetan culture, and their relationship to Tibet and Tibetan nationalism. These women came from varying backgrounds, were of different ages, had different statuses in Canada, and different histories. I purposely sought different women, to have broad perspectives on the notions of nationalism. This thesis has been guided by feminist methodological principles, and aims to collect each individual woman’s partial truth and knowledge, through qualitative interviews, to understand the broader form of Tibetan nationalism. Focusing on these 14 personal narratives of Tibetan women in Canada, this thesis analyses the themes of authenticity, citizenship, and exilic nationalism to highlight the heterogenous understanding of Tibetan nationalism. Further, the thesis also explores how gender is intertwined with the nationalist project, and the ways in which women are imagined and act as nationalists in the Tibetan nationalist project.

Arguments

Nationalism is a project that is imagined by the elite of the movement. In the case of Tibetan nationalism, official discourses of nationalism have arisen from the efforts of the Tibetan Government in Exile. These official discourses of nationalism have been complemented by the array of academic discourses on Tibetan nationalism, that have created their own imagination of the project. However, nationalism is also reimagined by

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2 Sample interview questions are detailed in Appendix 3.
the ordinary people who participate in the movement, and these narratives challenge the formalized notions of nationalism that have been established.

Tibetan nationalism has challenged the established academic literature around Third World and exilic nationalisms. The simultaneous superimposition of these two forms of nationalism has complicated the way in which academics can use existing frameworks to study the case of Tibetan nationalism. Tibetan nationalism exists simultaneously both inside and outside the homeland, and the brutality of Chinese occupation inside of Tibet has greatly influenced the shape taken on by Tibetan nationalism and the activities carried out by activists, both inside and outside Tibet. Tibetan nationalism is only further complicated by the need for the movement to appeal to the West to justify their demand for an independent state. These interwoven factors have formed a unique nationalist movement that pushes against the very theoretical frameworks established in academia to understand nationalist movements, and the case of the Tibetan nationalist movement demands a different outlook into the notions of nationalism.

Through an analysis of the personal narratives of Tibetan women residing in Canada, this thesis highlights how women’s perspectives reframe theories and notions of Third World nationalism. Tibetan women in exile in Canada are challenging these very concepts, based in official and academic discourses of nationalism, to forge their own understanding of Tibetan nationalism and nationalist ethos. The experience of exilehood and transit in South Asia and beyond has given Tibetan women the space to renegotiate their imaginations and participation in the Tibetan nationalist movement. Tibetan women
living in Canada have reimagined a more inclusive version of a nationalism, broadening the scope of who is included in a typically exclusionist movement.

Tibetan women have challenged the conceptual categories at the very core of the nationalist project, such as authenticity, ethnicity, the nation, family, religion and citizenship, to reform and reimagine the nationalist project. Claims of authenticity are managed by the elite to create a border around the ‘us’ versus ‘them’ narrative. While some claim that authenticity is gained by location, others claim that authenticity is gained by adherence to cultural markers. However, in the case of the Tibetan nationalist movement, the process of exile as well as the spread of the diaspora has given rise to different understandings of Tibetan-ness and has complicated the notion of authenticity. The reality of the nationalist activities is different from the official nationalist discourse.

Tibetan women challenge the notion of authenticity by tracing their own varying journeys, to take a broader view of an ‘authentic’ Tibetan identity – it is not premised on location or adherence to cultural markers, but is gained by ‘doing’ Tibetan. Since boundaries of the nation are mediated through women’s bodies, Tibetan women challenge the notions of racial purity that are apparent in traditional forms of ethno-nationalism by reformulating the ways in which one can be and ‘do’ Tibetan.

Tibetan women also contest the ways in which nationalism has materialized in exile, by reconfiguring notions of nation and family – they extend national identity to those that do not adhere to essentialist markers, and recast the family to include the larger Tibetan community. Further, they subvert academic symbolization of the Dalai Lama, and view him as another Tibetan on the journey of exile, akin to an elder in the
community. They reframe the ways in which Tibetan women have been interpreted by different framings, to assert their own perceptions of their own identities.

Tibetan women have also contested statist and territorialized notions of citizenship, to emphasize citizenship as a form of national membership, which oftentimes takes precedence over statist forms citizenship. The Tibetan case highlights how both refusing citizenship in another state or accepting citizenship can be ways in which to forward the Tibetan nationalist cause. By detaching the meaning of citizenship from the notion of the state, Tibetan women complicate the ways in which citizenship and statehood has been understood in an international realm, as they demand a more flexible approach to citizenship, as understood by membership in a nation. The intersecting concepts of identity and citizenship are in tension in the case of the Tibetan nationalist movement, since for many Tibetans their self-identification does not match their citizenship. Yet, it also points to a robust nationalist movement that exists in exile, which is not minimized by claiming citizenship in another state.

By challenging the official and academic narratives on nationalism regarding these core conceptual categories, Tibetan women refashion nationalism as a fluid movement, which encompasses a broad mass of people, in contrast to traditional modes of nationalism that demand a certain adherence to standards of authenticity, ethnicity, culture and citizenship. Tibetan women in exile in Canada, therefore, are establishing new norms of nationalism, to include those that have been disenfranchised from the nationalist project by official and academic discourses.
Chapter Outlines

The thesis begins with a background chapter, which introduces the Chinese occupation of Tibet, and highlights points of tension between Tibet and China. This chapter also explores the role of India in providing exilehood to the Dalai Lama, the larger Tibetan population, and the TGIE, tracing how India manages its relations with China at the expense of its relations with Tibet. It then provides insight into the history of Tibetans in Canada, focusing on the loss of the settlement system in the West, and the creation of an informal Tibetan settlement in Parkdale. The chapter then ends with an understanding of grievances that Tibetans have against their Chinese occupiers and provides the basis of Tibetan nationalism.

Chapter 2 situates this project in the broader literature. It details the existing literature on Third World nationalism, Tibetan nationalism, citizenship and nationalism, gender and nationalism, Tibetan women and Tibetans in the West, to understand the limits to current scholarship and to establish the rationale for this study. It establishes how Tibetan nationalism embodies and departs from the frameworks of Third World nationalism, and how the experience of exile complicates the case. It explores the frameworks of citizenship to understand how current understandings of citizenship are limited in understanding how Tibetans in exile relate to notions of citizenship and their homeland. The chapter also highlights how the case of Tibetan nationalism departs from dominant frameworks of gender and nationalism, yet how it is still gendered in its own way. This chapter ends by providing a history of the literature on Tibetan migration to the West, and delineating the research questions that guide this thesis.
Chapter 3 gives details on the methodology of this research project. I describe the way in which this research was conducted, guided by a feminist methodological framework. Semi-structured qualitative interviews were conducted with the participants due to the need for in-depth conversations and to understand personal narratives and perspectives on nationalism. A semi-structured format allowed participants to guide the researcher through different topics that they deemed important, and avoided the constraints of a structured interview or survey. Since theories of nationalism have been androcentric in nature and have underplayed women’s narratives and participation, this project focused only on women’s narratives and experiences. In addition, no research on Tibetans in exile outside of South Asia has focused solely on women, and there is a lack of empirical data on Tibetan women’s viewpoints.

In this chapter, I also highlight how no researcher is truly objective, and how a research project is impacted by both the researcher’s own perceptions of the topic, as well as the participants’ perceptions of the researcher. I illustrate the impact of my own identity on this project, situating myself as a researcher as both inside and outside the community, highlighting the fluidity of my own identity with regards to the participants. I detail how my identity impacted the responses I received from some participants, and how my status as an outsider created some silences in the narratives. I also detail how I recruited participants for this project, and the participant requirements. This chapter also highlights the ethics process carried out to conduct the project, and illustrates the ways in which the ethics process does uphold the institutional status quo, limiting researchers who are conducted research in different cultural settings.
This chapter also details the participant demographics as well as the interview process. Since 3 of the interviews were conducted with the help of a translator, I also detail the politics of translation, and how using a translator may have limited the data I could gather. I also describe my responsibilities as a researcher to share the findings of this research with the community it impacts. The responsibilities of a researcher do not end at data collection, but researcher ethics are an important dimension even in terms of the dissemination of the knowledge generated from a project. Since I have been guided by feminist methodologies, knowledge sharing is an important part of this project, and I hope that the knowledge produced is able to empower the exile community in Canada. The chapter ends with an overview of the main arguments of this thesis, delving into the ways in which current frameworks of nationalism, authenticity, citizenship and gender and the nation are limited in understanding the scope of the Tibetan nationalist project.

Chapter 4 focuses on the notions of authenticity in the nationalist project, and how these claims to authenticity are challenged by the Tibetan women in Canada. I trace the different ways in which authenticity has been imagined by both official narratives and by the participants, including based on location (in exile or in the homeland) or based on adherence to cultural markers (knowledge of language, religion, or an ethnic connection). Engaging with the literature presented by Malkki (1992, 1993), I establish that authenticity is an imagined and contested notion, and that there is no singular understanding of who makes an authentic Tibetan. I argue, however, that authenticity for Tibetans is derived from being an active part of the community – hence, Tibetan is not a passive identity, but must be asserted actively. This involves what I have termed ‘doing’ Tibetan, which includes different ways in which one can participate in political action for
the Tibetan nationalist movement. It is this active participation in the nationalist movement that authenticates Tibetans both inside and outside of Tibet, binding the community across borders.

This chapter also analyses how the notions of authenticity are gendered, and how the different women negotiate and challenge their roles as markers of authenticity. I highlight how women are the biological reproducers and reproducers of the boundaries of the nation, delving into notions of racial purity and Tibetan identity. With the expanded notion of Tibetan-ness to include ‘doing’ Tibetan, I explore how marrying outside the racial group would usually entail marrying someone who is active in ‘doing’ Tibetan. This chapter also details how women are the cultural reproducers of the nation. Beyond being the public face of culture by adhering to essential markers like clothing, women are also more active in the larger community as activists and political agents, extending ‘doing’ Tibetan to an essential part of Tibetan culture. This chapter also analyses the ways in which Tibetan women have planned to transmit culture to the future generations. The chapter ends with an analysis of how further migration to the West, including Canada, has challenged gender roles and familial relations, and how exile has become a space where tradition is revised and culture is re-written.

Chapter 5 provides insight into how Tibetan nationalism is simultaneously a project of Third World nationalism as well as exilic nationalism, and how Tibetan nationalism both embodies and departs from established frameworks of nationalism. It details how nationalist activities are carried out both inside and outside of Tibet, and the ways in which nationalist activities with Tibet are carried out in subtle manners, evading
the restrictive conditions imposed by the Chinese authorities. I establish how the nationalist agenda is determined by prioritizing those cultural markers that fall within the domain of the ‘inner’ as theorized by Chatterjee (1993), but also by emphasizing those markers that are being actively threatened by the Chinese inside of Tibet. I also analyse how the need to appeal to the West has reconfigured the way in which the nationalist agenda has been framed by the Tibetans, so as to make the Tibetan nationalist movement appeal to transnational themes. This chapter details the importance of language preservation as a nationalist agenda, and the role of religion in the nationalist movement. Beyond being merely nationalist symbols, language and religion are personal and modes of continuity for the Tibetan community. This chapter also delves into the role of the Dalai Lama in the Tibetan nationalist movement, and challenges existing academic conceptions of him as a mere nationalist symbol and works to analyse the ways in which participants reconfigure him as personable and humanize him.

The role of community in fostering and maintaining nationalism is also highlighted. Community is an important part of identity formation for the Tibetan exile population and gives them a sense of belonging in a foreign land. Community has helped many Tibetans build their sense of belonging in Canada. Yet, it is not helping them build their identities as Canadians; rather, it helps them build their identities as Tibetans in Canada. Community, thus, becomes a site of nationalism in exile, hosting cultural as well as political gatherings. Community also is a site where culture can be transmitted and preserved.
This chapter ends by noting the ways in which Tibetan women have been framed by different nationalist and academic projects, and the ways in which Tibetan women themselves subvert these framings. The chapter details the ways in which Tibetan women have been framed by Chinese nationalism, Tibetan nationalism, and Western feminists, and how all three projects capture Tibetan women as static entities. I analyse the ways in which participants embody and challenge these framings of Tibetan women, and how they complicate the notions of gender relations in Tibetan society.

Chapter 6 focuses on citizenship and nationalism. This chapter highlights how citizenship is linked to notions of identity, and challenges statist assumptions of citizenship literature, which fail to account for emotional membership into a deterritorialized and exiled nation. This chapter also details the way in which the TGIE provides Tibetans in exile with the crucial rights of citizenship – civil, political and social rights – and analyses why Tibetan women in exile are still unsure of claiming Tibetan citizenship. This chapter further analyses how identity can be de-linked from citizenship, and the ways in which Tibetan women in Canada self-identify.

This chapter also establishes how citizenship in another country is linked to Tibetan nationalism. I illustrate how both the acceptance as well as the refusal of citizenship is seen as furthering the Tibetan nationalist cause – while refusal is seen as nationalist in the context of South Asia, the opposite (acceptance) is seen as nationalist in the West. This difference highlights the different ways in which Tibetans are able to reconcile their citizenship status with the Tibetan nationalist movement. This chapter also details the structural impediments to graining citizenship for Tibetan exiles in South Asia,
and the ways in which Tibetans in the West use their citizenship to advance the Tibetan nationalist movement in their new host country. This chapter goes on to highlight the different meanings of citizenship for Tibetan women in Canada, especially since many of them have never held citizenship before. The chapter ends with an analysis of how Tibetan nationalism remains robust, even in exile in Canada, illustrated by the women’s acknowledgement that they are on borrowed land, and their desires to return to their homeland. This chapter concludes by understanding how, for Tibetan women, it is not merely a myth of return, but a hope to return.

Chapter 7 concludes this thesis, summarizing the main arguments that have been presented. This chapter also establishes the implications of the research project on the Tibetan community, the academic community, and the larger Canadian context. Since this research only presents a small slice of the life of Tibetan women in Canada, this chapter ends by highlighting the gaps in this project and the scope that remains for future research to have a more holistic understanding of the Tibetan nationalist movement.
Chapter 1: Background

Introduction – Chinese Occupation of Tibet

The traditional relations between Tibet and China have been much debated, but it is generally understood that, prior to occupation, the Qing Dynasty exerted suzerainty over Tibet. This suzerainty has been harnessed by the Chinese state to claim Tibet to be a historical part of China and to maintain control over Tibet. A year after the Chinese Revolution of 1949, Tibet was ‘liberated’ by the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) on 7 October 1950, capturing Chamdo, the capital of Kham province, on 12 October. Thus began the Chinese occupation of Tibet.

In May 1951, the 17-Point Agreement was signed by the Dalai Lama and Beijing, which guaranteed Tibet’s right to religious and cultural autonomy under Chinese sovereignty, allowing the Dalai Lama to retain his power and Tibet to maintain its political system (Ardley, 2002). In 1956, however, China replaced the traditional political system in Tibet by establishing their own government, the Preparatory Committee for the Autonomous Region of Tibet (PCART).

The Lhasa uprising occurred on 10 March 1959, triggered by a rumour (Ardley, 2002) that the Chinese military were going to attempt to kidnap the Dalai Lama. The revolt lasted for several days and included a women’s uprising on 12 March. The Dalai Lama fled on March 17 to India, reaching the border at the end of the month. The then-Prime Minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru, agreed to grant the Dalai Lama asylum. During the journey, the Dalai Lama renounced the 17-Point Agreement, stating that it had been violated by the Chinese, and announced that he would form his own government in exile.
In 1965, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) established the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR), which aligned with the Party’s constitutional commitment to set up autonomous regions for the country’s ethnic minorities. Though the creation of the TAR should have accorded greater freedom to Tibetans, Shakya (1999) considers the establishment of TAR as marking the “final integration of Tibet” (p. 302) into China. Tibet was no longer a ‘unique area’ as decreed by the 17-Point Agreement – the degree of autonomy it would enjoy would now be determined by China (Shakya, 1999). The creation of the TAR also divided traditional Tibetan territory. TAR only covers part of what Tibetans consider to be Tibet – the eastern provinces of Kham and Amdo have been divided and absorbed into the provinces of Sichuan and Qinghai, respectively.

The Chinese government began to inflict human rights violations on the Tibetan population from the 1950s itself (Ardley, 2002). The Dalai Lama claimed in 1959 that by the time he had fled Tibet, over 1,000 monasteries had already been destroyed (Ardley, 2002). During the Great Leap Forward (1959-1962), hundreds of thousands of Tibetans died due to the famine (Smith, 1996). Yet, one of the worst periods of suffering for the Tibetan population was during the Cultural Revolution, which began in 1966. Donnet (1994) notes that this period witnessed a systemic, planned and comprehensive destruction of Tibetan civilization; monasteries, considered to be sites of counter-revolutionary action, were destroyed. All religious activity was banned, many monks and nuns were killed, and the general population was subjected to torture (Shakya, 1999; Ardley, 2002). Tibet also experienced social and economic stagnation during this period – CCP General Secretary Hu Yaobong visited Tibet in 1980 and was “shocked at the poor condition of life there” (Dhondup, 2013, p. 122).
China began economic and social liberalization in the 1980s. The Chinese assumption was that these liberalization policies would remove the basis of Tibetan discontent, but instead, the loosening of restrictions led to a resurgence of Tibetan nationalism and a revival of civil and cultural life (Smith, 1996). This included rebuilding of monasteries in Tibet, and they became the locus of nationalist politics (Smith, 1996, Ardley, 2002). 1986 saw violent demonstrations erupt in Lhasa – as Smith (1996) notes, “the efficacy of CCP indoctrination depended upon total monopoly on information sources. When this monopoly was broken by exposure to contradictory information, the whole system collapsed due to a lack of correspondence with reality” (p. 580).

The Dalai Lama presented a Five-Point Peace Plan to the US Congress in 1987, which captured his vision for Tibet. The five points included: the transformation of Tibet into a zone of peace; abandonment of China’s population transfer policy; respect for Tibetan people’s human rights and democratic freedoms; protection of Tibet’s natural environment, and; commencement of earnest negotiations on the future of Tibet. In 1988, he presented the famous Strasbourg Proposal at the European Parliament, in which he asked for the genuine autonomy of the traditional boundaries of Tibet, Cholka-Sum (which includes all three provinces: U-Tsang, Kham and Amdo), within the People’s Republic of China (PRC), with China responsible for Tibet’s foreign policy. This marks the beginning of the official stance of the Tibetan Government in Exile’s (TGIE) Middle Way Approach, demanding genuine autonomy instead of full independence. In 2002, the TGIE stopped demanding a reunification of all three Tibetan provinces, and calling for genuine autonomy in the TAR, effectively accepting the borders of Tibet as set by the Chinese state (Topgyal, 2013). Beijing, on the other hand, states that it is open to
diplomacy on Tibet with the TGIE, but will not engage in any discussions on Tibet’s independence, semi-independence, or independence in a disguised form (Dhondup, 2013).

The 10th Panchen Lama died unexpectedly in 1989, prompting the need for the search of the next reincarnation. In 1991, the Dalai Lama wrote to the Chinese Embassy in New Delhi to offer his assistance in the search, but his request was denied as the government claimed that they did not need “outside interference in this matter” (Dhondup, 2013, p. 132). In 1995, the Dalai Lama recognized a boy in Tibet, Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, as the 11th incarnation of the Panchen Lama. This unilateral declaration strained Sino-Tibetan relations, and three days after the Dalai Lama’s declaration, the Chinese kidnapped the boy, who has not been seen since. The Chinese state selected their own Panchen Lama a few months later, a boy named Gyaltsen Norbu, whose parents are CCP members.

The year 2008 saw a huge uprising against Chinese occupation from within Tibet, complemented by a surge in supportive nationalist activities in exile. The goal of Tibetans inside Tibet was to harness the media attention being given to China for the Beijing Olympics to raise international awareness on the Tibetan occupation (Smith, 2010). Unlike previous revolts, the 2008 uprisings represented a broad-base of support – beyond traditional activists (monks, nuns, rural farmers and pastoralists), Party members, state employees, students, artists and intellectuals also participated in the protests (Smith, 2010).

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3 The Panchen Lama is one of the highest monks in Tibetan Buddhism, alongside the Dalai Lama. He also holds significant spiritual as well as political power.
The Chinese state responded with repression, including censorship of the internet (Topgyal, 2013). With 2019 marking sixty years of Chinese occupation of Tibet, the Chinese state has cracked down on the region of Tibet. This has included increased monitoring of Tibetans, as well as barring foreigners from entering Tibet (The Economist, 2019).

**Tibetan Grievances**

Tibetan grievances with the Chinese state can be categorized into two forms – institutional and constitutional grievances. While institutional focus on the repressive nature of Chinese institutions in Tibet and the lack of substantive Tibetan representation on issues regarding Tibet, constitutional grievances emphasize the failure of the Chinese state to deliver on the constitutional guarantees for minorities. The emphasis by the PRC on maintaining ‘national unity’ over placating minorities has meant that any activity that asserts minority identity has been deemed to be ‘splitsst’ and subject to punishment. This includes assertion of religious and linguistic identities. The inability of the Chinese state to address these grievances has ensured that Tibetan nationalism has remained robust, both inside and outside of Tibet. Tibetan grievances are detailed further in Appendix 1.

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4 These ideas are further detailed in Appendix 1.
5 These are activities that are deemed by the PRC to threaten national unity, and they claim are aimed at splitting the national integrity of the Chinese state.
**Indo-Tibetan Relations**

When the Dalai Lama arrived in India in 1959, India granted him and the thousands of Tibetans that had fled after him asylum. Yet, since India is not a signatory of the UN Refugee Convention, Tibetans in India are not recognized as ‘refugees’, but rather as ‘foreign residents’ (McGranahan, 2018). In order to maintain Tibetan community and continuity in the Tibetan way of life, the Dalai Lama requested the Government of India to set up independent ‘settlements’, which was agreed upon by Nehru. The settlement system has allowed Tibetan refugees in India to become self-sufficient and economically independent, not having to rely on substantial aid from foreign agencies. As of 1998, there are 46 Tibetan settlements in India, Nepal and Bhutan, housing more than 100,000 refugees (Norbu, 2003). As part of the creation of settlements, the TGIE was also set up in Dharamsala. Further, the TGIE formed their own Tibetan schooling system, which works in tandem with the Indian education system to give Tibetan children a holistic education in both modern subjects and traditional topics. These Tibetan schools provide the refugees with knowledge on Tibetan language, culture, religion and history.

While India provided material support to the Tibetan exiles, the government hesitated to extend the same in diplomatic terms. When the Tibetan case was brought to the UN in 1950, it was forwarded by El Salvador. British and American delegations were willing to support the resolution if it was introduced by India, as the state with the closest ties to the issue, but India declined to do so, prompting the British and American delegations to also withdraw support (Chaturvedi, 2003). In 1954, India signed the
Panchsheel Treaty with China, acceding that Tibet was an autonomous part of China. In 2003, India officially recognized Tibet as an integral part of the PRC (Bentz, 2012a). Though the Chinese have been weary of India’s leniency towards allowing the TGIE to establish itself in Dharamsala, India has refused to recognize the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA) as a legitimate exile or national government, and the Dalai Lama is seen as only a religious figure. In 1963, India stopped recognizing new escapees as refugees (Artiles, 2012). New arrivals are not given the same status as the first wave of Tibetan refugees (Houston & Wright, 2003) and are now recognized as ‘pilgrims’ (Misra, 2003). In 2018, the Indian government issued a directive to prohibiting bureaucrats and political leaders from attending events organized by the TGIE to mark 60 years of exile (Purohit, 2019). It is apparent, then, that for the Indian government, Sino-Indian relations take precedence over Indo-Tibetan relations.

**Tibetans in Canada**

*Relocation to Canada*

The Dalai Lama made a personal appeal to the Prime Minister of Canada in 1966, asking him to grant refuge to 2000 Tibetans in a group settlement (Gardner, 1999; Logan & Murdie, 2014). Though initially this request was refused, in 1970 the Canadian government agreed to resettle 240 Tibetan refugees (Dargay, 1988; Gardner, 1999). 228 refugees were allowed into the country between 1971 and 1972, and they settled in four

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6 The treaty includes provisions for mutual respect for territorial integrity and non-interference in internal affairs – thus, India accepted China’s borders as established.
provinces – Quebec, Ontario, Saskatchewan and Alberta (McLellan, 1987; Dargay, 1988; Gardner, 1999). The resettlement in Canada was in sharp contrast to the Tibetan settlements established in South Asia – though the Dalai Lama had requested at least 100 people and one monk to be allowed to create communities together in Canada, Tibetans were instead spread across the country, often with fewer than two families in a location (McLellan, 1987; Nyanang, 2015). Tibetans in Canada were unable to organize a large and strong, ethnically homogenous community, as they had in India (McLellan, 1987; Gardner, 1999). As McLellan (1987) notes, the inability to settle together led to “an extreme sense of loneliness from loss of contact between other Tibetans” (p. 74). The provincial and federal governments were not experienced in dealing with such a unique case of refugees, which made the process even more difficult for this first wave of refugees (McLellan, 1987). Further, as the first group of Asian refugees to be resettled in Canada, Tibetans also encountered issues of social adaptation (McLellan, 1987). In the early 2000s, chain migration brought more Tibetans to Canada - some came as part of family reunification programmes and others came as refugee claimants, due to the perceived increasing insecurity both in Tibet and in exile in South Asia (Logan & Murdie, 2014).

**Home in Parkdale**

Parkdale was established in the 19th century as a residential location for middle-class families – it appealed to buyers due to its proximity to Lake Ontario and downtown (Logan & Murdie, 2014). The creation of high-rise apartment buildings and the completion of the Gardiner expressway in the mid-1960s led to the decline of Parkdale’s
status (Logan & Murdie, 2014). As a result, Parkdale has become an appealing
destination for low-income Torontonians, including Tibetans and other newly arrived
low-income immigrants and refugees. Parkdale has, thus far, resisted the pressures of
gentrification, and remains an attractive location for new migrants (Logan & Murdie,
2014). While the Canadian government may not have supported the creation of
settlements for Tibetans in Canada, Parkdale is a reflection of the community’s ability to
create their own enclaves, without official help. Parkdale’s Tibetan population is
reflected in the aesthetics of the neighbourhood – walking down Queen Street West in the
Parkdale area, it is difficult to ignore the various symbols of Tibetan culture that adorn
the houses and businesses.

**Tibetan Nationalism**

The occupation of Tibet by Chinese forces and the experience of exile has fostered
Tibetan nationalism – scholars have argued that prior to the Chinese invasion, there was
no coherent thought on Tibetan-ness (Anand, 2000; Houston & Wright, 2003; Young,
2010). Indeed, the process of occupation and exile is what forced the creation of an
‘imagined community’ among the Tibetans. While there was a Tibetan identity prior to
Chinese occupation (Basu, 2012), it was not necessarily mobilized as a unified,
nationalist identity. Additionally, as Norbu (1992b) claims, the Tibetan identity was
linked to a religious identity, and did not necessarily include Tibetan Muslims or
followers of the traditional Bon religion. With the threat of occupation by an outside
force, Tibetan identity took on a nationalist tone, and was broadened to include all who
identified as ethnic Tibetans.
Tibetan nationalism is an exilic form of nationalism – the concentration of the exile community in South Asia, and predominantly in TGIE formed settlements, has meant that a robust nationalist project has been built in exile. Yet, exilic nationalism does not operate only in exile – it relies on nationalism to exist in the homeland as well. As Topgyal (2013) states, Tibetans inside and outside have maintained “informal channels to communicate with each other and calibrate their respective activities and positions towards Chinese rule” (p. 537). Tibetan nationalism, as an exilic phenomenon, demands that Tibetans inside and outside work in conjunction with each other – the persistence of Tibetan nationalism is proof of the existence of robust nationalism both within Tibet and in exile.

The Chinese justification for invading Tibet included ‘liberating’ Tibetans from their existing feudal and authoritarian systems, which the Chinese believed were rooted in the hierarchical structures of Tibetan Buddhism. China assured Tibet it would take it out of its traditional structures, modernizing the region, providing education to the Tibetan population and ensuring economic gains. Yet, sixty years of occupation have not proven the Chinese project to have been successful. Grievances remain, and while the capital region has modernized, much of rural Tibet remains disconnected and underdeveloped (Donnet, 1994).

The Dalai Lama and the TGIE have taken on exile as a location to modernize Tibetan society. This has included revamping the education system and the introduction of a democratic political system. The Dalai Lama has realized the importance of modernizing Tibetan society, and “he knows that Tibetan culture can only survive if it is
modernised” (von Bruck, 2003, p. 42). Tibetans have also succeeded economically in exile – as Goldstein-Kyaga (1993) notes, Tibetans in exile in South Asia have enjoyed a better standard of living than their parents did in Tibet. Further, some exiles have even invited their relatives from Tibet to join them in India for a better economic life (Misra, 2003). The ability of the Tibetans to modernize and thrive in exile undercuts the Chinese justification for colonization. Further, the continuous arrival of Tibetans from Tibet into exile also undermines the legitimacy of Chinese occupation in Tibet.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Third World Nationalism

In his seminal work on the origins of nationalism, Benedict Anderson (1983) describes the nation as an “imagined political community” – nations are imagined because “members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (p. 6). Anderson’s classic framework of modular nationalism, however, does not paint a complete picture of Third World nationalism.

Norbu (1992a) was one of the first academics to theorize on Third World nationalism and detail the emergence of a nationalism distinct from Western realities. He breaks nationalism into two components: traditional data, which includes race, language, tradition and territoriality, and egalitarian ideology, which includes freedom, equality and fraternity. He finds that Third World nationalism is a fusion of these two elements. He concludes that “the production and reproduction of Third World nationalism is a function of an intensified intersocietal process of dialectical interaction between a traditional culture […] and egalitarian ideology and rational techniques” (p. 222). For him, Third World nationalism is ethnic-specific, and is “a history of progressive politicization of a majority or dominant ethnic group” (p. 226).

Chatterjee (1993), questioning Anderson’s narrative of nationalism as a European import, questions what the post-colonial nations have left to imagine – “history, it would seem, has decreed that we in the postcolonial world shall only be perpetual consumers of modernity […] even our imaginations must be forever colonized” (p. 5). He states that
Third World nationalism is not premised on modularity, but rather on difference. In the conditions of unfreedom, the nationalism that is built by Third World countries is strikingly different from that which came about in Europe. Furthering Norbu’s (1992a) understanding of traditional data and egalitarian ideology, Chatterjee posits that anticolonial nationalism negotiates colonial difference and works to create two domains – the outside, which focuses on economy, statecraft, science and technology, and the inner, which includes essential culture. While the nationalist movement concedes Western superiority in the domain of the outside, it retains moral superiority in the inner, spiritual domain. The colonial state is kept out of the inner domain, which can be changed and modernized only by the nationalist movement. The goal of the project, then, is to build a ‘modern’ national culture which is distinct from Western forms of culture. Yet, for Chatterjee, Third World nationalism is not ethnic-specific but, rather, is forged on the basis of a ‘shared’ culture.

Tibetan nationalism has followed this framework where, in the realm of the material, the TGIE, headed by the Dalai Lama, have conceded superiority to the Western model, and adapted their political structure to mimic a Western democratic model; yet, in the spiritual domain, Tibetan nationalism has claimed the richness of Tibetan culture, religion, and spirituality (Young, 2010). Indeed, as Kolas (1996) states, religion provides the Tibetan nationalist movement within Tibet, led by monks and nuns, with a moral high-ground over the values of the CCP, thus reifying the superiority of the spiritual. This thesis adds to this framework of Third World nationalism by understanding how Tibetan nationalism has sustained the inner/outer binary. This thesis also explains how Tibetan
nationalism departs from this framework – the situation of exilehood complicates Tibetan nationalism, as it is not merely a case of Third World nationalism.

Tibetan Nationalism

Tibetan nationalism has been built and sustained in exile, rather than within the national homeland. Thus, the pressures of operating in exile take the Tibetan case beyond the framings of Third World nationalism. Yet, Tibetan nationalism does not operate solely in exile – it would be unable to survive without the mass support of the majority of the Tibetan population, who still reside within Tibet. Thus, as exilic nationalism, Tibetan nationalism must maintain chains of communication between exile and the homeland, to ensure that the movement is working simultaneously in both locations. The conditions of un-freedom imposed by the Chinese state within Tibet only serve to complicate the success of Tibetan nationalism, since it limits the flows of information that can be maintained.

This duality of the location of nationalism not only impacts the strength of nationalism, but also the mode it takes. Nationalism within Tibet has to contend with China as its opponent and focus of its struggles. Simultaneously, nationalism outside of Tibet has also focused on appealing to the West. Kolas (1996) states that Tibet’s appeal to the UN in 1950 made it apparent that Western standards would have to be used to argue the Tibetan case. The West is also appealed to in order to keep the movement alive, since the Tibetan diasporic population by itself is quite small, and the Tibetan issue is not a priority in international relations (Anand, 2002). Tibetan nationalism has, therefore, appropriated elements of transnationalism, including environmentalism, peace,
spiritualism, international human rights, and compassion, to formulate an “inclusivist cosmopolitan agenda” that makes the Tibetan movement significant (Anand, 2002, p. 219).

The duality of location results in the duality of focus as well. This duality of nationalism and focus also reveals itself in the conceptions of the ‘material’ domain. While Chatterjee’s framework would predict Tibet’s ‘spiritual’ superiority to be juxtaposed against China’s ‘material’ dominance, given that China is the colonizing state, the TGIE has adapted its material domain to Western democratic frameworks, refusing to concede to China’s claim of material superiority. Yet, the Dalai Lama’s Middle Way Approach would be at odds within an authoritarian Chinese state, and it is unclear how democracy in Tibet could thrive with an authoritarian state deciding foreign policy. Thus, the duality of focus also gives rise to tensions between the Western democratic ideals being adopted by the TGIE and China’s authoritarian state, which compete for material superiority.

Chatterjee’s framework, as one of Third World or postcolonial nationalism, is complicated by the fact that Tibet was “colonized by postcolonial China at a time when the rest of the world was witnessing movements for decolonization” (Anand, 2002, p.210). For Tibet, colonization is not a thing of the past, and it does not exist in the abstract as neo-colonialism, but is a fact that they are living in the present as an occupied state. Thus, a framework that considers the impact of both exile and settler-colonialism on nationalism is needed to understand the case of Tibetan nationalism.
Most accounts of Tibetan nationalism have focused on the significance of religion in the formation of a nationalist identity. This includes Young’s (2010) understanding of the role of the Fourteenth Dalai Lama in fostering nationalism, premised on a non-sectarian identity that is based in same-ness within the exile community. She looks at the ways in which the Dalai Lama has specifically formulated the nationalist project, and hence focuses on the role of the nationalist elite, rather than the ways in which ordinary people understand Tibetan nationalism. Kolas (1996) also focuses on the role played by Tibetan Buddhism for providing symbols and idioms to the nationalist movement, contrasting it with secular nationalist ideologies that have embodied Western nationalist movements. Thus, she acknowledges the role religion plays in Third World nationalist movements, and the potential for religion for mass politics.

In contrast to these views on religious forms of nationalism, Topgyal (2013) identifies the root cause of Tibetan nationalism to be insecurity. Framing the nationalist movement as a response to preserve identity in the face of rising Chinese threat, Topgyal claims that ethno-nationalism is not only about preserving a traditional culture but, rather, is a security fear. Furthering a different understanding of Tibetan nationalism, Anand (2002) analyses how the Tibetan nationalist movement has increasingly relied on transnational language to appeal to a larger Western audience for support. In a separate paper, Anand (2010) understands how contemporary Tibetan identity has been created due to modernization, colonialism and displacement, rather than seeing it as a historically rooted identity.
While these authors on Tibetan nationalism have delved into the broader themes of nationalism and their impact on the Tibetan case, none have looked at the way in which ordinary Tibetans have interacted with, and positioned themselves within, the nationalist movement. By exploring narratives of Tibetan women in Canada, this thesis thus aims to understand how women relate to and reimagine the nationalist movement. This thesis focuses on how women negotiate contentious issues of citizenship, identity and gender, in order to refashion modes of nationalism.

**Citizenship and Nationalism**

Citizenship remains a contentious issue for nationalist refugees and exile communities, like the Tibetans. In the context of citizenship and nationalism, Malkki’s (1992) exploration into the Hutu exile community offers an insight into maintaining refugeeness and establishing nationalism. The temporariness attached with being a refugee establishes that one has not given up on the nationalist movement, and there is hope to return to the homeland. The refusal to settle down in the host nation, and enduring the burden associated with being a precarious refugee, are seen as valuing membership in the national community over membership in a state.

In the case of Tibetans in exile, different locations of exile have elicited different responses to naturalization. While those in exile in South Asia have mostly refused (or been refused) citizenship, those that have migrated westward have accepted citizenship in their new host countries. However, as McGranahan (2018) notes, both refusal and acceptance are two sides of the same nationalist coin. It is not just refusal that is a sign of Tibetan nationalism – accepting citizenship allows one to utilize the freedoms associated
with being a citizen to forward the Tibetan nationalist cause in the new host society. Thus, subverting Malkki’s claims, the Tibetan population negotiates different understandings of nationalism and accepts varying ways of activism.

Literature on citizenship, however, does not de-centre the role of the state in making citizens and granting citizenship. Debates around citizenship have focused on the interplay between states and citizens to examine the scope of citizenship and the ensuring roles and responsibilities. Very few scholars have imagined non-statist forms of citizenship which are still local and not global. As Tandon (2005) notes, citizenship in the contemporary context is defined as ‘citizen of a state’. The proliferation of various identity cards has cemented citizenship as a purely legal-juridical identity. Kabeer (2005) establishes the notion of inclusive citizenship, de-emphasizing the vertical relationship between the state and the individual, and highlighting the potential of horizontal citizenship as the relationship between citizens. Ramirez (2007) also establishes the notion of cultural citizenship, where groups decide their own notions of belonging. Beyond a legislated identity, citizenship is also about feelings of belonging and emotions (Fleischmann & von Styvendale, 2011).

Yet, such frameworks assume that the nation is found within the state – for the case of the Tibetan exile community, the condition of exile distances them from their national territory and weakens their claims to Tibetan citizenship. Thus, the Tibetan exilic community’s experiences demand furthering these radical (and often feminized) notions

of citizenship to create new understandings of de-territorialized and non-statist approaches to citizenship. This thesis asserts this feminized notion of citizenship to understand how Tibetan women in Canada differentiate between their national and statist memberships.

**Gender and Nationalism**

Nationalism and gender are intertwined intricately, and the roles and responsibilities assumed by women in the nationalist struggle are quite different from the expectations levied on men. The gendered division of labour continues to be found in nationalist and nation-building projects, where women’s contribution is mediated through their reproductive capabilities. Anthias and Yuval-Davis (1989) provide a framework of gender and nationalism, and detail the five major ways in which women participate in nationalism. These include: as biological reproducers; as reproducers of the boundaries of ethnic and national groups; as ideological reproducers of the nation and transmitters of culture; as signifiers of ethnic and national difference, and; as economic, political and military participants of the struggle (p. 7). They concede that though women contribute to the nationalist project in varying ways, they are usually relegated to supporting roles. However, since their case studies are based on nation-states, they are limited in understanding how the state can be disengaged from nationalist projects.

Jayawardena (1986) focuses on the nationalist movements in the Third World to understand how gender has interacted with these movements. She states that the nationalist movement had to challenge and change the existing old order, while also reviving the traditions of the independent past, to create a nationalist movement that is
simultaneously modern and essentially traditional. She highlights how the elite of the nationalist movements determined the contours of the role of the ‘new woman’ – this woman was educated and equal to men in this regard, but did not abandon her traditional culture, since she was still the guardian of national culture, traditions and religion. Chatterjee’s (1993) framework also focuses on the role of women in the nationalist movement, and continues the ideas presented by Jayawardena. The difference in his understanding, however, is how this ‘new woman’ was constructed – by dividing the nationalist movement into the inner and outer domains, Chatterjee states that nationalist projects situated the ‘woman question’ in the inner domain. Thus, the ‘woman question’ becomes part of modernizing traditions and culture, which comes under the purview of the colonized. Yet both these frameworks operate with the assumption that nationalist movements are occurring within the homeland – the Tibetan case of exilic nationalism, then, does not fit these frameworks.

The case of Tibetan nationalism does not completely fit dominant frameworks of gender and nationalism that have been presented thus far. As McGranahan (1996) notes, while most nationalist projects imagine the nation as feminine (Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1989), “Tibetan formulations of national identity do not rely on an image of the nation that is gendered feminine” (p. 169). Indeed, the word for ‘Tibet’ in Tibetan is phayul, which translates to fatherland. Makley (1994) argues that the “main repository of Tibetan culture/identity is not Woman, but male-dominated institutional Buddhism” (p. 22). Further, the Dalai Lama is the embodiment of the nation as the spiritual father of the Tibetan nation (Kleiger, 1992). The institutionalized way in which the TGIE has focused on instilling nationalist feelings in the exile population has been through the educational
system, one which is not gendered either male or female (McGranahan, 1996). Thus, in many ways, the Tibetan nationalist project subverts the gendered logics and expectations of nationalism.

This is not to say that the Tibetan nationalist project does not have gendered elements. Yet, the way in which gender is formulated in Tibetan nationalism is not as straightforward. Additionally, the experience of exile has provided the nationalist project with a ground to modernize the ‘inner’ domain – this includes space to reimagine gender relations in Tibetan culture. By modernizing the ‘inner’ domain and challenging traditional gender roles, the exiled Tibetan community undermines the Chinese justifications for colonizing Tibet. Further migration to the West has hastened the reformulation of gender relations, largely due to economic pressures of maintaining a household in the West. Exploring the different perceptions of gender relations in the Tibetan community, this thesis explores how Tibetan nationalism both embodies but also deviates from the theoretical frameworks of gender and nationalism.

*Tibetan Women*

Makley’s (1997) article presents a framework of how Tibetan women have been represented in academic and popular works by three different projects, each with their own agenda. These three projects include Chinese nationalism, which imagines Tibetan women as victims of Buddhist structures; Tibetan nationalism, which represents Tibetan women in precolonial Tibet as liberated and independent; and Western feminism, which focuses on the inherently egalitarian nature of Tibetan Buddhism. Makley problematizes these monolithic views of Tibetan society and Tibetan women, and presents a holistic
understanding of the different Tibetan cultures that existed prior to colonization. In another book, Makley (2007) focuses on the role played by women in subverting the CCP’s nationalist impositions on Tibetan women inside of Tibet, to understand the role they played in the Buddhist revival in post-Mao China. Yet, in both of these works, her focus remains on Tibetan women inside of Tibet, and she does not explore the narratives and identities of Tibetan women in exile.

Butler (2003), on the other hand, focuses on the creation of the Tibetan Women’s Association (TWA) in exile and its role in promoting women’s nationalist contributions to the Tibetan movement. The focus of her research is on the exile community in India. Her comprehensive examination of the TWA details the history of the organization and the way it has transformed in exile. Yet, the focus of her book is on the institutional forms of feminism and nationalism – though she does interview individual women in the Tibetan exile community, she interviews them in their capacity as leaders or members of the TWA, rather than as women themselves. Her focus on the formal organizing of Tibetan women in exile in India, and the impact of feminism on the organization, fails to look at individual narratives of gender and nationalism in the exile community.

Both Makley (1997, 2007) and Butler (2003) focus on institutions and institutionalized expressions of gender relations and forms of feminisms. While Makley situates her work on Tibetan women inside Tibet, Butler looks at Tibetan women in exile in India. This thesis departs from these two authors’ works by exploring the personal narratives of Tibetan women in exile in Canada – thus far, no work has looked at Tibetan women’s narratives in exile, especially beyond exilic communities of South Asia.
Tibetans in the West

While the formation of diasporas and diasporic identities in the West have been extensively documented, including large literature on Chinese⁸ and South Asian⁹ diasporas, there has been less research that has been carried out on the Tibetan exile community’s westward move.¹⁰ Given their claims to a distinctly different identity than other Chinese, it is difficult to imagine merging narratives of those Tibetans escaping Chinese colonialism into the narratives of the Chinese diaspora. In addition, though many Tibetans make their journey towards the West through South Asia, they are also not considered to be a part of the South Asian diaspora. Their emphasis on a distinct ethnic identity, as well as their insecurity as refugees and foreigners in South Asia, makes it difficult to merge their stories into the journey of South Asian diasporas as well. The Tibetan exile community in the West, then, falls in a liminal space between being part of the South Asian and/or Chinese diasporas, yet not fitting either of those descriptions properly. Yet, as Rajiva and D’Sylva (2014) show, more recognition has to be paid to the “heterogenous nature of colonized groups within a particular nation-state” (p. 147). By taking a heterogenous view of groups within states and studying their movements, scholars can understand how the conditions of exile complicate simplistic diasporic narratives.

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⁸ See Ley (2003), Teo (2007), and Teo (2011).
⁹ See Israel (1987), Vertovec, Parekh and Singh (2003), and Rai and Reeves (2009).
¹⁰ It should be noted that the Chinese and South Asian diasporas to the West are older and more established than the Tibetan diaspora.
There is a paucity of research that has been carried out to understand the Tibetan diaspora beyond the borders of South Asia, and much of the research on Tibetans outside of South Asia has focused on the United States. In their paper, Houston and Wright (2003) use a diasporic framework to understand how diaspora is both a condition and a process for the Tibetan exile community. Comparing the exile communities in Dharamsala, Kathmandu and Boston, the authors highlight how there is no singular conception of a Tibetan identity in diaspora, to claim that diasporic identities are contested, complex and embedded in multiple narratives of struggle. In her dissertation, Lavine (2001) interrogates how nostalgia and narrative play a vital part in the cultural survival of Tibetan identity in New York. She examines the role of cultural memory in creating an idealized Tibet, an alternative to both the reality of colonization in contemporary Tibet and the dissatisfaction of diaspora existence. She further attempts to analyse how the construction of such memories interferes with their religious identities as Buddhists. Yeh’s (2007) paper examines the struggles over claims of authenticity by Tibetans in South Asia and those in the United States, to conclude that identity formation is varied and impacted by national location and transnational trajectories. Hess’s (2009) book on citizenship and belonging in the Tibetan diaspora focuses on the U.S. Tibetan Resettlement Project. She highlights how Tibetan migrants are often seen to be ‘cultural ambassadors’ to the US, and focuses on the roles Tibetans play in their new host nations to further the Tibetan nationalist movement in the American public and government institutions. Phuntsog (2012) focuses on educational institutions and identity formation of Tibetan youth in the US, to conclude that school and community partnerships contribute to a healthy ethnic identity development in Tibetan adolescents. He thus highlights the
role of community in the educational achievements of Tibetan youth. Piatti’s (2017) thesis focuses on Tibetans in the Twin Cities of Minnesota, to highlight how Tibetan-American identity is emerging, contrasting this identity with the experiences and memories of life in South Asia. He argues that Tibetan identity is dynamic and constantly changing, and cultural unity in the Tibetan community is challenged by political tensions.

Canada provides a different setting for the Tibetan exile community. Canada’s liberal multicultural policy, distinct from American policies, may impact the exile experience in a different way. Perhaps it is this distinctive approach which has resulted in the election of Tibetan-Canadian Bhutila Karpoche, the first ethnic Tibetan elected to public office in North America, who was elected to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario in the 2018 provincial elections. Yet, academic research that has delved into facets of the Tibetan diaspora in Canada is sparse. McLellan’s (1987) study on Tibetans in Lindsay, Ontario is one of the first studies on Tibetans in Canada, and examines the role of Buddhism in maintaining ethnic identity. She attempts to map the various cultural norms, values, myths and symbols that Tibetans in Lindsay mobilized as integral for their ethnic identity. Logan and Murdie (2014) explore the settlement experience of Tibetan refugees in the Parkdale neighbourhood in Toronto. They argue that despite the bad reputation of the Parkdale neighbourhood, the community aspect and feeling at ‘home’ are what drive many new Tibetan migrants to relocate to this neighbourhood. MacPherson’s (2017) study into the ethno-cultural diversity education using the Tibetan diaspora across Canada, the US and India analyses how different multiculturalism approaches in each country have had an impact on diversity policies in public education and have resulted in different diasporic experiences of Tibetans in the three countries. McGranahan (2018)
looks at citizenship acquisition by Tibetans in Canada, to understand how acquiring citizenship in a North American context is seen as a way to further the Tibetan nationalist movement. MacPherson and Ghoso’s (2008) study examines the multilingual practices of Tibetan women in Toronto who have arrived recently from South Asia. They consider how language ideology and sociocultural factors impact participants’ language preferences, and their consideration of gender roles highlights the undue burden put on women when it comes to family language practices.

Beyond these works, the Tibetan community in Canada has been of particular interest for many thesis projects, especially for Master’s students. Gardner’s (1999) project focuses on identifying how exile and transnational connections have aided in the construction of identity among Tibetan immigrants in Montreal. Akhtar (2010) explores themes of Tibetan cultural identity during the settlement experience in Toronto. Using Berry’s (1997) integration strategy of acculturation, she explores the barriers Tibetans face while settling in Canada. Nyanang (2015) focuses on political activism among second generation Tibetans in Canada to understand the construction of identity in transnational social spaces. Deng’s (2017) study also focuses on the formation of diasporic identities in the Tibetan community in Toronto, highlighting that a political Tibetan identity emerges out of a particularization of certain markers of Tibetan culture to be preserved and as a need to represent the Tibetan culture to the larger Toronto and Canadian community.
Research Questions

Situating my project at the intersection of these literatures, I aim to understand Tibetan nationalism through these various lenses, in the specific context of the Tibetan women situated in Toronto, Canada. Thus far, no academic study has focused only on Tibetan women in Canada and their contribution to the Tibetan nationalist project. The questions this project seeks to ask are: How do Tibetan women in exile interpret, reimagine and sustain Tibetan nationalism? How does Tibetan nationalism through women’s perspectives challenge current frameworks of Third World nationalism?
Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

This research project has been guided by feminist principles of conducting research. The focus of the project has been to gather the personal narratives of Tibetan women residing in Canada, and for that purpose, qualitative interviewing was deemed to be most appropriate. Data was collected using semi-structured interviews of 14 participants, and each interview was between forty-five and ninety minutes. Since feminists believe that no one individual can ever possess total knowledge and all knowledge is partial (Haraway, 1991), this project has focused on collecting each individual woman’s partial truth and knowledge. Interviewing was selected for the need for in-depth conversations with the participants and to understand personal narratives and perspectives on nationalism. A semi-structured format allowed participants to guide the researcher through different topics that they deemed important, and avoided the constraints of a structured interview or survey. Since the focus has been on personal narratives, quantitative methods would not have proven to be helpful to gather data.

Research was conducted over a 3-week period in Toronto in the fall of 2018. For this project, 14 Tibetan women currently residing in Toronto were interviewed. Since theories of nationalism have been androcentric in nature and have underplayed women’s narratives and participation, this project focused only on women’s narratives and experiences. In addition, no research on Tibetans in exile outside of South Asia has focused solely on women, and there is a lack of empirical data on Tibetan women’s viewpoints. By focusing on personal narratives, then, this project aims to fill the gaps that
currently exist in understanding how Tibetan women in exile outside of South Asia facilitate and contribute to Tibetan nationalism.

This methodology chapter is divided into eight sections detailing the methods and methodology guiding this research. The first section details my feminist reflexivity and how my identity affected the interview process. The second section details the recruitment process undertaken and the challenges associated with it. Next, the interview process, participant information and the data analysis methods will be illustrated. I also highlight the politics of translation, as well as researcher responsibility and my plans for knowledge sharing. The last section lays out the main arguments of this thesis.

**Insider/Outsider Divide**

*Reflexivity*

Feminist research methodology has emphasized the importance of reflexivity in conducting research, as it is imperative to understand that the “biographical journeys of researchers greatly influence their values, their research questions, and the knowledge they construct” (Banks, 1998, p. 4). My own interest in the project arose from my personal experience with Tibetans in India, but also my experience as an immigrant woman in Canada. While growing up in India, I had exposure to Tibetans in the community, and knew broadly of the Tibetan struggle for independence. Many Tibetan students attended the same boarding school in India as me, and that is where I first learned more about Tibetan culture. Yet my knowledge was limited, and I knew more about the cultural aspects of the Tibetan nation, than the political history and struggles. In addition, though I am also an immigrant woman to Canada, my relationship to my
homeland is quite complex – as Anand (2002) rightfully captures, “for the Indian diaspora, it might be comfortable to talk about failings of their nation-state, but for the Tibetan diaspora it is a luxury they can hardly afford” (p. 211). Since my homeland is not actively colonized, I am able to freely criticize the Indian state and society, and also notions of nationalism, which as participant Nyima tells me, are “inherently steeped in patriarchy”. Yet, the circumstances of current colonization change the relationship that Tibetan women have to their nation and to nationalism, since their aspirations for a state hinge on the collective identity of a nation that is shaped by nationalist projects. Hence, for these reasons, I sought to understand how Tibetan women in Canada relate to their nation and to nationalism.

Perceptions of Researcher

Reflexivity not only posits that the researcher cannot maintain pure objectivity, but it also establishes that she is not perceived as being objective by the participants. These subjectivities, therefore, not only affect how the researcher conducts their research, but also the responses of the participants. Reflexivity, thus, involves considering the researcher’s insider/outsider status. Couture, Zaidi and Maticka-Tyndale (2012) describe an insider as “someone who shares similar characteristics, roles, and/or experiences with those being studied”, and outsiders as “researchers who are not seen as similar to their participants” (p. 89-90). Yet, feminists have also acknowledged that the insider/outsider status is not a fixed notion – “in the actual practice of research […] one is faced with the need to constantly negotiate between the positions of insider and outsider, rather than being fixedly assigned one or the other subject position” (Lal, 1999). As an Indian
woman who has migrated to Canada, I was simultaneously an insider and an outsider for my research participants – as a racialized immigrant woman from a country which has given Tibetans and their leader refuge, I was an insider; yet, as an economic migrant to Canada who was not Tibetan, I was also an outsider.

**Insider-ness**

As a racialized immigrant woman to Canada from India, I was an insider to the participants. I had migrated to Canada and encountered the same white settler state as the participants – we were all visible minorities in this new state. I was also an insider because many of the women had lived in, visited, or had family in India, and India is the location of the Dalai Lama, the TGIE, and large Tibetan settlements. As I am Indian, born and raised in India, there was a shared cultural understanding between the participants and me, which was acknowledged by them as well. For example, participants would discuss things like their favourite food being *dal*\(^{11}\) or *dosas*\(^{12}\), or would talk about religious places in India like Dharamsala or Bodh Gaya. Some also commented on their love for Bollywood, strengthening our connection and my status as an insider. My insider identity also allowed us to broach other issues, like our shared understanding of a similar culture. Kunga, for example, recounted a time when she tried to help an elderly lady with her luggage at the train station in Canada:

> I went straight ahead - we don't ask - I went to pick it up for her, and she sprayed me with Windex, saying 'don't touch my things'.

\(^{11}\) Lentils  
\(^{12}\) South Indian flatbread
While this gesture was deemed inappropriate in Canada, in India Kunga’s reaction would be considered completely normal. The shared cultures where respect for elders is of utmost importance made Kunga feel at ease in recounting this incident, as she assumed that I would have probably empathized with her position in this story more than a white researcher or someone from a culture that does not have reverence for elders.

Shared cultural understandings also emerged when participants discussed issues relating to gender. My identity as a woman helped me approach these issues of gender and identity with the women, who understood that we had a shared experience under patriarchy. Dechen, a young participant, described the gender relations in her household as follows:

So when my grandfather was alive, my mom had to play the role of the bahu [daughter-in-law], do everything. My grandfather would order stuff around, and my mom has to do it. Our shared cultural understanding as well as gender identity helped Dechen describe the gender dynamics in her house by using the term bahu, which has certain cultural connotations, beyond merely meaning the legal relation of daughter-in-law – Dechen is implying that a bahu is subservient, who is expected to cater to the wishes of her in-laws, and not disobey her elders. Another participant, Yangchen, also described gender relations in Tibetan society by relating it to a shared understanding of patriarchy:

I'm sure it's very similar for Asian women. You know how women don't work, stay home, take care of the household, the kids, the husband. So, I guess that's like one of the challenges. Just like any other...in Indian families also it is very common, right.

My identity as a racialized woman in Canada also put some of the participants at ease, especially regarding conversations around issues of racism experienced in Canada. For
example, Kunga commented that her daughter’s appointment at a hospital was delayed, because of her race:

Seeing me as an Asian, they thought I can be pushed around. Again, Kunga believed that my shared experience with racism in Canada would allow me to empathize with her position more than a white researcher may have. Thus, as an insider, participants could not only relate to me, but also felt safe and comfortable sharing details of their personal journeys, which they may have hesitated to, if they were interviewed by a complete outsider.

Outsider-ness

As Bhopal (2001) states, however, “gender congruity is not enough to overcome ethnic incongruity within the interview process” (p. 280). While being an insider in terms of gender and some shared cultural understanding, I was still an outsider, since I was not a part of the Tibetan community. My outsider status was of much interest to the participants, who enquired as to why I was interested in researching the Tibetan community. Nyima, a young activist who was a 1.5\textsuperscript{13} generation migrant to Canada, was vocal about her inhibitions about me, an outsider, doing this research project. When I told her that my interest began because, as an Indian, I was exposed to the situation of Tibetans in exile, she replied:

It’s interesting because you know you were like as Indians in India we know about Tibetans, but that's actually not true.

\textsuperscript{13} The term 1.5 generation migrant refers to an immigrant that has moved to the host nation before or during their early teen years.
Furthermore, while talking about power structures, she told me:

I'm just thinking about Dalit women. There needs to be more writing - you can write as much as you want on Dalit women, I don't care, I would gladly accept that new scholarship, but for our community…

Nyima is apprehensive that I should be doing research on the Tibetan community – she later told me that she wants Tibetans to create knowledge on their own community themselves, rather than ‘outsiders’ like me conducting research, especially when I do not know what it means to be Tibetan, an exile whose homeland is currently occupied. For Nyima, if I wanted to challenge power structures and explore research areas, I should have started by researching my ‘own’ community. For her, this included Dalit women, even though I am an upper-caste woman myself. As an upper-caste woman, I would be in a similar, if not more oppressive, power relation if I were to research Dalit women. In addition, Nyima assumes my identity as a Hindu woman with caste, even though I am the product of an inter-faith marriage and did not inherit caste from my mother’s side. Yet, Nyima later conceded that she was more willing to talk to me than another ‘white’ researcher, because I come from a country that has struggled recently with the reality of colonialism:

Yes, you were not born in a time when you had to fight for independence, but it was not long ago that your people fought for their independence, right. Hence, she was more willing to be interviewed by me than by someone who had no connection to a colonized experience, or who was closer to the experience of the colonizer. This view was reiterated by Jamyang, who, while talking about Tibetan identity, said that the Indian history of colonization would make me understand nationalism and patriotism more than someone else:
[Someone from] a country that has had very little turmoil and conflict in their history, I don't know if they'd feel as strongly patriotic and nationalistic.

As Bhopal (2001) claims, “personal experience indicates a shared reality” (p. 284), and this shared reality between me and the participants made them trust me more. Thus, while I was an outsider to the community, I was still not completely removed from them and their experiences either.

I was also an outsider to the participants because I migrated to Canada for economic reasons, rather than as a refugee claimant, and also because my homeland is not currently occupied by a colonizer. While discussing with Nyima how immigrants also may contribute to settler-colonialism here in Canada, I responded that I was hesitant to accept citizenship in Canada, because I was unsure of how I would be furthering settler-colonialism. Yet, Nyima highlighted that our situations were completely different, stating:

But we [Tibetans] didn't have that choice. We didn't have the choice to be a settler. Hence, she rightfully pointed out that my privilege was in choosing to move away from my homeland, yet for Tibetans it was a forced expulsion from theirs. My choice to move made me a willing participant in the settler colonialism of Canada, yet Nyima explained that Tibetans did not have as much of a choice and were indirect and unwilling participants in the settler project. I also came from an upper-middle class family in India, and did not experience the economic precarity that many of the participants had experienced throughout their lives. Further, while it was my arrival in Canada which made me encounter my racialization, I was not racialized in India – on the other hand, the participants were racialized ‘others’ even in exile in South Asia, and had dealt with
outsiders for most of their lives. Given that my circumstances of migration and my background were different from theirs, it was easier to connect to the participants over our shared understandings of culture and gender, rather than our journeys as immigrants to Canada.

Responses to my Indian Identity

My identity as an Indian also moved some participants, without being prompted, to express their gratitude to the Indian government and their affection for India. For example, Lhamo, an elder, told me:

India is good, Indian government is good. India allowed us and Dalai Lama to live there. Another participant, Diki, in her 40s who had lived in India prior to coming to Canada, remarked:

Yeah I really appreciate India as a second home, definitely, because based on their agreement, government to government, even Dalai Lama he thought we would not stay long, that's why I don't have any complaint with India because they agreed to give us special status, that's why even though we don't have citizenship, we're okay.

Thus, some participants were careful not to critique India or the Indian government to me, but rather, felt compelled to praise India.

While some participants were careful not to critique India or the government, others were quite open with their frustrations with the Indian government. Nyima, for example, commented to me:

Tibetans face a lot of racism. My cousins...the majority of the Tibetans don't live in the North, the largest settlements are in South India, in Karnataka, and you could go a couple of hours outside of where we're from and people gawk at us. [...] There's a lot of racism we experience, there's a lot of xenophobia that we experience.
She went on to also vent about the legal status of Tibetans in India, which continues to be in a limbo, stating:

My cousins live in Karnataka, and I remember going and visiting them [...] and my cousin was saying yeah, nothing is ours, at any point the Indian government says I'm going to take this back, they will and they can, and then what do we do, we have nothing still. Even though we've lived there for 50 plus years. [...] There's been like a case or two now of Tibetans who have taken it to court to be able to get citizenship, but you know that system is only going to work for people who a) have capital to fund that, because you don't just fund the process, you fund all the people you have to pay, because of the bureaucracy and corruption, so the average Tibetan cannot do that, and also it's not like they would have the knowledge to go through that legal process. [...] We are still struggling in many ways in India - there are brilliant people in India that literally can't go anywhere further. There are Tibetan kids sitting with Masters' who sit in call centres because that's all they can do right now. And it's really frustrating.

Kunga also commented on the corruption in India, saying,

In India, to be honest, if you don't have money you cannot do anything. Especially if...I'm born there, but I still can't do everything [because I am not a citizen]. Then when there is a conflict between the locals and us, then they scream at us that we are here, they say all those bad things, and then they come in a group and start beating people. They do that. Then going to the embassy, going for visas, then they don't give us passports. Then they look at our yellow book and send us to a corner. Then they call the police and then they check.

My status as an Indian, therefore, elicited different responses from different participants. While some wanted to ensure that I knew how grateful they were to the Indian government and society for giving Tibetans space and recognition in exile, others were more critical of the support provided by the Indian government. Both reactions, however, were a response to my identity as an Indian, as participants wanted me to know how they felt about circumstances of Tibetans in India. Since most of my questions did not have much to do with the status of Tibetans in India, or their exile experience in India, I did not think that either viewpoint impacted the responses they gave to the questions.
Silences in Narratives

My status as an outsider and a stranger did impact the information that participants were willing to share with me. Specifically, as an outsider to the Tibetan community and the refugee claimant process in Canada, I felt that some participants were hesitant to provide full answers to some of my questions. These silences usually manifested around questions of gender and citizenship. Given that I was not an insider to the Tibetan community, participants may have been hesitant to critique the gender relations within the community, especially in the context of exile and colonization, when the stakes of nationalism are much higher. My position of power as a researcher who is presenting a slice of the Tibetan exile community and culture to the academic community may have prevented the participants from discussing problematic aspects of their community. Though I did probe the participants to give more detailed answers for such questions, I did not push them to answer if I felt they were hesitating, since I did not want to rupture the trust that I had built with them.

On questions regarding citizenship, unless the participants knew me personally, they might have hesitated to disclose if they had held any other citizenship before coming to Canada. This is because it is usually difficult to obtain citizenship in India and Nepal legally, and may also affect the participants’ claims as refugees to Canada. Thus, it was only one participant that had come to Canada via the refugee claimant path who admitted that she did hold false Nepalese papers and was able to obtain a false Nepali passport previously through that route, and she divulged this information because she knew me prior to this research project. The other participants who admitted to holding another
citizenship were three young participants who all had Nepali citizenship. Though one of these participants knew me, the other two did not. All three of them were not refugee claimants in Canada – they had come to Canada for post-secondary education, and were applying for Permanent Residency through the Express Entry system. Therefore, the precarity of the situation for refugee claimants may have prevented some participants from revealing the whole truth to me.

Recruitment

Participant Requirements

The initial requirements for this project included any Tibetan woman residing in Canada who was above the age of 18 and could speak English. As mentioned earlier, since narratives of nationalism have usually silenced women’s perspectives and participation, this project focused only on women’s narratives and experiences. There is also a lack of empirical data on Tibetan women’s participation in nation building in exile, which this project aims to fill. Thus, from a theoretical as well as empirical standpoint, this project sought to highlight exiled Tibetan women’s contribution to nation building in Canada, and hence did not include any male participants.

Recruitment Strategies

I initially started recruitment by posting on my personal social media pages\textsuperscript{14} that I was looking for participants – these posts detailed the scope of the project, the interview

\textsuperscript{14} Facebook and Twitter were the only social media platforms used.
process, and the requirements of participants. I also approached some groups on social media like Students for a Free Tibet Canada, requesting them to post information relating to my project on their social media pages. These social media strategies, however, were unsuccessful – I received no responses to my personal posts, and did not receive any replies from the groups I had approached.

The first participants in this project were found from my existing networks in Toronto. These personal contacts informed me that the Tibetan community is usually quite uncertain of outsiders asking them questions about themselves, and expressed doubts about me being able to find enough participants. When asked why Tibetans would be apprehensive to participate, they merely stated that Tibetans do not like talking about themselves. Nevertheless, I requested that they spread information about this project to other Tibetan women living in Canada in their social circles, and I received some further connections through this method. However, given the limited nature of their social connections, I began looking for other participants in the community myself. Given that I am not located in the Toronto region and lacked additional connections to the Tibetan community there, I started by visiting local restaurants in the Parkdale neighbourhood to ask business owners if they knew anyone who may be interested in participating in the project, and if they would allow me to put up recruitment posters in their restaurant information boards. The two restaurant workers I approached echoed my first participants, informing me that Tibetans would not actively seek out a researcher and respond to an advertisement that asks them to contact the researcher. One restaurant worker told me to visit the Tibetan Canadian Culture Centre, located in Etobicoke, on a Sunday, when there are many activities and visitors, and asked me to spend some time
talking to people and getting to know them before approaching them for an interview. The other restaurant worker, looking at my poster, told me directly that I would not find participants for the project.

Continuing the search for participants, I contacted other people I knew in Toronto who knew individuals in the Tibetan community. I also contacted Tibetans who were not in Toronto but were active in the Tibetan movement and knew activists based in Toronto. These contacts were sent a brief overview of the project, as well as the email invitation that had been prepared for participants, detailing the scope of the project and the interview process. This grew my contacts of Tibetans based in Toronto, and I was able to get enough participants for my project. Since I was a stranger and an outsider to the community, I was able to find participants only if another Tibetan that they knew vouched for me. While a few Tibetans, including some of the participants, were sceptical of my research interests, many also thanked me for undertaking research that would highlight the Tibetan cause in academia.

A total of 14 participants were interviewed for this project. Since the purpose of this project is not to produce a representative set of results that can be generalized to the whole population, but rather one that presents in-depth understandings of personal narratives, 14 participants were deemed sufficient to get an insight into the community. In addition, this is an exploratory study into Tibetan women in Canada, and hence this small number of participants was considered appropriate.
Research Ethics

Ethics Protocols

Research ethics were obtained from the Carleton University Ethics Board prior to data collection and conducting interviews. The ethics clearance number for this project is 109605, and clearance was received on October 16, 2018. Individuals who were willing to participate were given a consent form to sign before beginning the interview, which detailed the scope of the project, as well as indicated that participants could decline to answer any questions that they were uncomfortable with, could stop the interview at any time, and could withdraw consent after the interview.\textsuperscript{15} For interviews that were conducted over the phone, the consent form was read and explicit verbal consent was required from the participants. The elder Tibetan women that were interviewed face-to-face had limited English language knowledge, and oral consent was obtained from them after the translator had translated and read the consent form to them. In addition, consent was also taken from all participants to record the interviews, for transcription purposes only. Participants were assured that their responses would be anonymous, and that they would be assigned pseudonyms in the presentation of the data.

Limits to Ethics Protocols

My experiences with recruiting participants for this project highlighted the limits to the ethics process in place at Canadian universities. Having an ethics process is necessary and valuable, and ensures that participants have control over their narratives and

\textsuperscript{15} Participants had till January 31, 2019 to withdraw consent.
contributions by choosing what they would like to answer. Ethics protocols also ensure that explicit consent is gained from participants, participants’ details and information is kept secure, and that participants can withdraw without repercussions from a study. Though such protocols are valuable, especially when researching vulnerable groups, I found that the current process is very much rooted in an assumption that an ‘average’ research participant exists, leaving very little space to accommodate cultural differences.

The ethics board maintained that the participants should be the first ones to contact me for my project – I was told that participants who are interested in the project should email me on my official Carleton email, assuming they would respond to my advertisement posts or posters, or follow up from a contact of theirs who had my project information. Yet, as reflected above by members of the community, I would not have found participants if I had not followed up on contacts and introductions – culturally, Tibetans would not respond to a poster or a call for participants for a research project. Further, since I am the one seeking their narratives and knowledge, it should follow that I would approach participants to take part in the research project, rather than the other way around.

In addition, while the ethics process initially granted me permission to interview a participant alone, when some participants asked if they could be interviewed with another person they trusted present in the room with us, I had to apply for a change to my ethics process. Though the ethics board approved this request, there was a process I had to go through, and the ethics board failed to recognize that in some cultural settings it is more comforting and appropriate for participants to have others present with them during an
interview. This limited my flexibility during the research process and prevented me from making decisions on the spot.

This research process highlighted the limitations to the current ethics protocols in place, which fail to take cultural sensitivities into consideration. The limits to understanding different cultural settings and practices, thus, hampers the researcher from making changes to the research process on the spot and can jeopardize data collection. This would especially impact on qualitative projects like this, where it is important to build rapport and trust, and ensure that the participant feels comfortable. In addition, the failure to take cultural differences into consideration can hinder the process by which participants are recruited. The current process upholds institutions and standards that are rooted in whiteness and assumes that there is an average research participant for all research projects. However, there is no average research participant, and each project requires a different type of participant. By upholding the institutional status quo in the ethics protocol, researchers who are conducting research in different cultural settings may face additional challenges, and it may lead to a reproduction of research on similar populations, rather than expanding the scope to include those who have traditionally been left out of academic considerations.

Participants

Participant Demographics

The scope of this project was limited to Tibetan women currently residing to Canada, on any status, above the age of 18, and who could participate in an interview in English. The language requirement, however, had to later be amended, since elders in the
community were mostly fluent in Tibetan, with limited knowledge of Hindi, the other language I could have conducted the interview in. In addition, when one participant remarked that her command over English was not very strong, I offered to conduct the interview in Hindi, and she agreed. Though the project was open to Tibetan women residing in any part of Canada, it was easiest to recruit participants from Toronto. There are an estimated 8,000 Tibetans living in Canada\textsuperscript{16}, and around 6,000 of them live in Toronto. Not only do the majority of Tibetans in Canada reside in Toronto, they also have a significant presence in the neighbourhood of Parkdale, which has been dubbed ‘Little Tibet’. The strong Tibetan community presence in Toronto, thus, made it easiest to recruit participants from there. Yet, it should also be noted that recruiting from Toronto may also skew the data I have gathered – the strong community presence may contribute to a stronger nationalist presence, which in turn could impact the ways in which participants relate to Tibetan nationalism in Canada.

The ages of the participants ranged from their early 20s to their 80s\textsuperscript{17}. The participants also varied across class, with a few having an aristocratic background or connections to Tibetan aristocracy, while others were mostly working class. Two elders recalled working on road construction in India when they went into exile, and a few of the younger generation remarked that their parents or grandparents were involved in the sweater trade.\textsuperscript{18} All participants had lived in either Nepal or India (or both) prior to their

\textsuperscript{16} Estimated using language information from the 2016 census
\textsuperscript{17} It should be noted that some of the seniors were uncertain about their age, and did not know their exact date of birth.
\textsuperscript{18} Many Tibetan refugees in India are engaged in itinerant trade, selling sweaters across different places in India during the winter months (Lau, 2013).
arrival in Canada, with two having lived briefly in New York as well, and one of them having also lived in Switzerland for a year. Four respondents, including three elders and one middle-aged participant, were born in Tibet, while the rest of the participants were born in exile, with their parents or grandparents being the generation that fled Tibet. The participants also had different statuses in Canada – this ranged from having Canadian citizenship or Permanent Resident status, to being on a temporary visa (study or work) or being a refugee claimant. A diverse demography of participants was actively sought so that a variety of perspectives could be included. The table in Appendix 2 details the participant information.

Interview Process

Semi-structured interviews were conducted, and participants were asked questions regarding their identity, ties to Tibetan culture, memories and stories of Tibet, their linkages to the government in exile and the Dalai Lama, and their aspirations for Tibet’s future. A short guide of questions was prepared which ensured that I covered all the basis that I wanted to with each participant. Open-ended questions were chosen, to “explore people’s views of reality” (Reinharz, 1992, p. 18). The mode of one-on-one interviews was chosen over focus groups to eliminate the possibility of the group effect, so that participants would not feel compelled to answer in a specific way (Hesse-Biber & Piatelli, 2007). However, it should be noted that some participants preferred to conduct the interview with another trusted person with them, and those interviews were conducted in a group setting. These participants highlighted the cultural nuances that need to be considered while conducting qualitative research – the participants found it easier and
more comfortable to talk to a stranger with someone they knew present. For these interviews, no more than two participants were interviewed at a time.

Most of the interviews were conducted face-to-face. Four of the interviewees were interviewed in their home, where participants were most comfortable, and the rest were interviewed in a café or at the local library in Parkdale. Three interviews were conducted via phone or an internet call, because I had left Toronto by the time they were available for the interview, and I could not make it back to conduct the interview face-to-face. All interviews, except for four participants’, were conducted in English. The three elders that I spoke to did not speak English, and spoke only very little Hindi, so the interviews were conducted using a translator. One interview was conducted in Hindi, as the interviewee was more comfortable using this language than English.

**Politics of Translation**

The interviews that were not conducted in English and needed translation highlighted the loss of clarity and nuance when translating between languages. Parmar (2015) notes that “the problem with translation is our refusal to acknowledge that we do not all speak the same language and that in trying to translate, that is, communicate across difference, we often want to forget that we are in fact translating and that our language may not be able to represent fully what is expressed in a different language” (emphasis in original, p. 19). The answers to my questions, which were translated by a translator were always shorter, and the translator repeated a lot of the language that I had asked the question in. As Parmar (2015) finds in her research with translators who are also social activists, “the stories [the translators] tell are framed in languages that are
familiar to them and, more critically, are languages they often share with, and know will be recognized by their target audience or those who will hear and respond to the claims” (p. 14). I, thus, found that the translator was framing the responses in the language that she deemed I would find most appropriate, which was usually similar to the language in which I framed my questions.

The translator may have also found it harder to translate some of the words that are common in English to Tibetan. For example, the word ‘gender’, while used extensively in the English language, does not translate easily to many other languages, which usually conflate sex and gender. Jamyang, while talking about Tibetan language and culture, expressed the limits of Tibetan language, saying:

So even language, in the Tibetan, for Tibetan language, we don't have a lot of language around mental health, on women, on sexual health, you know a lot of those things. Thus, I understand that the translator was operating within a limited vocabulary to translate my questions appropriately to the participants, therefore potentially losing some insights. I found that in conducting the one interview in Hindi, I myself was struggling to find an appropriate Hindi word for specific English terms, and thus was not able to convey the nuance which would have been easier for me and more representative in English.

While the translator that was used was trusted by the elders, and I did not feel that there were any answers that they would not want the translator to know details about, the translator’s identity may have affected the way the participants answered the questions posed to them. Thus, it is not only the researcher’s positionality that has to be considered in these interviews, but also the positionality of the translator, and the perceptions that the
participants had of the translator. Further, I found that the translator would often add some information of her own to the answers that the participants were giving. For example, after the participants answered a question regarding the importance of community in maintaining cultural identity, the translator added:

Every Sunday, [the participants] are always there. They are making tea from 8 am in the morning till 5 pm in the evening, selling tea, trying to raise funds for the community. And not just Sundays, every occasion, every ceremony or get togethers we have, they are the ones who are always there, actively making tea, selling tea, contributing, you know. Sweating for the community.

The information added by the translator, however, was mostly her own observations about the elders, and it was usually easy to separate her opinion from the participants’ answers.

The politics of translation, therefore, must be considered while analysing the interviews that were not conducted in English, especially those interviews conducted with the aid of a translator. Using a translator hinders the nuance with which the information can be conveyed, both to the participant as well as to the researcher. In addition, the perception of the translator by the participants may also affect the responses that participants are willing to share. Finally, the translator’s own opinions and views are often added to the narratives of the participants, and it is imperative for the researcher to be able to distinguish between the participant’s answers and the translator’s observations.

Data Analysis

The interviews were transcribed using NVivo. The interview conducted in Hindi was translated into English and then transcribed. The open-ended and semi-structured nature of the interviews allowed for the use of a grounded theory perspective to analyse
the data inductively. NVivo was also used to code the data, using an emergent themes framework. Themes that emerged from the interviews included issues of gender, activism, language, religion, citizenship, authenticity, stories and memories of Tibet, and culture. Field notes were also transcribed and coded. The data from these themes were then analysed to understand if there were any patterns that emerged from the interviews, and to understand the different viewpoints that participants may have had. The major themes that emerged were all linked to nationalism, and thus explore the different facets of nationalism, and how they interact with the conditions of exile.

Knowledge Sharing – Responsibilities of a Researcher

Many participants expressed an interest in learning more about results of the project – hence, upon completion of this thesis, the findings will be shared with the participants and the larger Tibetan community. As Datta et al. (2015) found in their research on the Indigenous community of Chittagong Hills in Bangladesh, non-relational research could become oppressive to the knowledge-holders. A participant in their research stated:

There are a number of researchers who come to our community for research from various organizations (such as: government, NGOs, research organizations, and universities) promising that they would bring many positive changes for us; but once they [outside researchers] are done with their research, they never come back. Even in most cases, we do not see our research results and/or research report. We do not know what information they have taken from us and for what (p. 592).

This observation highlights the responsibilities of the researcher do not end at data collection – researcher ethics remain an important dimension even in terms of the dissemination of the knowledge generated from a project. Datta et al. (2015) claim that the researcher’s responsibilities include “situating the researcher within the participants’ community (i.e. building trustful relationships), empowering participants, recognizing
spiritual and relational knowledge, and taking a political stand for the participants’ community” (p. 581). Within this framework of researcher responsibility, it is important for me to share the knowledge that is produced through this project to the community that shared their stories with me. While I was unable to establish a relationship with the community prior to my research project, I hope that knowledge sharing after completing this project will help me build more a more substantive relationship to the Tibetan exile community, whose struggle for independence remains pending. I also hope the knowledge produced will empower the exile community in Canada. Further, as stated previously, I understand that I am not an objective researcher, and that all knowledge produced is subjective and political in nature; however, I hope that this project is able to contribute to the Tibetan nationalist project.

Participants involved with the Tibetan Women’s Association of Ontario said it would be a good opportunity to bring the results of this project to a Lhakar\(^{19}\), once the project is completed. I also intend to share the knowledge with the larger Tibetan exile community, including the community based in India. Using existing personal networks that know Tibetan community leaders in both Delhi and Dharamsala, I hope to be able to share my findings with the Tibetan community in India, to give perspective to the different experiences of exile that Tibetans in Canada have undergone.

\(^{19}\) Lhakar means ‘White Wednesday’ and is a celebration of Tibetan culture and a protest against Chinese occupation that Tibetans engage in every Wednesday of the week. Lhakar involves wearing Tibetan clothing, speaking in Tibetan, meeting as a community, participating in Tibetan circle dances, and engaging other Tibetan cultural practices. Lhakar has regained prominence after the Tibetan protests of the 2008 Beijing Olympics, and continues to be an important, non-violent avenue of political protest against Chinese occupation by exile Tibetans.
Arguments

Through an analysis of the personal narratives of Tibetan women residing in Canada, this thesis highlights how women’s perspectives reframe theories and notions of Third World nationalism. Tibetan women in exile in Canada are challenging these very concepts, based in official and academic discourses of nationalism, to forge their own understanding of Tibetan nationalism and nationalist ethos. The experience of exilehood and transit in South Asia and beyond has given Tibetan women the space to renegotiate their imaginations and participation in the Tibetan nationalist movement.

Tibetan women have challenged the conceptual categories at the very core of the nationalist project, such as authenticity, ethnicity, the nation, family, religion and citizenship, to reform and reimagine the nationalist project. Tibetan women challenge the notion of authenticity by tracing their own varying journeys, to take a broader view of an ‘authentic’ Tibetan identity – it is not premised on location or adherence to cultural markers, but is gained by ‘doing Tibetan’. Since boundaries of the nation are mediated through women’s bodies, Tibetan women challenge the notions of racial purity that are apparent in traditional forms of ethno-nationalism by reformulating the ways in which one can be and ‘do’ Tibetan. Tibetan women also contest the ways in which nationalism has materialized in exile, by reconfiguring notions of nation and family – they extend national identity to those that do not adhere to essentialist markers, and recast the family to include the larger Tibetan community. Further, they subvert academic symbolization of the Dalai Lama, and view him as another Tibetan on the journey of exile, akin to an elder in the community. They reframe the ways in which Tibetan women have been
interacted by different framings, to assert their own perceptions of their own identities. Tibetan women have also contested statist and territorialized notions of citizenship, to emphasize citizenship as a form of national membership, which oftentimes takes precedence over statist forms of citizenship.

By challenging the official and academic narratives on nationalism regarding these core conceptual categories, Tibetan women refashion nationalism as a fluid movement, which encompasses a broad mass of people, in contrast to traditional modes of nationalism that demand a certain adherence to standards of authenticity, ethnicity, culture and citizenship. Tibetan women in exile in Canada, therefore, are establishing new norms of nationalism, to include those that have been disenfranchised from the nationalist project by official and academic discourses.

Conclusion

This project was carried out using semi-structured qualitative interviews, in order to delve into each participant’s personal stories and experiences. This research method has allowed for in-depth conversations to be held with each participant, and rich data to be collected. A variety of Tibetan women from different backgrounds were purposely sought to highlight the heterogenous experiences of Tibetan women and to ensure that a variety of perspectives were included. The research design allows for a deeper understanding into how each individual participant understands and relates to Tibetan nationalism in exile in Canada. Given that the research project carried out purposeful sampling and had a relatively small sample size, the data generated may not be generalizable to the larger Tibetan population. In addition, given that I was an outsider to the community, there were
a few silences in the narratives, and some of the data gathered was not as clear and detailed as would have been preferred.
Chapter 4: Authenticity and Identity

Introduction

Nationalism, by virtue of being an imagined project, aims to create an ‘authentic’ version of a culture, to model the ideal citizen for the nation. These claims of authenticity form the official nationalist discourse. Some claim authenticity is gained by location – thus, whether one resides within or outside the homeland. Yet others claim that authenticity is gained by adhering to cultural markers, like language or religion. Hence, the more one adheres to cultural markers, the more one is deemed to be ‘authentic’. However, this authenticity is also imagined, and claims to it are constantly negotiated by different people in the nation. In the Tibetan context, the process of exile as well as the spread of the diaspora has given rise to different understandings of Tibetan-ness and has complicated the notion of authenticity. Thus, the reality of the nationalist activities is different from the official nationalist discourse.

This chapter focuses on authenticity and identity, aiming to understand where an authentic Tibetan and authentic Tibet exist, and what constitutes a Tibetan identity. This chapter is divided into three parts. The first part focuses on the notions of authenticity and aims to understand the claims to authenticity that are made based on location. The second section focuses on the markers of authenticity and challenges the conception of a homogenous and singular authentic Tibetan, detailing how Tibetan nationalism and identities are imagined by women. The last section analyses how both the concepts of authenticity and identity are gendered. The questions this chapter aims to answer are: Where is an authentic Tibet/Tibetan located? What are the markers of authenticity needed
to claim a Tibetan identity? How are these notions of authenticity and identity gendered by the nationalist project?

**An Authentic Tibetan**

The discourse around an authentic Tibetan highlight the official outlook on nationalism – there is a location or markers that one has to abide by to claim a Tibetan identity. The official discourse of nationalism aims to create hardened boundaries of identity. Yet, as the participants reflected, there is no singular understanding of where an authentic Tibetan is located or what traits are needed to be considered an authentic Tibetan. These differing views highlight that the reality of nationalism is at discord with the official narratives. Thus, ordinary Tibetans take a more nuanced understanding of Tibetan identity and challenge the hardened boundaries of the official nationalist discourse.

**Authenticating Tibet**

The physical space of Tibet is often romanticized as ‘pure’ and ‘authentic’. Many younger participants recalled hearing stories of Tibet from their parents and grandparents that would corroborate the authentic image of the Tibetan landscape. Nyima states that many of the stories shared in the Tibetan community focus on the landscape of Tibet:

> A lot of our stories are very land based – ‘oh Tibet is the most beautiful place you'll see, the most beautiful landscape. We have the clearest skies, we have the cleanest waters’. It's very poetic how we describe our land to ourselves. Most Tibetan art, culture, if you look at traditional music, even contemporary music, it's all these odes to our land. There's a great attachment to our landscape and how it sustained us.

Dechen shares the stories her grandmother told her about Tibet:
So, I only hear [stories of Tibet] from my grandma. […] She'll be like, ‘oh in Tibet the fields are so green!’ She describes Tibet like a paradise. So in her memory she's like all these like fields, horses everywhere, yaks everywhere. And then she keeps describing how like the air is so clean, and then she talks about how the water is so clean, like if you were just out anywhere you could go to any stream and drink water from there. So she talks about the nature side of it a lot. Especially now Nepal is so polluted, she always has to stay in her own room, and I think she misses those days in Tibet when she was in the open, in the fields.

For Dechen’s grandmother, the authentic Tibet is juxtaposed not only with the rest of China, but also with the exilic landscape in Nepal, which is a poor imitation of the original Tibet.

The view of a pure Tibetan landscape has been reiterated by Western and Chinese authors, who have portrayed Tibet as untouched and not modernized, juxtaposed with the stress of modern city life. As Qian and Zhu (2016) highlight, Han Chinese writers have pushed this image of Tibet in their writings, contrasting the “disruptive changes in [China Proper] with Tibet as backward but also idyllic and authentic” (p. 421). Hillman and Henfry (2006) reiterate this claim by explaining the story of Chi Li, where the “rugged Tibetan man represents the passion, purity, and free-spiritedness of nature, while [Chi Li’s] Han man represents the boredom, superficiality, and frustration of modern urban living” (p. 259). Thus, Western as well as Han academics and authors argue that the Tibetans living inside Tibet are authentic.²⁰

The Chinese claim that the authentic Tibetan resides within Tibet challenges the authenticity of the Tibetans living in exile, including the Dalai Lama, and hence is also an attack on the authority of the TGIE. The Chinese claim to be holding the authentic Tibet

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²⁰ For more information, see Bishop (1989) and Lopez (1998).
challenges the charges by Tibetans in exile that Tibetan culture is being destroyed by the
Chinese state’s occupation. Hence, the Chinese state is politically motivated to maintain
claims of bearing the authentic Tibet.

Yet the memories that are shared of the authentic, original Tibet do not reflect the
reality today. The realities of occupation and modernization have drastically changed
what Tibet looks like, as was reflected by two of the participants that had visited Tibet in
the early 2000s. Yeshe, who had visited Tibet about ten years ago, recounted her
experiences and initial impressions:

Tibet was very [nice], seeing roads very well [built], infrastructure in the major capital
city which is Lhasa. When we were outside of Lhasa, then it was not built properly. The
people living when we went to visit my mom's side's cousins, they were very poor. I saw
this little guy his skin was all cracked [...]. Yeah, it was very sad. People were all like
dirty and they weren't...it was totally opposite from people what we saw in Lhasa [...].
That was the first time for me getting exposure to what a developed country looks like or
seeing roads and what malls look like because in Nepal we didn't have that much
facilities.

Yeshe challenges idyllic constructions of Tibet – while Lhasa is another modern
city, the rest of Tibet faces debilitating poverty and is not in an ideal situation. Rinzen,
who had also visited Tibet in the mid-2000s, found her questioning her own authenticity
as a Tibetan and also the authenticity of Tibet itself:

I had no idea what to expect. My brother had been to Tibet before me, and I asked him
how it was, and he said that it was really moving for him, and he felt that this is my land,
this is where my people come from - he felt that connection to the land. But I don't
think...well I didn't. It felt foreign to me. And it was a little depressing. I'm glad I went,
but it wasn't like...I didn't know what to expect, and I realized then how removed I was
from the lives of Tibetans. It was kind of a wake-up call to me.

She finds that Tibet is foreign to her, and it does not match up to the stories that she has
heard and memories that have been shared. She also felt like a foreigner in her land,
disconnected to her kin and fellow Tibetans, thus putting into question her own authenticity, as well as the authenticity of the land.

The population transfer policies followed by the Chinese state have also made it so that many parts of Tibet are mostly populated by ethnic Han, and these parts are seen to be heavily Sinicized (Vasantkumar, 2017). Further, as Vasantkumar (2017) finds, Tibetans in Tibet also lamented the departure of Tibet – “their senses of displacement have not resulted from leaving home. Instead they stem from staying behind while home itself departed” (emphasis in original, p. 116). The passage of time and the realities of occupation have meant that the ‘authentic’ Tibet is now only in the memories of the older generation and in exile – it is merely nostalgia for a past that cannot be retrieved.

Locating Authenticity in Exile

Some claim that the authentic Tibetan, and authentic Tibet, have been preserved in exile, especially in Dharamsala, complemented by the robust Tibetan nationalism that has developed there. This is especially due to the presence of an authoritarian state in Tibet, along with censorship of information, religion and language by the Chinese state. Thus, some exiles argue that “they have taken the true Tibet with them, out of the reach of Chinese influence” (Falcone & Wangchuk, 2008, p. 179). Since markers of Tibetan culture are more difficult to preserve within Tibet, due to the crackdown by the Chinese state, it is in exile that Tibetan culture is thriving and being preserved. Falcone and Wangchuck (2008) further claim that “newcomers coming from Chinese-occupied Tibet today are taught that their version of Tibet is less authentic and less real than the
version(s) preserved by the Tibetan exile community” (p.179). As an elder, Tsewang, claimed:

The authentic Tibetans are those who escaped from Tibet, leaving everything behind, just coming with anything you could carry. Those are the real Tibetans. It is not only the ability of Tibetan culture to thrive in exile that makes it more authentic – indeed, according to Tsewang, the very exercise of exile makes an authentic Tibetan. Similar to Malkki’s (1995) findings then, for Tsewang, exile is a “moral trajectory of trials and tribulations,” which in turn is the marker of authenticity (p. 3).

**Authenticity in South Asia**

Since the further migration of Tibetans to parts of the Western world, claims have been made that authentic Tibetan-ness is preserved in exile in South Asia. The re-creation of Tibetan Buddhist temples in exile (Misra, 2003) in South Asia, and control over the education of Tibetan children, which includes essential markers of ‘authenticity’ like language and history, bolster these claims to authenticity. Further, as Vasantkumar (2017) states, the “true Tibet lies not in a territorially defined homeland, but in a body of religious and cultural practice that has travelled with the Dalai Lama […] into India” (p. 119). Hence, the proximity to the traditional Tibetan religious and political leader furthers the claim that the authentic exile experience is in the communities of South Asia. In addition, the Tibetan refugee community in India has been quite insular in their settlements (Norbu, 2003), resisting the “process of Sanskritisation that affects minority groups in India” (Anand, 2010, p. 276), as well as opting to marry Tibetans rather than Indians (Misra, 2003; Falcone & Wangchuk, 2008). Thus, a ‘pure’ Tibetan culture and racial lineage is said to be preserved in exile in South Asia.
Yet, the exile experience in South Asia is not so simple. Vasantkumar (2017) challenges this authentic notion of Tibet preserved in South Asia, stating that “many Tibetans who have passed through Dharamsala since the 1980s have found their proximity to traditional religion and culture a poor substitute for the kin, climate, and cuisine of territorial Tibet” (p. 119). Proximity to the Dalai Lama, as the embodiment of the homeland, is still limited in mediating the assimilationist effects of survival in exile. As conversations with the participants revealed, the exile experience in South Asia has not preserved a ‘pure’ Tibetan culture – indeed, it has given rise to a hybridized Tibetan identity. These hybridized identities have manifested in some of the cultural markers of the nation and have arisen due to the need to adapt to the conditions of exile.

One of the most significant areas that have been affected by exile is the change in food for the Tibetans. Kunchen describes how the diet for Tibetans in exile has changed, due to the change in available produce – while the harsher conditions in Tibet made it so that vegetation was sparse and the diet was more meat heavy, the diet in exile includes a lot more vegetables. Further, the food in exile has been influenced heavily by South Asian food:

We don't have that much Tibetan food. Like, at home we make fusion of Tibetan and Indian. But Tibetan food we have tsampa, which is made from wheat or barley. And then we have Tibetan butter tea. We don't have that much food because in Tibet it is so cold there is not much vegetation, so all we eat is meat, butter, milk. But then here [in Canada], or back in India, they make fusion food.

Nyima confirms the South Asian influence on Tibetan food and diet patterns in exile:
I was raised, and my body was created out of rice and *roti*\(^21\) and *dal*\(^22\) and *sabji*\(^23\), and the average Tibetan household, this is what we eat. [...] We don't really eat necessarily very traditional food anymore because we don't live in that kind of landscape, we don't eat the harsh foods like we used to because now we're here, but also because now for generations we've learnt how to cook South Asian food.

The clothing of Tibetan people has also changed much in exile, to suit the different climate. As Kunga states:

> The way of dressing and everything is changing, right. So it doesn't matter what clothes you wear because in Tibet we wear wool. But in Delhi to preserve your culture wearing those clothes is hard.

While woollen clothing may not be worn by many Tibetans anymore, it is not uncommon to see Tibetan women in South Asia and in Canada wearing their traditional *chupas* in cotton or silk.

Another aspect of identity that participants noted had hybridized in exile was language. This is because the community speaks more than one language and, thus, vocabulary is constantly mixed up. As Nyima says:

> My Ama [mother] speaks 4 languages, 5 if you include her broken Kannada. We hold so many different languages in our brain. I never grew up learning the name for potato in Tibetan because we always say *aloo*\(^24\). We don't really have a different word for *chappal*\(^25\) in Tibetan because no one is wearing *chappals* in a cold environment.

However, hybridized language, in this case, is also due to the limited vocabulary in the Tibetan language. Tibetan language, as Yangchen told me, had not been modernized to adapt to changing vocabulary:

\(^{21}\) Flatbread
\(^{22}\) Lentils
\(^{23}\) Vegetables
\(^{24}\) Hindi word for potato
\(^{25}\) Slipper
That's a problem with the Tibetan language itself, […] because it's such an old language and because there's so much text in the old language, they've never made an effort to [modernize language]. […] Obviously language is not something that is going to change overnight. It's [over] generations and decades that you slowly improve. Like Old English is so different from what we use today. So in the same way like Tibetan should, I feel that Tibetan should have evolved with [time].”

In exile, this has meant that Tibetans have adopted vocabulary from Hindi or other South Asian languages to fill the gaps in Tibetan. Rinzen only realized the extent to which her Tibetan is a hybridized form when she and her friends challenged themselves to speak to each other only in Tibetan:

A group of my friends, we decided that every Wednesday26 […] we would come together and speak only in Tibetan, and if we mistakenly uttered a non-Tibetan word we would throw in a quarter in a bowl in the middle of the table. So it was a fun experience - a lot of us realized that we didn't know Tibetan words for things like pyjamas - I think it comes from Hindi and it's become an English word; coffee, I don't know what the Tibetan word for coffee is; peanuts - Tibetans say badam, and badam is Hindi; kela27 - we throw in a lot of Hindi and Nepali words and we don't realize it. We say chini28, and chini is Hindi.

These hybridized forms of culture challenge the notion of authenticity and purity that can be maintained in exile, even if the community is relatively isolated. Indeed, the ‘worldliness’ of exiled Tibetans is what limits their claims to a pure identity, and the proximity to the Dalai Lama is deemed to be “insufficient compensation” for the reality of exilehood in South Asia (Vasantkumar, 2017, p. 118).

26 Coinciding with Lhakar
27 Banana
28 Sugar
Authenticity in Canada

The experience of exile is not the same for all Tibetans, and this heterogenous experience has been complicated by the further migration of Tibetans to Europe and North America. The different trajectories taken by Tibetan exiles has meant that the authenticity of ‘Tibetan-ness’ has been challenged by exiles in different parts of the world. A Tibetan exile living in the US “argued that since Tibetans in Tibet have been Sinicized and Tibetans in India have been Indianized, the only authentic Tibetan culture left would be that carried by exiles to America (Falcone & Wangchuk, 2008, p. 182).

Yet, one cannot ignore the assimilationist forces at work in Europe and North American countries. Though it may be argued that the different approaches to handling multiculturalism – with the US adopting a more assimilationist strategy than Canada’s ‘mosaic’ model – may allow Canada to house the most ‘authentic’ Tibetans, conversations with the participants revealed that many respondents, both older and younger, found the Canadian context more assimilationist than South Asia. Dolma, an elder, said that going to school in Canada, as opposed to Tibetan school in South Asia, made it harder for her grandchildren to learn Tibetan:

My grandchildren are born here - since they are going to school here, born and raised here, they don't speak much Tibetan but they are trying.

She and Lhamo also found that because of the limited means to discipline children in Canada, it is more difficult for them to instil Tibetan culture and values in their children and grandchildren here:

Dolma: It is harder in Canada than in Nepal [to maintain Tibetan culture], because in Canada you cannot do capital punishment, back home you can spank them and discipline them.
Lhamo: It's very hard to discipline here in Canada. Children are more powerful than teachers, so leave us. It is much easier in India to discipline and teach them to maintain Tibetan identity.

Further, Dolma notes that there are more options available for those wanting to learn Tibetan language in South Asia than in Canada:

When we were living in Nepal, my daughter would go to school in the daytime, but when she returns in the evening, we would make sure she got Tibetan tuition, we taught everything at home. But here it is much harder.

This point was reiterated by Dechen, who said that she would like to learn Tibetan if she went back to Nepal for an extended period of time:

Dechen: I'm not doing anything actively [to learn Tibetan], but if I am going to be in Nepal for a long period of time, I'm going to go back, then I'm going to go to classes.

Tariqa: Because that's more available there?

Dechen: Yeah, more access. Plus, I could just have a teacher come to my house and teach me. But here it's kind of pricey to do that. And also all the classes here are for little kids. There's no adult Tibetan class here. You know, so I'm not going to go sit in a classroom with little bacchas. I feel awkward, right?

The lack of access to private lessons, or even adult classes, has prevented Dechen from enrolling in Tibetan language classes in Toronto. She finds there is more access to learning Tibetan in South Asia than in Canada. Nyima, who did grow up in Canada herself, highlights how the assimilationist forces of adapting to a new context made her lose her Tibetan language:

“When I came [to Canada], and we were living in the middle of nowhere, and there were no Tibetans […]. So there was nobody really to speak with, and then we had an extremely intense situation where we had to assimilate quite rapidly in a very white space. So […] I lost my Hindi, I lost my Nepali, and the worst was losing my Tibetan, and it was mostly that I wasn't speaking, I wasn't practicing enough, and I wasn't speaking to my parents a lot because they weren't home a lot. […]. And then my parents also got into the practice of speaking to us in English sometimes, and then it just kind of

29 Children
became a thing where we were speaking Tiblish, you know. […] my language suffered greatly because of my migration here.”

The inability to speak Tibetan outside of the household, especially if the larger community is not Tibetan, has put much stress on maintaining a distinct culture and language on the Tibetan population in Canada. In contrast, the insular nature of the Tibetan communities in South Asia has meant that they have been able to preserve their unique identity there. Thus, assimilationist forces are often stronger in Canada than in South Asia.

As Vasantkumar (2017) notes, Dharamsala Tibetans are considered to be “worldly cosmopolitans” (p. 118), echoing the claims put forward by Malkki (1992), who posited that the town refugees were considered impure and inauthentic due to their cosmopolitan worldliness, owing to their mingling with the larger community in the town. A similar view was reiterated by Yeshe, who found that culture is harder to maintain in Canada, due to the many more obligations that individuals have:

Here [in Canada] we have a lot more distractions, a lot more things that we can do, a lot more facilities or experiences or things that we can involve ourselves in, so that makes it difficult for everyone to observe or do certain things, right. Having social gatherings and social media, social lives, I think that makes it difficult and just distracting.

The ability to engage with the larger community and the larger world has ‘distracted’ Tibetans from their authentic selves, according to Yeshe, and has taken away their ability to engage in more Tibetan activities. Thus, the cosmopolitan worldliness of the Canadian lifestyle is also to blame for the loss of Tibetan culture in this context.

Some respondents, however, believed that the awareness of the distance from the larger Tibetan exile community, and Tibet itself, made Tibetans in Canada more aware of their loss of culture, and prompted them to take their identity more seriously than others.
As Nyima sees it, some of the Tibetans who have grown up in South Asia, in the Tibetan schooling system, tend to take their identity and culture lightly:

“[My friends] didn't have to struggle the way I had to, living here and constructing my own identity and trying to preserve my own language, because that's something they took for granted. A lot of Tibetans who've gone through Tibetan schooling systems who are not actually that great at Tibetan, and it's because they took for granted that language.”

Given the struggle of trying to construct an identity in a vastly different context, Nyima believes that she has taken more efforts to learn and preserve Tibetan culture, as opposed to somebody brought up in South Asia, for whom Tibetan culture was ‘normal’.

Yangchen and Dechen find that being so far removed from a larger Tibetan community has ensured that Tibetans here, especially as parents, make more of an effort to instil Tibetan culture in their children. Dechen finds that while the focus is usually on language, Tibetan children here have the opportunity to engage in Tibetan dance and music classes as well:

Dechen: It's not even the language part - the kids here they go to dancing, singing. At least when they go to a Tibetan event, they know how to do the Tibetan movements, like the dance.

Tariqa: Is that more developed here than in Nepal or India? When you grew up did you have the option of doing Tibetan dance and singing?

Dechen: No. Unless your parents really wanted to send you to a specific school, but over here the community tries even harder to actually keep the culture alive. But in Nepal you could have, there were options, but it wasn't important. Like it wasn't something that my parents even thought of.

Thus, Dechen’s parents took the larger cultural context of proximity to the Tibetan community for granted and did not take as many steps to instil Tibetan culture in her.

Yangchen echoes the sentiment that parents here make more of an effort to maintain different aspects of Tibetan culture:
Tariqa: Do you think there's more opportunity for [engaging in Tibetan dance and music classes] here in Canada than in Nepal/India?

Yangchen: Yes. But I also feel it's because the parents make those opportunities for the kids, because […] Canada to Tibet is such a far distance as compared to Nepal and Tibet or Dharamsala and Tibet. […] I feel like people who grew up here with those parents who realized that they're being, the kids are being removed from our culture and stuff like that, they make crazy amount of effort and then the kid becomes super good at Tibetan, super good at dancing and stuff.

The distance from the original homeland, as well as the temporary homeland established in South Asia, means that individuals and the community in Canada are more committed to preserving Tibetan culture.

*Locating Authenticity Inside Tibet*

Participants also recognized that the experience of exile does not make one more ‘authentic’ than others. This is in contradiction to Malkki’s (1992) findings through her research that “the real return can come only at the culmination of the trials and tribulations in exile,” (p. 36). It is not only the experiences of exile that shape an ‘authentic’ Tibetan – the experiences of living under Chinese occupation provides a different set of trials and tribulations, which also culminate in authenticity. While homeland can still be a “moral destination” (Malkki, 1992, p.36), this morality is not only derived from exile – it can be attained by remaining inside Tibet as well, under colonial rule and Chinese repression.

Malkki (1992) asserts that the “widely held common-sense assumptions linking people to place, nation to territory, are not simply territorializing, but deeply metaphysical” (p. 27). Hence, she claims that being rooted, being indigenous is deemed as being authentic, and is often heroized. A few of the participants interviewed reiterated
this view, especially those that were born in exile. As Rinzen stated, she felt she had less of a claim over Tibet than those that were still inside Tibet:

Rinzen: I've never lived there, and I haven't lived under a colonizer [...] I just don't have as much of a claim on what should be done in terms of Tibet's political future and I don't know, whatever other decisions affect people that live there, that have been living there.

Jamyang also feels that the decision on the future of Tibet should be with those that are still inside Tibet, and not with those that are in exile:

Of course we want independence, but I also personally believe in self-determination. If there's Tibetans inside of Tibet that say no, we're okay with autonomy, I'll be like ‘okay what can I do now to help’.

Given that they have not had to suffer through the repression imposed by the Chinese state, Jamyang and Rinzen feel that they do not have the authority to make decisions regarding the future of Tibet – that authority and right belongs to those that have continued to live in Tibet, regardless of the conditions.

The authenticity of Tibetans inside Tibet does not come about from mere rootedness, however – it is also their resistance to Chinese occupation that makes them authentic. Misra questions the authenticity of Tibetans inside Tibet, and claims that “those Tibetans who have successfully made their exit appear to have made the ultimate sacrifice. Indeed, there exists very little admiration among the diasporic community for those who decide to stay, fight and die inglorious deaths” (p. 204). Yet, this view takes a narrow account of the activism happening within Tibet which challenges Chinese occupation. Indeed, this activism was recognized by some of the participants, who valued the authentic and heroic acts by the Tibetans inside of Tibet. As Rinzen recounted:

Tibetans inside Tibet have these amazing ways to resist and creative ways of showing their devotion to Tibet, to the Dalai Lama, to their communities, to their language.
Jamyang also values the acts of resistance of the Tibetans inside of Tibet, claiming that Tibetans in exile cannot give up on the fight against Chinese occupation if the resistance movement is alive inside of Tibet:

I don't think we have the right to lose hope [for the future of Tibet]. Especially if Tibetans inside of Tibet still have hope. […] I'm very vocal about that when I meet people who are […] really pessimistic and they don't believe that Tibet's [going to be free]. I'm like “who are you, who are you to even say something like that?” What does that say about Tibetans inside of Tibet that haven't lost hope?

As indicated by Rinzen and Jamyang, the active ways in which Tibetans inside Tibet are continuing the struggle against Chinese occupation is what makes them authentic, not merely their rootedness in the homeland.

**Challenging Authenticity – Being Tibetan**

Yet there is no authentic Tibetan, as ‘Tibetan-ness’ is an artefact that has been created by the forces of the nationalist movement. Thus, an ‘authentic’ Tibet or Tibetan is purely imagined by the nationalist project. It is not only the Tibetan nationalist project that imagines the authentic Tibet – the Chinese nationalist project has its own imaginations and understandings of an authentic Tibetan and the authentic Tibet. This does not imply that Tibetans are unaware that authenticity is ‘imagined’ – indeed, they constantly question and negotiate new meanings of what it means to be a Tibetan. These negotiations become more salient in the context of Canada, which is far from both the homeland as well as the exile government.

The complicated notions of authenticity were reiterated by the participants, especially the younger generation, who questioned the tangibility of the markers of authenticity and demanded an expansion of Tibetan-ness to go beyond cultural markers
like language or religion. Tibetan-ness is not always tangible, cannot be measured solely by ascriptive factors, and is not achieved only through the experience of exile. While they did not deny the importance of these markers for Tibetan culture, they did disassociate culture from identity, and stated that these markers are not necessary to claim Tibetan identity itself. Participants are aware of the multiplicity of Tibetan-ness and challenge the notions of authenticity imposed on them.

A nuanced understanding of ‘authenticity’ does not imply that Tibetan identity can be claimed by anyone – nationalism sets up boundaries of belonging and creates an ‘us’ versus ‘them’ narrative, and not all are able to permeate these barriers. But who can claim Tibetan identity? What are the boundaries created by the Tibetan nationalist movement, and who is included as a Tibetan? Nationalism creates an ‘imagined community’ and sets the boundaries of belonging, “of a delineated collectivity, that includes some people […] and excludes others, involves an act of active and situated imagination” (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p. 204). Yet, Yuval-Davis (2006) clarifies that “belonging is always a dynamic process, not a reified fixity” (p. 199). As the participants recognized, there is no universal understanding of a Tibetan identity, and a multiplicity of components must be considered while claiming such a Tibetan identity.

Language and Authenticity

Regarding language, the older generation, as well as younger respondents who were educated in Tibetan schools, tended to be more critical of those that did not know Tibetan language and challenged their claim to a Tibetan identity. Dolma, an elder, is blunt in her understanding of the connection between language and identity:
Language is the most important thing. If you don't know the language, even if you say you're Tibetan, there's not much value in it.

Tsewang, another elder, also relates Tibetan language to identity, and feels the pressures of assimilating in exile are threatening the Tibetan identity:

Yes, I feel that we are losing Tibetan identity here. I feel very sad when older people who meet speak in English, because they know Tibetan and they don't have to speak in another language. It doesn't cost them any money to speak Tibetan, but some people do that, and I feel sad.

Lhamo, the third elder, also reiterates this view:

The language is one of the many identifications of your identity as Tibetan. If you're from India, you speak Hindi. If you identify yourself as Tibetan, you need to know the language.

For this generation, language and identity are inextricably tied together, and to claim a Tibetan identity, one has to know Tibetan language.

The younger generation, especially those that were not educated in Tibetan schools, understood the importance of language for a people and nation, especially in the context of language repression by Chinese inside of Tibet; yet, they asked for a nuanced understanding of why a Tibetan may not know Tibetan language, thus challenging the notion that Tibetan-ness hinged on language skills. Jetsun and Karma, who went to boarding school in India, lost their Tibetan language skills because of their school:

Tariqa: You didn't learn Tibetan when you were growing up?
Karma: No, we did, but when we went to [boarding school], they told us that we were not allowed to speak in Tibetan.
Jetsun: Only English.
Karma: So, I think because of that we started forgetting.

Rinzen had a similar experience to Jetsun and Karma:
I was sent away to boarding school when I was in first grade, and even though my boarding school had a number of Tibetan students, we were discouraged from speaking in Tibetan, and school was very much the focus of our existence, and we didn't really talk or we weren't really reflexive, you know, about our own identity and things like that.

Jamyang gives the example of some of her Tibetan friends who grew up in Canada, and the assimilationist forces of living in this state made it difficult for them to retain their language skills:

I have really close friends, their parents were some of the first Tibetans to come to Canada in the 1970s, so they were, they grew up in Belleville, Ontario […]. And they didn't grow up speaking Tibetan. In their household maybe their parents would speak it, but most of their time was spent in school and in other places, so they can't speak Tibetan right now. They can understand it a little bit, but because of this, there are Tibetans out there, and then again it is hard to blame them, because they are also trying to hold onto something, Tibetan identity, which is one of the only things we have as a refugee, stateless community, they are now starting to do something that we call language policing. ‘You're not Tibetan [because] you're not speaking Tibetan. You're not pure Tibetan, you're not speaking pure Tibetan’.

Jamyang understands the perspectives of both sides of the argument, but also highlights the negative consequences of ‘language policing’ on a community that is already insecure in its identity.

A few of the participants felt that the ability to speak Tibetan was not related to one’s identity as a Tibetan. Rinzen states that it is erroneous to conflate language to a marker of identity:

I think it's wrong to see language as a marker of identity. I think language itself is incredibly important for any people, especially when your language, culture and whole identity is under attack […]. At the same time, I don't think that you can say someone is not Tibetan because they don't speak Tibetan.

A similar view is reiterated by Dechen, for whom language is only important for communication, but not for her identity:
Dechen: Language is important when I'm with like the older community. When I'm with my own age group people for me it's not super important because I can just communicate in English and I feel fine about it.

Tariqa: But beyond communication, for your identity is language important? Like not just for your identity but Tibetan-ness?

Dechen: No.

While Dechen would like to learn Tibetan soon, she does not believe that her inability to speak in Tibetan takes away from her identity as a Tibetan. Some participants understood language as being only a part of what constituted one’s identity. It was not the only thing that defined one’s Tibetan identity, but it was also not completely disassociated from Tibetan identity as well. Jamyang states:

I think language is a part of Tibetan identity but if you don't speak Tibetan, I don't think that means you are no longer a Tibetan. I think there's a lot more that makes up one's identity.

A similar view is reiterated by Diki, who associates Tibetan identity with a feeling inside oneself:

On top of language, inside, you know, Tibetan-ness […]. Some people maybe they are brought up here and they do not know the language but if their heart is Tibetan, and they have that Tibetan-ness in them, definitely that also… and force them to learn the language later.

For Diki, what is more important than language is having that Tibetan-ness inside you, yet that feeling must also be complemented by Tibetan language skills. Thus, Tibetan language is only one aspect of Tibetan identity – the younger generation complicates the notion of Tibetan identity, taking a nuanced understanding for the reasons of not knowing Tibetan language.
Some scholars have argued that the rise of Tibetan Buddhism around the world, especially in the West, allows those that have converted to Tibetan Buddhism to further complicate the Tibetan nationalist movement. As Misra (2003) claims, citing Bauman (1997), cultural theorists “rightly enquire whether these non-ethnic Tibetan converts can be put in the larger category of Tibetan diaspora” (p. 193). Claiming that converts to Tibetan Buddhism can claim an identity as the Tibetan diaspora minimizes Tibetan identity to a singular facet and equates Tibetan-ness to religion. Such a claim also denies the history (and present continuance) of the struggle that is the Tibetan nationalist movement, a struggle which binds together Tibetans around the world.

Asserting a Buddhist identity was not essential to be a Tibetan for most participants – indeed, most of them recognized the existence or a substantial Tibetan Muslim population, and Tibetan converts to Christianity. Though all the participants interviewed identified as Buddhist, many clarified that a Tibetan identity is not linked to religion. Nyima found that that Tibetan Muslims do not get talked of enough, and their existence is often erased in most discourses around Tibet. As she further states, there is an assumption both inside and outside the community that being Tibetan means being Buddhist:

Sometimes they say it together which is really funny - Tibetan Buddhism is not a national identity, it's a national and a religious identity.

Yangchen also reiterates that her Buddhist identity is separate from her Tibetan identity:

Tariqa: Does religion matter [for being Tibetan]?
Yangchen: No.
Tariqa: Is [religion] important to your identity?
Yangchen: Somewhat...yes.

Tariqa: Is it important to your Tibetan identity or your identity as Yangchen?

Yangchen: My identity as me. Not so much as my identity as a Tibetan.

For Yangchen, religion is part of her personal identity, and not her identity as a member of the Tibetan nation. Diki highlights that different religions make up the Tibetan community:

That's a thing there are lots of Tibetans who are not Buddhist. Christian Tibetans are there, Muslim Tibetans are there. You know that in Kashmir, Jammu Kashmir side there's lots of [Muslim Tibetans]. [...] But for me doesn't matter, the religion itself, [it’s] the person who has the Tibetan-ness within.

Dechen states that while growing up, she assumed that being Tibetan and being Buddhist were synonymous. Yet, she later discovered that the Tibetan community is not as homogenous as it has been depicted:

Growing up I was like yeah they're the same. Like Buddhist, Tibetan are same. But now I'm more, it's not the same thing. Tibetan religion and being a Tibetan, I mean a lot of our culture is basically religion, it like revolves around that, but for me I wouldn't say that because someone is not a Buddhist but is Tibetan they are not a Tibetan. [...] But I can see why so many Tibetans, who don't follow Tibetan Buddhism, are excluded from being Tibetan. [...] There's actually a really big Tibetan Muslim population. My neighbours, when I was growing up, they were Tibetan Muslims. [...] I wouldn't say that they aren't [Tibetan]”

Kunchen also brings up the Tibetan Muslim community, claiming that though their religion is different, they still revere the Dalai Lama, highlighting the unique position of the Dalai Lama as the religious leader for Tibetan Buddhists, but also the political leader of all Tibetans:

But there are Tibetan Muslims. Yeah in Ladakh - I think they're mostly Tibetan Muslims. But they respect...they look up to the Dalai Lama [almost] more than we do. Very, very respectful. I've seen like videos, because Dalai Lama he visits the Tibetan Muslim community, and the way they, like, look up to him.
The multiplicity of religions held by Tibetans highlights that the Tibetan identity is not a homogenous one. These perspectives from the participants illustrate that the Tibetan identity is not linked only to a religious identity, and a Buddhist identity cannot be conflated to claiming a Tibetan identity.

‘Tibetan’ as an Ethnic Identity

Most of the participants that were interviewed stated that they viewed being Tibetan as an ethnic identity. Even if someone was themselves not born in Tibet, if they had parents or grandparents that were born in Tibet, the participants considered them Tibetan. Elders Dolma and Lhamo, for example, said:

Dolma: The birth, being born as a Tibetan, that's the Tibetan identity.

Lhamo: The connection that identifying yourself to the birthplace, Tibet, is what is important to connect oneself as Tibetan.

Tariqa: The person has to be born in Tibet?

Dolma: Even though you are born outside Tibet, if your parents were born in Tibet or grandparents were born in Tibet, they will identify them as Tibetans.

Similarly, Yangchen also said:

Ethnically. Like if they're born into it. Yeah, I would say if you're born into being Tibetan. Doesn't matter if your own family, like your grandad is Tibetan, I would still count them as Tibetan.

Yeshe also states that having Tibetan ethnic lineage is what is needed to claim Tibetan identity:

I guess someone having one of their parents being Tibetan, of Tibetan lineage, I think that's when you can call yourself that, even though you haven't personally visited Tibet, but you know that you have the Tibetan blood in you, I think that's when you can call yourself Tibetan.

Kunchen reiterates:
Someone who is born to a Tibetan family - not necessarily both parents have to be Tibetan.

Kunchen and Yeshe bring up the issues of ‘racial purity’, an issue that has been discussed extensively in the larger Tibetan community, especially in exile. Rinzen states that such concepts are not conducive to building a Tibetan identity and community, and that such views only serve to limit how Tibetan-ness and claiming a Tibetan identity are viewed:

Who is a Tibetan - I think if you can trace your lineage back to Tibet that makes you a Tibetan. Whether it's part or full...even if one of your parents is Tibetan and you want to identify as Tibetan, that's fine, you don't have to say I'm half Tibetan, right.

This is further reiterated by Jamyang:

I definitely don't think being Tibetan is only about your blood content, right, how "pure" you are, or how fluently you speak Tibetan. I think being Tibetan means that you have some Tibetan blood in you, your ancestors were Tibetan and you identify as a Tibetan person.

As Jamyang notes, claiming a Tibetan identity is not limited to Tibetan lineage. It is also a matter of considering yourself to be Tibetan. Dechen further explains:

Yeah, your lineage. Yeah, I would say so. But then that also is like hard because there's a lot of people in Nepal who can trace their lineage like hundreds of generations back to Nepal, like Sherpas, who are Tibetan by lineage, but now they don't consider themselves Tibetan. But yeah like I would say that if I can trace my family background to Tibet, then I would say I'm Tibetan.

Thus, Dechen highlights that self-identification is an important part of asserting a Tibetan identity. However, it should be noted that this self-identification works in tandem with having an ethnic Tibetan background. As Rinzen clarifies:

There are people who have no connection to Tibet, and then they take on Tibetan names and they identify as Tibetan - and I'm like, that's not how it works. Just because you feel Tibetan doesn't mean you can identify as Tibetan. But there are people who do that.
There are two parts, then, to claiming a Tibetan identity – an ethnic component and self-identification are both necessary. Hence, both external as well as internal validation are an integral part of Tibetan identity.

‘Doing Tibetan’ – Tibetan as an Active Identity

Being Tibetan, however, is not a passive identity – it involves being an activist and being involved in the struggle against Chinese occupation. As Fortman and Giles (2006) argue, mere self-identification is not the way to assert identity – one has to also embrace its culture. In the context of Tibetan identity, then, this involves ‘doing Tibetan’.

While attempting to find participants for this research, I was often told by few participants that they were not “very Tibetan,” and some redirected me to other women who they deemed were more “Tibetan”. When I asked what they meant by being ‘very Tibetan,’ they stated that they were not very actively involved in the political struggle, and hence did not feel that they were living up to their Tibetan identity. Thus, this facet of activism becomes a major part of Tibetan-ness and claiming Tibetan identity.
Many Tibetans hold the view that being born a Tibetan implies that one is born a political activist. Indeed, this was the slogan on a poster that I saw at a Tibetan independence rally on March 1st, 2019 in Ottawa:

This view is echoed by Nyima, who believes that being born as a Tibetan is in itself a political position:

I mean right now, unfortunately, to be Tibetan is to be political. And it's not because of our choosing but because of our existence. [...] To identify as a Tibetan is to identify a political existence. And I don't...think I've met a Tibetan who isn't politicized in some way or had to experience something because of who we are. We are political, yeah. To be Tibetan is to be political.

Jamyang furthers this thought, and posits that the political aspect of being a Tibetan comes from being born in exile, and being born with a loss of identity:

We have this saying, we say if you're born after 1959 you're born an activist. But I think we can also say if you're born after 1959 you'll be born with an identity crisis. [...] That identity hasn't been taken away from you. It hasn't been challenged, it hasn't been
stripped away from you. So I think that's definitely something that I would say, you said what indicates, right, what makes a Tibetan.

Thus, one’s mere existence as a Tibetan means that one is a political being.

Diki is the only participant who disassociates Tibetan-ness from an ethnic identity – yet, she does assert that being Tibetan is an active identity:

There are lots of mix race right like nowadays. But yeah, there's Lhadon Tethong right [...]? She's [an] activist, half-Canadian, half-white and half-Tibetan. But she doesn't speak Tibetan before, but her heart is there for the Tibetan nation, you know, cause she is fighting for. Tibetan-ness is that in her. That's why it doesn't matter whether you're mixed or a pure Tibetan. [...] Richard Gere, right, he's not Tibetan in blood, but his heart is. So the way he does his work, all that is Tibetan. Yeah that's what, it defines in that way, right. Even there are nowadays lots of Indians who fight for the Tibetan rights. So Tibetan-ness is within them, that makes the difference, right. Otherwise even pure Tibetans whose parents and all the you know they don't do anything for the Tibetan cause and they don't care, they are not proud of what they are, then it's just a mere name.

An elder, Tsewang, reiterates that self-identifying as Tibetan and having Tibetan lineage is not enough to claim Tibetan identity – giving up on the struggle against Chinese occupation is grounds for losing your Tibetan identity:

There are a lot of people in Nepal who wear similar dress like us, but they are not Tibetan. So, identifying just with clothing does not mean you are Tibetan because some of these people have land, property, family, citizenship in Nepal. They wear same clothes as us, but they are not Tibetan.

For Tsewang, owning land and having Nepali citizenship is a sign of giving in to the comforts of life, and giving up on the struggle that constitutes Tibetan-ness. Reiterating Diki’s perspective, to be Tibetan is not an outward act – one has to actively participate in the independence struggle to be considered Tibetan. The epitome of ‘doing Tibetan’ is the Dalai Lama himself – as Nyima notes:

[The Dalai Lama is] like just [a] never-ending workaholic for our people, and I really think we should all aspire to be just like him, just continuously be working for our people and the future of our people. It feels unfair to burden him to do most of the legwork.
His political and diplomatic work which helped secure exilehood and community space in India, and then in the West, is the biggest contribution to the Tibetan struggle. Without the space to exist in exile, none of the nationalist activities would have developed. As Nyima states, he is someone that all Tibetans should aspire to emulate – he epitomizes the way to be Tibetan, and the way of ‘doing Tibetan’.

To be Tibetan and to be an activist, however, is not limited to active participation in political rallies or formal political activities. It could include participating in the larger Tibetan community, and volunteering, like the elders do, as the translator tells me:

Every Sunday, they are always there. They are making tea from 8am in the morning till 5pm in the evening, selling tea, trying to raise funds for the community. […] Sweating for the community.

It could also be as simple as maintaining Tibetan culture within the home, which, in the conditions of unfreedom that have been imposed by the Chinese state inside Tibet, is in itself a political act. As Yeshe explains:

I think the most influence is the parents, if they never taught their children that they're Tibetan and this is how Tibetans does things, our traditional lives, this is what Tibetans observe New Year, if this is not taught then I guess you don't really call yourself Tibetan if you don't observe these things, if you don't do these things.

Knowledge of the Tibetan way of life, or Tibetan history and culture, is an active assertion of Tibetan identity as well. Jamyang further states that actively engaging with your Tibetan identity, and attempting to understand that identity, is also a way to be a Tibetan:

I think being Tibetan means that […] you're actively finding ways to understand your identity as Tibetan I think that automatically makes you a Tibetan.

Thus, there is an active element involved in claiming Tibetan identity. It is, indeed, the continuing struggle against Chinese colonialism that ties Tibetans together.
Doing Tibetan – In Exile and Inside Tibet

This assertion of an active identity is not only a part of the identity of Tibetans in exile – indeed, it is also what makes Tibetans inside of Tibet ‘authentic’. Revisiting what participants Jamyang and Rinzen explained to me, it is the active resistance against the Chinese occupation that makes Tibetans inside of Tibet brave and authentic. It is not merely the fact that they live in the homeland that makes Tibetans inside of Tibet authentic – it is also their activism and resistance to the Chinese state that bolsters their claims to authenticity. Indeed, beyond a mere ethnic identity, it is this struggle and activism that binds Tibetans around the world, both in exile and inside Tibet, to the nation. While Malkki (1992) asserts that the moral trajectory gained through exile is due to the trials and tribulations that are experienced in exile, in the case of the Tibetans, trials and tribulations are experienced within Tibet as well. It is this shared experience of struggle – whether of living in exile or of living under occupation – that makes Tibetan identity. Unlike other groups which may rely on some racial and ethnic connection to the nation in order to claim membership, for the Tibetan nation, ethnic identification is not enough – Tibetan-ness, constituted by struggle and activism, is needed to become Tibetan.

Doing Tibetan – Class and Aristocracy

Of the participants interviewed for this study, four of them recognized themselves as not being ‘very Tibetan’ – Dechen, Yangchen, Jetsun and Karma. These four participants are from upper-middle class families, have all held (or currently hold) citizenship in another country, and have ties to the Tibetan aristocracy. They found
themselves distanced from the Tibetan community in Toronto and did not make much of an effort to participate and integrate into the larger Tibetan community. While still recognizing themselves as Tibetan, they asserted less of a political identity for themselves, and hence concluded that they were not ‘very Tibetan’.

The class and aristocratic influences on ‘doing Tibetan’ and activism in the community highlight that there is a higher threshold of doing (and proving) Tibetan-ness for those who are of a lower class and belong to a lay family, than those with higher connections. Links to aristocracy and access to upper class privileges meant that their links and commitment to Tibet were already established\(^\text{30}\) - their families would have enough connections should they ever need to prove their Tibetan-ness. Thus, class and aristocracy are factors that impact on the understanding of an active Tibetan identity, with those with higher connections not needing to do as much to assert a Tibetan identity.

‘Tibetan’ as a Dynamic Identity

Tibetan-ness and a Tibetan identity are not static entities – they are dynamic, and they change not only through time and geography, but also between individuals. Every Tibetan identity is unique, especially for those in exile, as it tells a story of a journey. As Nyima states:

Tibetan-ness also changes and shifts - to be now Tibetan is to be multilingual, is now to be South Asian, is now to be a trans person - we're all these things because of what we're becoming in exilehood or transforming ourselves into in exilehood.

\(^{30}\)There is a predominance of individuals with links to aristocracy in the TGIE. Links to aristocracy also implies links to higher monks in the Tibetan Buddhism system.
Thus, exile has forced the community to adapt to new surroundings, but it has also given them the opportunity to explore the different facets of being Tibetan. As she goes on to further claim:

[Being Tibetan is] also to be so many other things. It's to be hilarious, it's to be very good singers and dancers, it's to be profusely in love with our land, it's to be really resilient, to be very caring, to be very communal, to be very spiritual. There's so many facets to being Tibetan [...] I think we sit too much in trauma because we're often being retraumatized, but we don't look at the ways in which we are amazing. [...] When I think of the Tibetan community, when I think of my identity and what I like about it, my community, I think of amazing storytellers, of an oral tradition, I think of jokesters, I think of dancing and singing, I think of an abundance of food, I think of intense hospitality, to a fault, and yeah. I think of us thriving, because we've chosen to be resilient.

Tsewang, an elder, claims that being Tibetan is a virtuous identity:

Being Tibetan means being truthful to yourself and not lying, not stealing, and doing everything that His Holiness the Dalai Lama always advises us to do, to be compassionate and kind. [...] Benefitting others is what Tibetan-ness means.

The multiplicity of views on what it means to be a Tibetan highlight the multiple ways in which a Tibetan can exist. This multiplicity of views challenges the official narratives of nationalism that are promoted, both by academics as well as the Tibetan elite and TGIE. Being Tibetan, ultimately, is about being human. Reducing the Tibetan identity to merely one that is bound to a religious identity, as Misra and Bauman attempt to, takes a narrow, static, and essentialized understanding of Tibetan-ness, and denies Tibetans from the different ways to exist. Challenges to these narratives highlight a grassroots level and bottom-up form of nationalism that exists parallel to official discourses.

**Gender, Tibetan-ness, Authenticity**

Nationalism is also a gendered project, and identity and authenticity are both affected by one’s gender identity. The scope of the nationalist project is different for men and women, and as Anthias and Yuval-Davis (1989) recognize, women are “a special
focus of state concerns as a social category with a specific role” (p. 6). Women are not only the biological reproducers of the nation, they are also the reproducers of the boundaries of the ethnic and national group, and ideological reproducers and transmitters of culture (Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1989).

*Women as Biological Reproducers and Reproducers of Boundaries of Nation*

Women are considered the biological reproducers of the nation – without reproduction, the nation would cease to exist. For the Tibetan community, the fear of ceasing to exist is a real fear, due to their small population and the policies of the Chinese state inside of Tibet. As Nyima tells me:

There were sterilization projects that had been happening in Tibet, people are self-immolating, mortality rates are pretty bad, just all these things are happening. […] There's not very many of us in the world. If China actually wanted to literally just kill us all, they could. There's only a handful of a million of us. So, the fact that we survived is intense.

The political situation inside of Tibet has thus given rise to fears around not existing as a people. In addition, the stress of living in exile has meant that women have had to not only reproduce the nation, but also ensure that it survives the process of exile. For Nyima, it is the Tibetan women that are to be credited with the survival of Tibetans in exile:

I believe that every single person, but especially women, have been a part of the survival of our community.

Women’s contributions have thus been integral to the survival of the Tibetan nation in exile – from biological, social and psychological standpoints.

Women are not only the biological reproducers of the nation – they also reproduce and mark the boundaries of the ethnic nation. As Anthias and Yuval-Davis (1989) note, it is upon the women to ensure the ‘purity’ of the nation. The fixation with racial purity is
only exacerbated for the Tibetan community due to their small population and the political situation inside of Tibet. Nyima notes that the fears around maintaining a racially pure Tibetan identity is rooted in the political situation of Tibet:

It's a real fear around not existing as a community. What does it mean to be a people? And people will be like I have Tibetan blood. And that's true, we have our genetic makeup, Tibetans have unique genetic makeup. [...] People often distil it to like we are this ethnic group, and to dilute this ethnic group is going to be to our detriment.

Further, as the translator acknowledged when I asked the elders if it was important for their children and grandchildren to marry within the community, it is a “tricky question”.

For the older generation, they would prefer it if the younger generation married within the community:

Dolma: It's very important but eventually it is up to them because they are powerful here.

Lhamo: Same thing - it is up to them eventually, but it is very important that they marry Tibetans.

Tsewang: If possible, you should marry a Tibetan so that there is no clash of ideology or religion, there won't be any problems. Both my children married Tibetans so there's no problem.

For Kunga, whose daughter is in her early twenties, she says it does not matter if her daughter marries outside the community:

I don't mind because to get married and to preserve culture are separate things. Nowhere is it written that if you marry a Tibetan your life will be good. If you're happy with someone, you can marry anyone. But my daughter's choice is Tibetan only. She has seen her aunts who have married white people...and she has seen the relations that they have, especially with parents. She doesn't want such relations. So she tells me that her first choice is Tibetan. Then second choice is Indian. But she is quite certain that she will not marry a white guy. [...] Culture is different but also the way they think, it is totally different.

For her, and for the elders, the argument is not rooted in racial purity, but is justified through cultural similarity. Yet, Kunga does state that she does not want her daughter to marry a Chinese man:
My daughter sometimes says that Chinese boys are very handsome, but I say no, I'm sorry. In my family also there are a few people who have married Chinese people, but I pray that she marries whoever but not a Chinese.

For Kunga, while her daughter can marry whoever she pleases, there is a limit to this freedom – marrying someone from the ethnic group of their colonizer would be crossing a line.

Many of the younger participants highlighted that they felt pressure to marry within the Tibetan community. Dechen notes that she was open to marrying outside the community, but felt that her family would prefer it if she married a Tibetan:

If I was to get married, I would prefer, definitely, that I marry a Tibetan. But whatever happens, happens. […] I'm open to anything. And I feel like I would only prefer it because my parents have told me this from a young age.

Yangchen feels like it would be important to marry within the community if she was planning to have children:

So I feel like it would be a very important thing if I was going to have kids […] For my mom, […] she thinks a Tibetan will be able to understand, because I'm Tibetan, we would have more similarities in the way we think, in the way we, you know, process tragedy or a celebration or something like that. It would be more similar. […] I do feel like my parents would be happier if I was to be married to a Tibetan.

Thus, for Yangchen, marrying within the community becomes important for the continuity of the nation, and to retain the ethnic lineage.

Even though the younger generation is more open to marrying outside the community, they do clarify that the person they marry still has to have the ‘doing Tibetan’ aspect of Tibetan-ness. Thus, even though they may not be ethnically Tibetan, they have to be politically active in the Tibetan movement, especially in terms of the upbringing of children. As Yeshe notes:
You mentioned if we feel the pressure to marry Tibetans, um, I guess that also comes to individual choices. [...] I guess for me I want to have someone Tibetan, that was my choice initially as well, I knew that I was going to end up with someone Tibetan, I knew that even long before coming here I was like okay, I am going to go there but I am going to marry someone Tibetan, you know, it would be easier for me. And then I want someone who would also be passionate about preserving language, like our culture and identity so that's something I seek for as well if I am seeing anyone.

Yangchen echoes this sentiment, stating that:

I think it's important for me to marry somebody who would be happy with me exposing kids to my culture, my religion.

For Dechen, the person she marries must have a clear political stance on the issue of Tibetan independence, and must be open to a Tibetan upbringing for any future children:

Whoever I want to marry in the future, if it wasn't a Tibetan, they would at least have to be someone who is pro-Tibet, or who understands my values, how I feel towards Tibet. And they have to be accepting of the fact that I want our kids, if we have any, to be Tibetan. So that's the condition. If I was to marry a non-Tibetan it has to be that - they have to be open and accepting of all the things that I'm going to teach my kids.

While the younger generation feels pressure from the older generation to marry within the community, they take a more nuanced understanding of the Tibetan identity. They recognize Tibetan as a dynamic identity, which is not limited to just being ethnically Tibetan, but also ‘doing Tibetan’. Hence, if they do not marry an ethnically Tibetan person, they are sure that they want to marry someone who engages in Tibetan activism, and in ‘doing Tibetan’.

Nyima feels that the pressure to maintain a ‘pure’ Tibetan ethnicity has gendered connotations, as more women are pressured more than men:

There is actually an expression in Tibetan that as clean as clean can be Tibetan. That's not even possible. [...] I find random uncles who say ‘Nyima you should get married.’ It's funny because in some places their own sons will marry white ladies, you know. The audacity of trying to police my...it's not even policing cultural preservation, you're literally policing my vagina. [...] This really stupid guy told me one time that if you marry somebody else, not Tibetan...and I think when they think non-Tibetan, they think
white people, or something like that, like something more foreign from us, and he was like marrying outside is genocide.

She goes on to further note that women have more pressure on them because historically, they have not had the opportunity to travel across the world as Tibetan men may have:

A lot of people that I interact with are mixed race with white, because we've interacted a lot with European folks, and it's usually that the father is Tibetan, not the mother. Because Tibetan men have historically had the privilege of mobility, of access to education, of traveling to foreign countries. [...] His Holiness's translator, his wife is white...he was sent to Oxford, he's a cis-man, he was a monk, but it doesn't matter, you're a man. [...] You don't see an equal amount of Tibetan women doing that. It definitely has to do with access to class and to gender.

The classed and gendered barriers to exploration and travel, thus, limit the opportunities women have had to interact with the larger world community, and have amounted to stricter roles on women for maintaining the ethnic boundaries of the nation. Yet, Nyima is also careful in historicizing the emphasis on racial purity in the Tibetan community. She claims that the Tibetan experience of inter-marrying from culturally very different ethnicities is a new experience for the community:

I think that inter-marriages, or just inter-couplings, are not looked upon really well, but also putting into context that we are still very new to the world, the world did not interact with us. So now that we are living amongst people, having people marry and having different interracial children, having mixed Black children, that's very new to us.

Thus, for Nyima, a nuanced understanding of the history of the Tibetan nation must be considered in conversations around racial purity. She does recognize that the burden of reproducing the boundaries of the ethnic nation are on the shoulders of the women, a result of patriarchy, history and class, but asks for a consideration of the historical context of the Tibetan nation to understand the community’s apprehensions towards interacting with other groups.
As Chatterjee (1993) highlights, Third World nationalism, which is premised around the preservation of the ‘inner’ domain, puts the onus of preserving tradition and culture onto women, who are seen to be the carriers and transmitters of culture. Jayawardena (1986) supports this statement, finding that in Third World nationalist movements, women are still considered the guardians of national culture, indigenous traditions and religion. Women are not only the biological and ethnic reproducers of the nation but are also charged with the continuity of the cultural nation. The emphasis on preserving the essential character of the culture and the nation, thus, falls on the shoulders of the women.

Thonsur (2003) highlights that Tibetan culture has traditionally put the burden of cultural preservation on women. The public-private divide in pre-colonial Tibet meant that only men could participate in the government and other public activities, and the private responsibility of the family fell on women. Thonsur (2003) reflects on Tibetan sayings, like “Though I am the head of hundred men, my leader lives at home” and “Men are the guardians of the courtyard and women, the pillar of the house” to reflect the responsibilities of women in the private domain. For Thonsur (2003), the traditional responsibility of women in the household has meant that in exile, women have become “a strong force in instilling in the younger generation a sense of patriotism and belonging to the community” (p. 334). She goes on to claim that Tibetan women have to spearhead the preservation of identity and culture of Tibet in exile. Thus, Thonsur’s understanding of gender relations in Tibetan communities follows the framework of women’s role in
nationalist movements set forth by Chatterjee, Jayawardena, and Anthias and Yuval-Davis.

A few of the participants noted that Tibetan women had the burden of preserving Tibetan culture on their shoulders. As Yeshe mentioned:

I think in our culture or in any, women are supposed to be the ones who are taking care of the family, […] because they have to bear children, they are a part of them. And Tibetan women in general I think they have a huge role in how the future generation comes out as well. […] Not only do [Tibetan women] have to take care of the family, take care of your career, that's something that every other woman does, but then we have to worry about preserving our culture […]. Because just like in other, I guess, in any other culture too, the blame usually comes to the mother or the wife, "She didn't do it, that's why the kids don't know how to speak Tibetan" or you know "She didn't take care of the family properly".

Yeshe highlights that the preservation of the culture is deemed to be the responsibility of the women, and the failure to transmit culture to the next generation is a personal failure, as a woman, but one that has a compounding effect on the larger nation. This is similar to Rajiva’s (2013) finding that diaspora women “tend to have more pressure on them to embody the values of the family and community” (p. 19). Further, as Yuval-Davis (2002) notes, women bear the ‘burden of representation’ of the collectivity’s identity and the collectivity’s honour. Nyima, on the other hand, relayed the story of her grandmother, to highlight the lack of options available to women:

I asked [my father] a lot of questions about my grandmother because I want to better understand a woman I never got to meet. And also understand how did she survive. I always check my dad […] on what his mother had to sacrifice, and his mother as a single mom also had to do and recognizing that his father has many privileges as a man to be able to walk away from a family […] he left to become a monk. But that isn't afforded to Tibetan women - we are the foundation so if we leave like how dare you, how selfish of you.

Women, being the foundation of the family and the private domain, do not have the options to abandon this responsibility – here, Nyima reiterates that women’s personal
choices are not only personal, but as the foundation of the culture, they have larger
effects on the nation as a whole. The responsibilities of preserving tradition, and the
blame for not being able to do so, fall squarely on the shoulders of the women in the
community. Yangchen recounted an instance where she saw the pressure on women to
conform to the ideals of Tibetan tradition and femininity when she went for a community
event:

So, I went to a wedding here recently, [...] and it was at the community, TCCC, and I
wore my *chupa*. And this is when I realized how important having a *chupa* was. [...] My
oldest sister wasn't able to fit into her *chupa* because she had gained too much weight,
she was the only person not wearing a *chupa*, other than the groom's work friends. Who
were not Tibetan. [...] Every other woman was wearing a *chupa*, but the men were all
wearing suits. [...] Men were all wearing suits and it was not a big deal, but I do feel like
people did point out to my sister that she was not wearing a *chupa*. Maybe not in a very
like "oh you're not wearing a *chupa*" but they were like "oh you're wearing a dress, so
pretty". You know, there's no reason to say "oh you're wearing a dress". You can just say
"oh you're looking so nice". It was like that. [...] But I feel like that's for all cultures. I
feel like women end up having to keep their traditional dresses.

A similar story was recalled by Rinzen, who felt that there was more pressure on women
to wear traditional clothing to community events, while most men would show up in
Western clothing. Further, it is not uncommon to see older Tibetan women walking
around in Parkdale wearing their *chupas*. Indeed, the three elders that I interviewed were
all wearing their *chupas* that day. When I asked Dolma if she wore a *chupa* every day,
she replied:

Most of the time, not at home. Or if I'm traveling long distance then I don't wear it. But
most of the time. Especially when we go to the Tibetan Canadian Cultural Centre.

Tsewang also mentioned the importance of the *chupa*:

It is very important to wear Tibetan dress. This is half *chupa*, I brought it from Nepal. I
have both full and half *chupas*. 
Yuval-Davis (2002) notes that “women, in their ‘proper’ behaviour, their ‘proper’ clothing, embody a line which signifies the collectivity’s boundaries” (p. 18). Women are the transmitters of private aspects of culture, but also become the public face of culture – wearing the chupa signifies a distinct culture and nation, and, in exile, women have the responsibility to signal to the larger public the existence of a distinct Tibetan nation.

Beyond clothing, many participants also noted that women were more active in the larger Tibetan community, as activists and political agents. Since ‘doing Tibetan’ is an important part of the Tibetan culture and identity, it follows that as ideological transmitters, women take up more responsibility around community organizing and activism. Thonsur (2003) claims that Tibetan women are the “backbone of society in exile and have played an active role in the freedom struggle” (p. 338), reflecting their role in ‘doing Tibetan’. Women’s activism and participation in exile in Canada was also reflected by the participants. As Yeshe noted:

Women tend to do a lot more things compared to men. That's from what I've seen, yeah. […] In the community. Like […] when I was involved in Students for a Free Tibet, there were about 90 percent or 95 percent women, and then maybe one or two guys that would be present doing things, taking action. So then for guys they're just focusing on their career or just having fun with their social life, whereas we were the ones staying, as I mentioned every Friday, we would actually meet up to plan our events or fundraise or do things.

Nyima also claims that women are more active members of the Tibetan community in Toronto, but also of the larger Toronto community:

It's very interesting because […] with Tibetan women in Canada, we are very active politically, socially, culturally, economically, like in every way. […] Largely, I know it is Tibetan women here in Toronto who are the most active in our political struggle internationally and then also in terms of local politics. Tibetan people have been part of the housing strikes, so the rent strikes because of the housing issue in Toronto, in Parkdale, they've been part of labour protests, and that's because those things directly affect us as working class, immigrant, refugee, racialized people.
The active part of the Tibetan identity manifests so that Tibetan women find themselves as highly active agents in the Tibetan nationalist movement and also in larger social issues in Toronto and Canada. Women, thus, carry the larger community, upholding the Tibetan community in Toronto, and ensuring that the Tibetan community has a place in the larger framework of the city.

Participants also realized that the gendered burden of the preservation of nation and culture was true of many different cultures and was not unique to the Tibetan experience. As many of the participants noted in the quotes above, it is not only Tibetan culture that expects women to uphold traditions – this is a common feature of almost all cultures. As Yangchen noted, women are the ones who are expected to maintain their traditional dress. Indeed, many participants recognized that the challenges faced by Tibetan women were the same as the challenges faced by any other woman – that of patriarchy. They did not think that the experience of occupation and exile made their experiences any different, since nationalism is still alive in many other states and nations. The only difference, as Nyima noted, was that nationalism, even with all its flaws, was integral for the survival of the Tibetan nation:

Nationalism for the most part is very toxic and very problematic and heteropatriarchal and violent, but for us it is very necessary for our survival, because if we fight for independence and sovereignty, even autonomy, we must assert some sort of national identity.

Hence, they realized that nationalism is a patriarchal conceptualization, which creates similar situations for women across nations and borders; yet they understood that nationalism was essential for the survival of the Tibetan nation and Tibet’s claims to independence.
Participants did not have an abstract notion of maintaining and transmitting culture to the next generation – indeed, many of the younger participants already had concrete ideas on how they would ensure that their future children grew up with a strong Tibetan identity. As Yeshe told me:

Tibetan women in general I think they have a huge role in how the future generation comes out as well. So they have to, I mean I can already think of, [...] if I have children, I am going to send them to Tibetan school, or language classes, or dance classes. I already know that that's something I am going to do.

Dechen also had similar plans, if she had children, to instil Tibetan culture and values in them:

Dechen: Like keeping the culture alive, making sure that in the future if I have kids that they know Tibetan, that they keep the culture alive.

Tariqa: Would that be important, if you had kids, for them to know Tibetan?

Dechen: Yeah, I'm sending them to [Tibetan Children’s Village]. Yeah. That's like the only school that teaches Tibetan, right [...] So because I'm not a very Tibetan person, I probably have to send them to like Tibetan school, or if I'm like here, so there's like summer camps that you can send them to, to Dharamsala, TCV. Or you can like, [...] in the Tibetan cultural centre here, they have like dance classes, singing classes, like Tibetan.

Since Dechen does not know Tibetan herself, and does not consider herself to be ‘very Tibetan’, she states that she will ensure that her children are fluent in Tibetan language and culture, so that the tradition is kept alive, even if it has skipped a generation. Jetsun, who also does not know Tibetan language herself, says it is important for her future children to know Tibetan:

If we have children, we want to teach them, make sure that they know Tibetan. Even though I don't know, I want to make sure that they know Tibetan.
Jetsun and Karma say that they would ensure that their children knew their Tibetan identity, and if they were to move permanently to Canada, they would send their children to the settlements in India to connect with their identity:

Jetsun: I'd teach them [their Tibetan culture]. Tibetan tuition. [...] I mean just like how we were brought up, similar. And then maybe like, suppose I move to Canada, then take them to like Nepal, India.

Karma: The summer camps\textsuperscript{31}.

Even though some of the participants may not be able to directly transmit culture to the next generation, due to their limited knowledge of Tibetan culture, many had planned out concrete ways in which they would ensure that the next generation would understand their Tibetan identity and carry on preserving the Tibetan culture. The participants wanted to ensure that the next generation knew the essential parts of being Tibetan, but also the crucial aspect of ‘doing Tibetan’.

\textit{Changing Gender Roles in Canada}

The experience of exile, however, has also changed familial relations, challenging the traditional binary of the public and private divide that has existed, as men have taken on more roles to also become transmitters of culture. As Karma notes, the Tibetan women in Canada engage more with the workforce than in South Asia:

In Nepal the Tibetan women, they don't really work. In Canada a lot of them work. That's a difference.

\textsuperscript{31} The TGIE has summer camps for Tibetan children in exile in the West to learn more about their heritage and culture. These camps are held in India.
Nyima notes that though there are economic reasons for women to engage in the workforce in Canada, the Canadian society also creates opportunities where women’s paid work is normalized:

For some women because they've come here, they've had more opportunities, and it's not just necessarily oh there are more opportunities everything's great, but it's like they were given more opportunities because that's also the environment we're in, where they have to work. Women that might have been housewives at home are working, they have income, they gave it to their family members.

Thus, the economic and social pressures for women to engage in the workforce have also resulted in a changed dynamic within the household. Nyima goes on to further note:

My uncle, he's a younger uncle, his wife makes more money in the household. And he likes being home at the kids. So within my family I am able to see different gender roles which is amazing.

This normalization of women’s economic participation has meant that men have had to contribute to maintaining the private domain as well. Rinzen, however, notes that the changing dynamic may lead to a feeling of emasculation among the men:

In Canada, there may be some comments from Tibetan men about ‘oh these are Canadianized ideas’, […] I’ve heard even Tibetan men saying ‘oh over there women are oppressed, over here men are oppressed’. […] They see doing household chores and taking care of kids as somehow emasculating.

Though the changing gender dynamics may be emasculating, their implications cannot be ignored. Men are also now responsible to ensure that the culture is transmitted to the future generation. As more men take on roles in the household, there is a larger role for them to play in the upbringing of the children as Tibetans. For example, Jamyang, who grew up with her father in Toronto, recalls that it was his insistence that ensured that she was grounded in a strong Tibetan identity:

Tibetan dance and music was my main way of really connecting with my identity. And a lot of that had to do with my dad encouraging my brother and I to go to these classes.
She also credits her father with her proficiency in Tibetan language:

I can speak fluently, because growing up my dad made it a really...he made it very important. At home we would not speak English, he would only speak Tibetan to us, and to be honest that's the sole reason why I speak a lot of Tibetan.

For Nyima, it is this very situation of exile that allows the Tibetan community to challenge the traditions and gender notions in Tibetan culture:

We can complicate the problematic things in our community, especially related to gender, so that we don't reproduce that in the future generations. Now that we're in this predicament, we should make the best of it.

Thus, exile becomes a space where tradition can be revised, culture can be re-written and renegotiated to become more critical of gender relations. As Chatterjee (1993) states, for Third World nationalism, the colonial state is kept out of the inner domain, but that does not imply that the inner remains unchanged – indeed, the nationalist project aims to modernize the national culture, but without interference by the colonizer. In the case of the Tibetans, exile has provided the very space that is needed to change national culture, and the community can decide how it wants to proceed with modernization, without interference by the colonizer.

**Conclusion**

Official narratives of authenticity are constructed by elites in the nationalist movement to define the boundaries of belonging and justify the existence of nationalism. In the Tibetan case, official narratives have been presented by both the TGIE as well as the Chinese state, highlighting the opposing claims to legitimacy.

These notions of authenticity, however, are imagined, and claims to authenticity are constantly renegotiated by different members of the nation. Authenticity is neither based
on location or on adherence to ‘essentialist’ notions of Tibetan cultural markers – rather, one of the biggest factors of claiming an ‘authentic’ Tibetan identity is the continued struggle and activism against Chinese occupation. This concept of ‘doing Tibetan’ is what binds the nation, regardless of abiding by cultural markers or location.

The gendered aspects to claims of authenticity highlight the uneven burden put on women to ensure the continuity of the nation – both biologically as well as culturally. Though participants recognized this burden and its unfairness, they also remarked that these gendered notions were true of all nationalist movements, and not particular to the Tibetan case. The journey of exilehood beyond South Asia, however, has changed gender roles, as more men take on responsibilities in the private domain, including cultural education of the next generation.

The next chapter will build on the concepts presented in this chapter to understand how Tibetan nationalism has been shaped in exile. It will explore how Tibetan nationalism continues frameworks of both Third World and exilic nationalism and will examine how this case departs from current frameworks.
Chapter 5: Third World Nationalism in Exile

Introduction

Tibetan nationalism has arisen due to the Chinese occupation of Tibet. While a ‘Tibetan’ identity did exist prior to occupation (Basu, 2012), the need to organize around this collective identity was not needed till the invasion of an ‘outside’ force. The movement of thousands of Tibetans into exile has given rise to an exilic form of nationalism, where exile has become the main arena for nationalism to develop and be defined. This can be largely attributed to the crackdown by the Chinese government throughout China during the years of the Cultural Revolution, as well as the stringent limits to freedoms in occupied territories like Tibet.

The framework of Third World nationalism, as presented by Chatterjee (1993), has manifested in the Tibetan nationalist movement. While the Tibetan nationalist movement has conceded the superiority of the West in terms of the material and has made moves to revise the Tibetan political and educational systems, the movement has simultaneously asserted Tibetan superiority in the ‘inner’, including elements like religion, language, culture and spirituality. The superiority of the inner has only intensified in the face of increasing Chinese suppression against these elements inside of Tibet.

The case of Tibetan nationalism, however, is not merely a case of Third World nationalism – it is simultaneously also a case of exilic nationalism. Tibetan nationalism is sustained by resistance and movement both inside and outside of Tibet. The added layer of exile makes this case more complicated, and Tibetan nationalism, thus, departs from the framework set forth by Chatterjee. As Misra (2003) states, exilic nationalism “does
not augment in isolation, but grows in tandem with the political forces within Tibet” (p. 190). Hence, Tibetan nationalism is influenced not only by the framework of ‘material’ versus ‘inner’ – the reality of life under Chinese occupation inside of Tibet greatly influence the nationalist movement.

In the case of Tibetan nationalism, the exile community has simultaneously also had to appeal to a Western audience to justify the demand for an independent state (Anand, 2010). The need for Western support has also come out of a need to have larger support numbers – without a larger support base, the movement cannot gain traction in international media and could not be sustained (Guibernau, 2004; Anand, 2010). Thus, exilic nationalism not only considers the actions of the exiled Tibetan population, but also the impact of these actions on a larger, Western audience. The framings of exilic nationalism, therefore, have been adapted to appeal to a larger base, and have taken on more transnational themes.

This chapter focuses on how Tibetan nationalism operates in practice and aims to understand how the experience of exile has affected the way Tibetan nationalism has manifested. This chapter is divided into four parts. The first part focuses on exilic nationalism, to understand how the nationalist project in exile is affected by the reality inside of Tibet. The second section seeks to understand the nationalist agenda of the Tibetan movement, to highlight the aspects of the ‘inner’ that have been prioritized by the movement. Particular focus is given to language and religion, and the unique position of the Dalai Lama. The third section focuses on the importance of community for exilic nationalism to thrive. The last section focuses on gender and nationalism, to understand
how Tibetan women have been represented by different frameworks, and how Tibetan women themselves understand gender in Tibetan society. The questions this chapter aims to answer are: How has Tibetan nationalism determined its agenda? Why has particular focus been given to language and religion? What is the unique position of the Dalai Lama, and how do Tibetans themselves relate to him? What is the role of community in fostering nationalism in exile? How are gender relations dealt with within a nationalist movement?

**Exilic Nationalism**

Misra (2003) claims that Tibetan nationalism operates as a ‘brain drain nationalism,’ which “encourages committed freedom fighters or those associated with symbols of the Tibetan nation to flee” (p. 190). This type of nationalism, he asserts, limits the growth of nationalism within Tibet itself, and cannot be sustained if it relies mainly on the activities of the exiled community. He concludes that in the Tibetan case, nationalism in exile has not worked in tandem with the situation inside Tibet, and that the pressures of sustaining the nationalist movement are on the shoulders of the exile community. Yet, looking at the aspects of the nationalist movement that have taken precedence, it can be concluded that the nationalist activities are dictated directly by the Chinese policies towards Tibetans inside Tibet.

The assertion by Misra that ‘brain drain nationalism’ limits the scope of nationalist activities inside of Tibet only serves to erase the activism happening inside of Tibet. Topgyal (2013) states that “for Tibetans inside Tibet, cultural revival after the traumatic decades following the invasion has been achieved with great sacrifice and hard work by
the Tibetans, in spite of rather than because of Chinese policies” (p. 530). The anticolonial movement inside of Tibet is quite active, but the repressive conditions imposed by the Chinese state and the restricted flows of information have limited our ability to understand how activism takes place in Tibet. As noted by Rinzen, the conditions of unfreedom change the nature of nationalist activities that can take place inside of Tibet. She recounts this from her visit to Tibet:

Obviously when I was there I didn't witness any rallies or mass arrests or anything like that, but I knew from my guide that people were generally very afraid to speak up and speak out, and all the monasteries we went to had CCTV cameras everywhere. My group included a lot of tourists, and asked our guide about that and our guide just looked at me and to the tourists he told them that ‘oh because there are some antique statues and valuable things in the monastery’, and he took me aside and told me ‘it's the government, they don't want anyone having any kind of protests or meetings, so they put the cameras there’.

In such restrictive conditions, resistance techniques must be more creative. Barnett (2005) notes that Tibetan cadres practice ‘strategic deception,’ hiding their true loyalties and objectives from the state to work for Tibetan rights; further, Kapstein (1998) finds that Tibetans adopt a “dimorphism of values by adhering publicly to the official culture while masking their true sentiments” (p.143). Thus, there is a subtlety required by activists working inside of Tibet, but this subtlety should not be mistaken for inactivity.

Further, while Misra (2003) claims that the nationalist movement inside of Tibet has been limited to the religious clergy and has been elitist in nature, the 2008 rallies against the Chinese during the Beijing Olympics highlighted that many laypeople were also participants in nationalist activities – these included Party members, state employees, students, artists and intellectuals (Smith, 2010; Topgyal, 2013). Jamyang gives the example of Tashi Wangchuk, an advocate for Tibetan language rights inside of Tibet:
Tashi Wangchuck, he's currently serving five years. All he did is he found out his nephew and niece couldn't learn Tibetan anymore in school. He's from [...] eastern Tibet. It's like ethnically Tibetan. And the Chinese government removed the Tibetan language from that school. So he basically decided to sue the local authority, using the Chinese constitution, using legal measures, right. And because of that, he was slapped with a sentence of five years for inciting separatism, when we know that he hasn't done anything political.

There is a myriad of ways in which nationalist activities inside of Tibet take place – assuming that nationalism only operates in exile takes a narrow view of the ways in which activism can happen. There is a need to take a broader understanding towards how activism and nationalism operates in repressive settings, such as inside occupied Tibet. Without such an understanding, the activism and efforts of the nationalist movement inside of Tibet are erased.

**Determining the ‘Inner’ – The Nationalist Agenda**

The agenda of Third World nationalist movements converge around a set of markers which are deemed to encapsulate the essence of the ‘inner’ domain of the nation, and these markers become priorities to preserve for the nation. These essential ‘inner’ domain markers are also what differentiate the colonizer from the colonized – hence, they are necessary to preserve, because they also become a means to legitimate the demand for an independent state and the existence of the nationalist movement.

In the Tibetan nationalist movement, the nationalist agenda has been prioritized not only by the cultural markers that fall within the domain of the ‘inner’, but also by those very markers that are being actively threatened by the Chinese state in occupied Tibet. As Pema (2003) notes: “Given our situation in exile and what is happening back home, we have no choice but to safeguard what is being destroyed in Tibet by the Chinese occupation of our country” (p. 291). Thus, there are two interplaying forces that have
determined the nationalist agenda for the Tibetan nationalist movement – the ‘inner’
domain, as well as Chinese policies in Tibet.

*Language*

Chatterjee (1993) notes that for Third World nationalism, “language is a zone
where the nation declares sovereignty and it is transformed to make it adequate for the
modern world” (p. 7). Thus, language is part of the inner, an essential marker of cultural
identity, which is integral to the formation of a cohesive nationalist project. Indeed, one
of the areas where Tibetan nationalism, especially in exile, has gathered much force is
language rights. This is in part to preserve the language that binds the nation, but also
because of the restrictions enforced by the Chinese state to practice Tibetan language
within Tibet. Community organizing around language rights is an example of how the
nationalist movement is simultaneously influenced by Third World nationalism, but also
by what is happening inside of Tibet itself. As Rinzen notes, the Chinese state policies
that restrict Tibetan language education has created an insecurity in exile as well:

I think for Tibetans in general we feel that our language is under attack and it's something
that people in the diaspora are working really hard.

Nyima further corroborates this same claim, stating:

There's a big place of pain and insecurity about our language, and language is very
intense because it is being actively attacked back home, and because it is struggling to
survive here [in exile].

Tibetan language is threatened, both in exile and inside of Tibet, and the endangerment of
this language is a source of anxiety for the Tibetan community (Oha, 2008).

It is not exile in South Asia, however, where language is threatened – it is exile in
the West where Tibetan language is most insecure. The efforts to preserve language are
actively carried out by the TGIE – indeed, it was the first major project undertaken by the Dalai Lama in the initial years of exile (Giles & Dorjee, 2005). As the Dalai Lama himself explains, the essential component to preserving Tibetan culture in exile was maintaining language and Tibetan history, which is why a separate Tibetan school system was set up (Bernstorff & von Welck, 2003). Through the Tibetan schooling system set up in India, Bhutan and Nepal, Tibetan refugee children receive both Tibetan and modern education, to ensure that Tibetan children could keep up with the modern world, while still preserving their cultural heritage, religion and identity (Rigzin, 2003).³² Yet, this ability to exist as a separate community with their own educational systems, as in South Asia, is not possible when Tibetans migrate further to the West. The pressures of assimilating into a new society have made it harder to maintain language in countries outside of South Asia. Nyima is, therefore, speaking about an issue that arises distinctly in the West, and not necessarily in the settlements of South Asia. Indeed, as Gyaltag (2003) notes, “the loss of the mother tongue by the youngest generation is the greatest concern for Tibetans in Canada” (p. 257) – thus, the issue is compounded in further exile in Canada. Language, therefore, is an important focus of the nationalist movement – it is being actively targeted by the colonizer and must be preserved by the Tibetan community.

³² Tibetan has been heralded as the medium of instruction from elementary to eighth grade, and students are taught the honorific form of the Tibetan language (Rigzin, 2003; Giles & Dorjee, 2005; MacPherson & Ghoso, 2008)
Further, as Nyima captures, language is integral to the culture because it shapes the very way in which one’s thinking and articulation is formed:

Language is usually the key to culture. You know there's things you cannot describe or articulate as well in English as you would in Hindi, right, similar with Tibetan. And I think because we actually speak different languages, I also feel like...we see the world in a different way, we have a different worldview, but that's because we can actually communicate with the world in a different way. And so, you can describe the world in a different way.

She reiterates the importance of language in nationalist movements and narratives, stating:

Because our national narratives are usually told in Tibetan, so you must have some understanding of Tibetan to be able to grasp the stories. Also when we are learning stories of our home from our parents, usually it's best told in the original tongue. So language becomes a very big part of like our history, our understanding of the national narrative.

Thus, language, as a “transmitter of cultural heritage” (Oha, 2008, p. 91) is also important for continuity of the memories and narratives that the nationalist movement is based on.

As Dechen also notes, her lack of knowledge of Tibetan language prevents her from hearing her grandmother’s stories in her own voice:

I think language is important, especially if you want to communicate with anyone, if you want to know more stories about like first-hand things. Like I can't communicate with my grandma so fluently, you know, there's always a barrier. Or my mom has to be in the room and my mom will translate to me.

The nuances of the stories and memories are lost in translation for her. For this very reason, Jamyang actively engages with the elders of the Tibetan community in Toronto on the weekends, to ensure that their narratives and memories of escape are remembered and passed on. As she recounts, most of these stories describe the mundane aspects of life before Chinese occupation:
What was normalcy like in Tibet, before occupation especially. Because most of the stories that I'm hearing are from elders that lived in Tibet before occupation. So they just talk about...so if I talk to a momola, like a grandmother, who was a dokpa, which is a nomad, she'll tell me stories about, you know, everyday life, living in a black tent made with yak wool, and like drinking Tibetan salted butter tea, milking the dik, which is the female version of the yak.

Language allows Jamyang to interact with the elders in her community, to listen to their stories and keep alive the memories of an unoccupied Tibet, and these memories and images are important for the nationalist movement to aspire towards. Without the preservation of Tibetan language, however, this continuity would be lost, and the nationalist movement would also lose parts of their narratives and memories.

Kunchen further explains that the reason why language is important is also because the Tibetan population is so small, that if there are not active efforts made to maintain the language, Tibetan language, and by extension the culture, will die out:

I think [language is] very important, especially because for us we don't have that much...our population is very small. And second, there are a lot of Tibetans who live abroad, and they learn new languages and the kids who are born here they don't speak Tibetan. So I feel like slowly it is going to die. I think so. I feel like it is very important for us to preserve it, preserve the language, preserve the culture.

Without a conscious effort to maintain language, the dwindling Tibetan population in exile will not be able to maintain this distinct cultural marker, one that is already being threatened inside of Tibet. Hence, the position of the Tibetan language is even more insecure, due to the small Tibetan population that exists.

Some of the participants recognized that the nationalist movement has prioritized the Lhasa dialect in promoting a unified identity around a unified language. This highlights that they are not only aware of the false claims of a singular narrative as put forward by the nationalist movement, but are also aware of the necessity of this singular
narrative in forwarding their claims to nationhood. As Dechen explained, though she is from the Kham region, she would like to first learn the Lhasa dialect, and then learn the Kham dialect of Tibetan:

Well I would say the general Tibetan first would be important for me. And if I knew Khamke as well that would be helpful too.

While the official nationalist discourse emphasizes a unified language, participants realize that there are different dialects to the Tibetan language and have a heterogenous understanding of language. Nyima realizes the need for this unifying language, but also highlights the efforts being made by the exile population to understand the different dialects:

That's a moment in which a national identity is also connected to a national dialect, which then minimizes or prioritizes a central language over your own regional language, right. That's a very specific situation in my community - I think we're getting a lot better now, we are trying to make an effort to understand different dialects. You look at Tibetan news, now it's done in Khamke, it's done in Amdoke, which is very harsh dialect, but we're doing better, and we're not going to prioritize a central language over the other languages, because those two languages are arguably the most difficult to understand, so sometimes people would stray away from them or be like oh speak properly but that's not true, they're speaking fine, we are just not opening our minds and ears to understand. Because for the most part we do understand each other, we just have to make sure we don't speak crazily fast.

Nyima highlights that the modernization of language is being undertaken in exile and a better understanding of the different languages and regional identities is being recognized, giving more space to a heterogenous understanding of a Tibetan identity. The process of exile has led to an acute sense of loss, and going beyond the official narratives of nationalism, the exile community has taken it upon themselves to work to preserve the dialects as well.
Religion

The intertwined nature of Tibetan culture to Tibetan Buddhism has created a situation where religion has become a marker of nationalism. Giles and Dorjee (2005) find that Tibetan literature is rooted in Buddhism, and “it is almost impossible to conceptualise Tibetan cultural identity without Buddhism” (p. 145). As Jamyang notes:

I would say that there's probably not a lot of other similar situations where religion and culture are so intensely intertwined. To a certain extent you almost can't take away the two.

The unique nature of Tibetan religion and culture have made it so that Tibetan Buddhism has become an integral part of the ‘inner’ domain. Tsewang notes that when coming to Canada, one of the most important things she brought with her were her Buddhist scriptures:

Along with clothing, I brought two Buddhist scriptures, which alone weigh 12 kilos, because it is very important, I brought that. This is something that I know I won't get in Canada, so I brought that along with me.

For Tsewang, beyond the religious significance of the scriptures, it was the inability to find these items in Canada, items that are linked to her Tibetan identity, that it was important for her to bring the scriptures with her. Indeed, walking down Queen Street in Parkdale, it is not uncommon to see the local Tibetan-owned businesses to be adorned with Tibetan prayer flags, an indication of the Tibetan culture and heritage of the business – more than a religious indicator, the flags indicate that the business is owned by Tibetans, and hence take on a more cultural role, than a religious one. Tibetan Buddhism, thus, is of much cultural importance to the Tibetan community, and distinguishes Tibetans from the Chinese occupiers, as well as the larger Canadian population.
Religion, like language, is also a mode of continuity for Tibetans in exile. Following their religious practices allows them to connect to their ancestors, as well as to their elders. As Karma notes:

[Religion is] very important. It's who you are. And it's how we like connect to our parents also. It makes us good people when we follow the teachings.

Karma finds that continuing religious practice helps her connect to her parents and keep the continuity of the culture. Tsewang, an elder, reiterates this:

[Religion is] very important to pass it down to your children and grandchildren. So if you practice your own religion, your children will also do that, and your children's children will do that.

This continuity, of connection between generations, becomes an important aspect of the nationalist project, especially as exilehood becomes protracted.

The importance of religion has only been reinforced by the Chinese communist state’s crackdown on religious freedoms within Tibet – hence, asserting a religious identity or religious symbols is politicized as a mode of resistance against the Chinese state, both within and outside of Tibet. During the invasion of Tibet, the Chinese state claimed that Buddhism was the root cause of Tibetan backwardness, and the “PRC has denounced Tibetan Buddhism […] as a remnant of the feudal system” (Giles & Dorjee, 2005, p. 138). This vilification of Buddhism continues till today, and as Jamyang notes:

In Tibet, being Buddhist can get you persecuted, right. Larung Gar, which is the world's largest Tibetan Buddhist institute, the last three years it has been demolished by the Chinese government, and they've made monks and nuns, thousands of them, disrobe, dress them in Chinese soldier uniforms and sent them to re-education camps, make them sing praise to the Chairman of the Communist Party of China.

Thus, religion takes on a political meaning due to the persecution of religious freedom by the Chinese state inside of Tibet; in exile, maintaining Tibetan Buddhism allows the
Tibetan community to preserve their traditional culture, while also taking a political stance. Jamyang, however, highlights that, in many ways, more efforts are being made within Tibet to preserve Tibetan Buddhism:

So I think inside of Tibet, because it is being attacked, but also because Buddhism is preserved even more inside of Tibet than in exile. If you look at a lot of the Tibetan Buddhist monasteries in Nepal and India, slowly there are less and less Tibetans - there are a lot of Buddhist Nepali monks and then Indian too, but a lot of Nepali, and the percentage of Tibetans is going down, whereas inside of Tibet it is flourishing but also being systematically attacked.

The preservation of religion is the preservation of the ‘inner’ domain, in exile, but within Tibet, it is an explicit form of subverting Chinese authority.

Working in tandem with the political situation inside Tibet, in exile, the possession of religious symbols is not only a preservation of the ‘inner’ and traditional culture, it has also taken on a political meaning. As Nyima notes, secular events are also laced with Buddhism in exile:

What we do in different ceremonies and different kind of celebratory times, it's very much rooted in Buddhism. In our protests we do prayers, Buddhist prayers.

Jamyang corroborates this claim, noting that:

A lot of our events that are seemingly secular will begin in very religious ways with religious rituals and ceremonies and stuff.

Yet, this is not only a way to practice religious freedoms, but also a political stance against the crackdown on religion within Tibet. Every participant interviewed claimed that they had a photo of the Dalai Lama in their homes, and almost all Tibetan shops and restaurants in the neighbourhood of Parkdale also display pictures of him. He is significant to the Tibetan community as a religious leader, and the simplest way to maintain connections to religion is by showing allegiance to the leader of Tibetan
Buddhism. Yet, the political power of his photo must not be discounted. Taking the political situation inside of Tibet into consideration, the possession of a photo of the Dalai Lama is also an act of resistance – since Tibetans inside of Tibet can be sentenced to jail for even the possession of a photo of the Dalai Lama, the possession of his photo in exile is also a form of political resistance. In this sense, the Dalai Lama has become a symbol of nationalism and resistance. The Chinese government’s crackdown on Tibetan Buddhism and the Dalai Lama within Tibet has only furthered his symbolic importance both within Tibet and in exile.

Many participants also noted that Tibetan Buddhism had provided them and the larger Tibetan community with mechanisms to deal with the stresses of exile – hence, religion becomes important to continue the nationalist project and the fight for freedom, as it provides the necessary tools needed to continue the movement which is proving to be long and difficult. As Jamyang noted:

I definitely think that Buddhism, especially amongst our elders is a huge part of why they are resilient [...]. Just to think that they lived in an independent Tibet, they escaped through horrific conditions like this, they started a brand new life in Nepal, learned a new language, adapted to a new community, decided that it's time to get up and go to India, did the same thing there, and then oh okay we're going to come to Canada now, [...] they're like modern day nomads, but without choice, displaced nomads. And I think...yeah Buddhism is a really big part of why they're able to, I guess, continue.

Rinzen also says that the teachings of compassion and kindness are important for her, as well as for the larger Tibetan community:

[Buddhism is] more of a philosophy than a religion, and so I think that makes it, for me, even if I'm practicing certain tenants of Buddhism or contemplating certain teachings of His Holiness, I don't think of that as religion - I just think of that as a way of life, a way of living, living compassionately, and it just makes sense to me. [...] I can see that it's very important to my community. [...] I do see that it's extremely, incredibly important to the Tibetan community.
For Nyima, among the other teachings of Buddhism, it is also the idea of impermanence that has impacted her identity and allows her to navigate exilehood:

Buddhism as a philosophy, as a lifestyle, has really influenced my identity, because it's also what I understand what is connected to what it means to be Tibetan, to be compassionate, to be kind, to understand the importance of impermanence, like all those things have shaped who I am and how I see the world.

Thus, beyond religion as a cultural and political marker for the nationalist agenda, the more practical teachings of Buddhism are important to provide the necessary hope and strength to the Tibetan community to continue the nationalist project and the fight for independence. For many Tibetans, the practice of Buddhism is what has allowed them to endure this journey and make it worthwhile.

The Fourteenth Dalai Lama and Nationalism

The Fourteenth Dalai Lama as a ‘Summarizing Symbol’

The political significance of the Fourteenth Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso, for the Tibetan community has made him a symbolic embodiment of resistance against Chinese occupation. He has, thus, become the symbol for the Tibetan nationalist movement, around which the nation can rally. In nationalist movements, symbols provide feelings of belonging and loyalty towards the nation. As Nowak (1984) suggests, the Dalai Lama has come to epitomize and encompass everything Tibetan, both to the Tibetan people and to the general public. Yet, he is a symbol not because of his religious role, but rather despite it. His symbolic power has been created in exile, but also within Tibet due to Chinese policies.
Scholars have stated that the Dalai Lama is a ‘summarizing symbol’, a symbol who represents for Tibetans everything that Tibet means to them (Nowak, 1984; Young, 2010; Bentz, 2012b). Young (2010) states that his power as a summarizing symbol comes from his non-sectarian approach to both Buddhism and politics. She states that the “Dalai Lama’s self-identification as a [non-sectarian] has allowed him to function as the summarizing symbol of Tibetan identity through the promotion of ‘sameness’ among Tibetan refugees” (p. 82). In addition, it is also the condition of exile which has promoted his role as a summarizing symbol – the decentralized nature of Tibetan polities prior to Chinese occupation meant that the Dalai Lama would not have been a representative symbol of the region beyond Lhasa in that setting (Young, 2010).

Beyond a Symbol – The Dalai Lama as a Political Leader

Viewing the Dalai Lama as merely a symbol, however, makes him an abstract concept, and takes away from the actual efforts he has made to better the lives of the Tibetans in exile. His efforts as a diplomat, negotiator and political leader have had tangible effects on the Tibetans living in exile and have been acknowledged as such by the Tibetans themselves. His ability to negotiate resettlement for Tibetans in India, and then further in Switzerland, the US and Canada, has not been forgotten by the Tibetans. Many respondents stated that their reverence for him came not only out of respect for his religious position, but also because his diplomatic efforts have had actual repercussions on the lives of Tibetans living in exile. As Dolma told me:

There's no one more important than His Holiness, the Dalai Lama. We were in India because of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, by the grace of His Holiness India granted us asylum in India.
She does not focus on his religious importance, but rather emphasizes his political contribution to the Tibetan people. Rinzen also notes that his political leadership came at a crucial time, and he has supported much of the community in exile:

[The Dalai Lama is] incredibly important. We couldn't have imagined a better leader for our people at this critical time. He was very young when the Chinese came to Tibet, and he's had to shoulder so much burden on behalf of the Tibetan people. So, he's a phenomenal leader and he's done so much for the Tibetan cause and the Tibetan community. He is so, so important. [...] I know that if he hadn't set up the refugee camps and done all the diplomatic work that he had to, then I don't know where I would have been as a person, would I even have been in existence, would my parents have arrived. Because when they went to those refugee transit schools, they were educated, they were fed, they were housed.

Nyima further humanizes him, by focusing not only on all that he has done for the Tibetan community, but by also mentioning the fact that he has survived a tumultuous life:

I feel a great sense of indebtedness to His Holiness. Obviously revere him. I also feel like he's...like all of us he's survived a lot and continues to.

As Nyima points out, he is like the rest of the Tibetans, and has had to endure the trials of exilehood.

Participants also credited him with bringing international attention to the Tibetan movement, and as Jamyang recognized, it is his persistence that has kept the nationalist movement alive:

If you think about it, we [in exile] make up less than 3 percent of the Tibetan population. [...] 97 percent of Tibetans are still inside Tibet. And yet the tiny amount of resources we have, even just like the tiny population that we have, so many people know about His Holiness, so many people know about the Free Tibet movement. In the 90s, it was like a trend, with so many people got in to Buddhism in Tibet, and His Holiness is a huge part of that.

As Jamyang further notes, he has also been an important figure in bringing democracy to Tibetans in exile and working to change the structure of Tibetan polity:
His Holiness wanted to make sure that Tibetans have this democracy. We like to say that this is practice for us, before we get real independence and we have to put this to the test, right.

As a leader, thus, he is also important for being willing to experiment with the traditional structure, and to change and modernize. Viewing him as an abstract concept casts him as a static symbol, which erases his dynamism, especially when it relates to his flexible understanding of Tibetan identity and culture. Thus, for Tibetans in exile, he is not a mystical notion or abstract concept like a symbol, he is also a political leader whose diplomatic efforts have allowed for the successful resettlement of the Tibetan community. His ability to secure tangible rights for the exiled population has made him more human in the eyes of the Tibetan community, beyond just understanding him as a symbolic notion.

The Dalai Lama as a Familial Figure

Some of the participants also identified the Dalai Lama as a grandfather and elderly figure – thus, he is not only a highly revered religious figure for them, but also someone who is personable, personal, and approachable. While some only see him as the embodiment of Buddhism, a familial understanding of the Dalai Lama makes him human and even secular. As Yangchen stated, she was searching for a picture of the Dalai Lama where he looks more personable:

I want to find a picture where, you know, he looks very, almost like a grandad.

Nyima looks up to him, not just as a leader, but also as an elder:

He also, for me, was like a grandparent, not a grandparent but an elder, that I felt like great affection towards.

These images of the Dalai Lama as a grandfather make him more of a personal figure to
Nyima and Yangchen, rather than a religious figure, who may be out of reach. This personable approach to the Dalai Lama can be considered a continuity of his religious figure – as the embodiment of the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara, he is the “original father of all Tibetans” (Bentz, 2012b, p. 292). He is the father of the Tibetan nation, and Nyima and Yangchen continue this narrative in their understanding of him as a grandfather and elder. Yet, this view of him as a familial figure also reconfigures and secularizes him – he is, simultaneously, a personal relation, a relatable elder, their grandfather, and not just the father of the larger nation.

Tibetan women, thus, challenge academic discourses of the Dalai Lama as a mere nationalist symbol, by reconfiguring him as personable and by humanizing him. Though he is important as a religious figure and a political symbol, the tangible efforts he has made for the Tibetan community in exile have made him more familiar to the Tibetan community. De-linking the symbolic value placed in the Dalai Lama by academics, Tibetan women recognize him as the leader of the Tibetan nationalist movement, but also as its most active participant.

**Transnationalism – Appeals to the West**

The activities of the Tibetan nationalist movement have been directed not only by the aspects of the ‘inner’ and the actions of the Chinese inside of Tibet – they have also been influenced by the need to appeal to a larger Western audience. These appeals to the West have been important for two reasons – to justify the need for a Tibetan nationalist movement, and to garner larger support for the movement (Anand, 2010). This need to
appeal to a larger, Western audience has meant that the Tibetan nationalist movement has increasingly relied on a transnational narrative of their cause.

The conflict between Tibet and China has been a debate around whether Tibet was a sovereign nation prior to Chinese occupation, or if China exerted a form of suzerainty over Tibet. As Anand (2002) highlights, however, it is the very concept of sovereignty that has been unproblematized – he notes that the Westernization of international relations has failed to understand that there are non-Western ways of engaging in international relations, and these different worldviews cannot be captured in the simplistic binary of sovereignty/suzerainty. He goes on to state that “not only did imperial powers actively delegitimize non-Western modes of sovereignty, they also refused to recognize the intricacies of non-Western inter-state relations” (p.214). Thus, Tibetans had to grapple with an appeal to the Western norms of international relations and nationalism to justify their movement from an early period. As Kolas (1996) acknowledges, the Tibetan “encounter with UN in 1950 made it clear that Western standards would have to be used to argue the Tibetan case” – the Tibetan community had to convince the world that they were a state prior to occupation, with a permanent population, defined territory, a government, and relations with other states (p. 59). The appeal to a larger Western audience has also been motivated by the fact that Tibetans, especially those in exile, constitute a very small proportion of the world population, and there is an assumption that without the support of a larger, Western community, “nothing substantial can be achieved” (Anand, 2002, p.221). Western supporters of the Tibetan movement provide extensive media coverage as well as financial contributions to the nationalist project.
The appeal to the West has been achieved by couching the demands for a free Tibet in the transnational language of peace, environmentalism, indigenous sovereignty, human rights, and non-violent activism. According to Anand (2002), the adoption of such an “inclusivist cosmopolitan agenda [...] gives the Tibet movement its geopolitical significance” (p. 219). Nyima relayed the transnational importance of the Tibetan nationalist movement:

I approach campaigning very differently for non-Tibetans because human rights, it's such a popular issue that is not a huge issue unless it is so intensely grotesque. [...] There's strategic ways to look at it. So now people are a lot more concerned about the environment - I actually talk about Tibet having the third-largest reserve of glaciers, and how that actually directly affects a billion people in South Asia. [...] When colonialism happens it isn't just human rights violations but also literally the raping of the land, it's not just the people, it's the land. [...] In the world we know that if there isn't freedom in the world somewhere, that it's actually a loss for all of humanity, so we all need to work towards that. Because a freer Tibet is a freer world.

Nyima understands the strategic importance of using these transnational tropes to appeal to non-Tibetans to be activists for the Tibetan nationalist project. It is easier for non-Tibetans to connect to an idea of a collective humanity, and this is actively utilized by community organizers to appeal to a larger audience. The pinnacle of the Tibetan nationalist movement using transnational tropes to appeal to a larger audience was when the Dalai Lama was bestowed with the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989. This win signalled the triumph of peace and non-violent activism on a global stage, and these transnational elements resonated with a large part of the international community.

**Community and Nationalism**

The transnational element of the Tibetan nationalist movement comes not only from the advocacy of non-nationalist causes – it is also due to the spread of the exile
community across the world. This transnational nature of the Tibetan diaspora has made Tibetan nationalism more varied and complex, as the diaspora has had to adapt to each host country (Gardner, 1999). Misra (2003) argues that the Tibetan diaspora settled in India, especially the strong community created in Dharamsala, have “[harboured] a false sense of nationhood,” supported by the physical topography of the region, which resembles the physical Tibet (p. 200). Gardner (1999) corroborates this claim by stating that the establishment of the Tibetan community in India has resulted in India “standing in for Tibet as the ‘country of origin’” (p. 48). The very location of the exile community and the organization of the exile community in India becomes an important aspect, then, for Tibetan exilic nationalism to operate.

Community and Identity

Misra’s assumptions on the familiarity of surroundings fall apart while looking at those Tibetans that have migrated further to other parts of India and to countries outside of South Asia. While Tibetans in Dharamsala may forget that they are not in their homeland, what are the implications on nationalism when the environment ceases to resemble their homeland? How do Tibetans in countries like Canada react to the change in their environment and surroundings? The unfamiliarity that Tibetans in Canada have due to the change in environment is only exacerbated by the loss of the proximity from the government-in-exile and the larger Tibetan community. The participants I interviewed in Toronto still harboured strong connections to the Tibetan nation, and nationalism is strong in the Tibetan community in Canada. It is the strong ties to the
larger Tibetan community which can be credited for the success of the exilic nationalist project.

Community has been an important reason for maintaining Tibetan culture in South Asia. The creation of settlements allowed the flourishing of community life in exile, as Tibetans could rebuild their lives in homogenous communities, without relying entirely on assistance from outside (Bernstorff & von Welck, 2003; Phuntso, 2003). Living in such homogenous communities also ensured that Tibetans were not scattered all over the sub-continent and would be able to maintain their culture and identity (Norbu, 2003). Dorjee (1992), noting the importance of settlement life in India, states that it is keeping Tibetans “together in a community setting which is so vital for our cause. This holding environment to maintain our identity is so crucial in our fight for freedom” (p. 11). Thus, community is important for maintaining identity, which in turn is important for the nationalist cause.

While Dorjee (1992) is uncertain of how community can be maintained outside of the Tibetan settlements in India, the example of the strong community in Toronto highlights that community remains an important part Tibetan identity in exile, even beyond South Asia. As Jamyang explained to me:

Basicall, I feel like community is a really big part of something that helps keeps Tibetans grounded […]. So I would definitely say community is a huge part of my entire being right now. […] You know how they say it takes a village to raise you - I definitely agree. It takes a community to raise.

Indeed, Gyaltag (2003), examining the Tibetans in exile in the West, notes that “it is vitally important for the Tibetans in exile to foster a strong, intact community that can provide support for their members and nurture their self-confidence. […] Within this
community, the Tibetans in exile, especially the young generation, can unfold and master their past, their present and their future together” (p. 264). Jamyang corroborates the need for community, as Gyaltag asserts, for the younger generation to understand and continue the nationalist project.

Jamyang further states that the Tibetan community is important not only in Canada – indeed, she has found the strong community connections between Tibetans during her travels around the world:

I've had the privilege of doing quite a bit of traveling and whenever I travel, I will gravitate, I will find Tibetans. I'll find a restaurant or I'll find out if there's a community, where do they hang out, things like that. […] When I went to Paris, this was in 2013, I found out that there is just this random park that all the Tibetans will come to just like, literally, just to hang out and be around each other. It's not like they're going there to pick up something, they don't have like something they need to do. They'll just go there and play cards all day, or play basketball, or they'll bring...some of them I hear make Tibetan food at home and they sell it. So that's Paris. And then I went to the Czech Republic, and it was so random because I think there's in all of the Czech Republic there's like 3 Tibetans and they have their own community. They have like a President.

Community helps Tibetans create a group identity, and gives them a sense of belonging, as Jamyang emphasizes:

I definitely think this says a lot about the fact that we Tibetans have this innate longing and needing to belong, and because we don't have that physical space where we belong right now, we find it through other ways. I think that says a lot about the fact that when I moved to Parkdale here in 1999, I think there were 5 Tibetan families, max. Now there's like 3000 Tibetans. The local high school here, Parkdale Collegiate, 30 percent of the student body is made of Tibetans. It's crazy. Of course, one reason is that this is a lower income, right and they can afford it. But there's so many lower income neighbourhoods in Toronto, why are all Tibetans coming here? It's because of that community. It's because they need to be around all that looks, sounds and experience the same thing.

Community has helped many Tibetans build their sense of belonging in Canada. Yet, it is not helping them build their identities as Canadians; rather, it helps them build their identities as Tibetans in Canada. As many of the participants detailed, participating in
activities put on by the Tibetan community in Toronto helped them find a place they belonged to. One of the elders, Dolma, said:

We have Tibetan Canadian Cultural Centre on Titan road, so we go there very often. We are active volunteers since we came to Canada. So, we continue doing that because we feel the sense of belonging.

Another elder, Tsewang, commented that the community here helps her maintain a sense of continuity, which has helped in the transition to life in Canada:

It's very important to have that sense of community. The older people go for their own dharma classes, they have their own religious ceremonies, and they continue doing that as a community here. That sort of gives us a sense of belonging and connection.

Yeshe, who is now in her 30s, recalled the difficulty she faced in finding her place in Canada when she moved here initially:

When I moved here then the first couple of years was basically trying to find myself, trying to settle in, trying to see where I belong. And also I didn't live in Parkdale, I was only there for the first month only, and then we moved, and I didn't go to the school where all the other Tibetans went to as well, so then it was difficult for me to find like my group of people, you know finding my place. And then, so, in my high school we had I think about 5 Tibetans, so then in the end we just gathered for lunch every time, just talked to each other.

Nyima, also in her 30s, did not grow up in Toronto, but rather was in a smaller town with few racialized people, and no Tibetan community. It was the alienation from the Tibetan community that made her realize where she belongs:

I intentionally came back to Toronto because I wanted to reconnect with the community [...]. Here, we actively as a community are always organizing together, having functions together, having religious gatherings together, having political gatherings together. And those things that we do together on a regular basis - like Tibetans are always organizing. [...] That also is because we have a very different history of survival, because we had to survive by helping each other. [...] because we lived really far away from the community at that time, and now that I live in the community, I've organized in the community, I know people, so when I walk around the community or the community centre, people know me, I can greet people, and it's like I feel so at home in that space, in that time, in that moment, and I've never had that before.
Nyima, thus, highlights that community is important for belonging, and also for survival. This is corroborated by Kunga, who was supported by the community when she was dealing with mental health issues:

> Then in our Tibetan Community Centre, and now for almost 7 years I have been volunteering there. I try to give my best to the community because then you get to know people, that's why I know lots of people, because many people come to the community centre. I wash dishes, make food, sweep, sell tickets, I do whatever. […] To come out of depression, that's the best solution – community. […] When I used to get depressed, I’d try to put my attention on other things like temple and community.

Community has helped create a sense of belonging for many Tibetans in Toronto and beyond. It has helped shape their identities as Tibetans and has also been a source of comfort and survival for many. Dorjee’s (1992) fears that community would unravel outside of the South Asian Tibetan settlements is, thus, unfounded, as Tibetans have reformed communities by themselves, as highlighted by the Tibetans in Parkdale and Toronto.

*Community as a Site of Nationalism*

Community is important not only to help build a sense of belonging among the Tibetans, but it also serves as a site to nurture nationalism in exile. As Nyima mentioned above, the Tibetan community in Toronto hosts many political gatherings. For example, the community hosts Lhakar evenings every Wednesday in the summer. But nationalism is not just fostered through these political gatherings – it is also fostered by providing a space for Tibetans to learn about their culture, and nurturing Tibetans to carry with them markers of their Tibetan-ness. Community becomes the avenue through which tangible aspects of Tibetan identity can be learned. The Tibetan community in Toronto hosts religious events, language classes, dance classes, and political events, all of which
culminate in forging a stronger Tibetan identity in exile. Yeshe recalls going to the community gatherings when she was younger:

My parents used to take us to all the Tibetan gatherings at the community centre, and I also joined like dance group that performs during special occasions, which was organized by the community centre. So through that I was able to maintain...because back home I went to a Tibetan school.

Thus, for her, the community filled the gaps in her Tibetan education, which was provided by the Tibetan schools in Nepal. Nyima states that her nationalism has been encouraged by the community, and the community members’ Tibetan education has helped her learn more about her identity:

The way I've developed my national identity has been very much rooted in what my parents have instilled, passed on to me and my sister, but then also in my organizing with my community, because their influence is through the schooling system and things like that via the Tibetan government.

For Nyima then, informal education on national identity happened not only at home, but also in the larger community, which supplemented the knowledge she got from her parents. Jamyang grew up in Toronto, and found the community classes as integral for her to connect to her Tibetan identity:

In high school and growing up I took part in Tibetan dance classes, dance, music, singing, instrument. [...] It was organized by the Tibetan community here. So it wasn't part of any school or anything like that. Since as long as I can remember, since we moved here, we had these Saturday/Sunday classes - now there's Sunday school - but yeah. Tibetan dance and music was my main way of really connecting with my identity.

Diki, who has two young sons who were born in Canada, also finds that the Tibetan community in Toronto helps educate her sons about their Tibetan identity:

As a Tibetan it is very important to keep our culture alive, and also the language, tradition, altogether. So I always attend all the community events, even though it is far, like Etobicoke side we have a big community centre. [...] Lhakar during summertime here, we have a circle dance every Wednesday. And my sons are so excited, "Oh today is
Wednesday. Lhakar, Lhakar”. And on that day, I try to put them in the Tibetan dress as well. So overall, I am more engaged in all activities and even Sunday, every Sunday we have Tibetan class, school, day school in the community centre. Yeah, I send [my sons] there.

Community supports the nationalist education of Tibetans in the West, who are unable to access the education system of the TGIE through the Tibetan schooling system. The larger community comes together to ensure that the culture stays alive, even without the formal support system of the TGIE.

Community can be a site where not only nationalism is fostered, but activism is also nurtured. For the case of Tibetan nationalism, activism and identity go hand in hand. For Jamyang, the opportunities to learn about Tibetan culture provided by the Tibetan community in Toronto helped her find her identity not only as a Tibetan, but also as an activist:

In my first year of university, in around 2010-11, is when I joined Students for a Free Tibet. [...] SFT was a really great way for me to connect with my identity. [...] Of course, connecting with my Tibetan identity, but also connecting with my identity as an individual, as Jamyang.

Rinzen also credits the larger activist community, in the form of Students for a Free Tibet, for helping her begin her activism for the Tibetan cause:

“[I] started a chapter of Students for a Free Tibet in my college. [...] So I think that's when I started to be more conscious of my own identity and my role. [...] I started thinking about what I could do to make a difference in my own small little way, given what my parents, my grandparents, and others had been through. So yeah, I felt that obligation and sense of I have to do something.”

Community becomes a site where not only does one learn how to be Tibetan, but also how to ‘do Tibetan’. It thus contributes to an essential component of Tibetan identity – activism.
Community and Culture

Though there is a fear that further migration to the West, away from the Tibetan settlements in South Asia, would erode the strong community ties and hence compromise the Tibetan identity and nationalist movement, the strong community in Toronto has ensured the robust continuity of the nationalist movement in Canada. The Dalai Lama himself finds no reason to worry, claiming that Tibetans who have migrated to the West have generally maintained Tibetan identity quite well (Bernstorff & von Welck, 2003).

Further, the Dalai Lama also states that those who migrate often become much more aware of their Tibetan identity and culture, and the efforts to maintain these can be attributed to the community (Bernstorff & von Welck, 2003). The community understands that the pressure to conform is much stronger in Canada, than in South Asia, and hence tries even harder to maintain a distinct identity and foster nationalism in exile. As Falcone and Wangchuk (2008) argue, “the preoccupation of the exile community with the preservation of tradition has resulted in a degree of ‘enclavement,’ or ‘emplacement’ from Indian society” (p. 165), and this has been possible due to their ability to set up Tibetan settlements in different parts of India, and the Indian government’s understanding to not interfere in these settlements. The Tibetan community in Canada, being a rather small one, has been unable to create its own enclaves, and has had to adapt to the broader Canadian society. They also do not have a similar agreement with the Canadian government as they do with the Indian government, and thus end up having to conform to mainstream Canadian society. Yet, the community has organized itself to ensure that tradition and culture can be preserved in Canada as well. As Yangchen points out:
My little cousin here she's taking Tibetan class, she takes Tibetan dance and by thing is exposed to the music and stuff as well, she also takes ballet and she goes to French immersion school.

While her cousin here conforms to the standards of Canadian society by attending French immersion school and learning ballet, a dance rooted in Western culture, her parents ensure that she does not forget her identity as a Tibetan, and accordingly enrol her in classes that encourage her to learn her Tibetan culture.

**Distance from Community**

Not all participants, however, lean on the larger Tibetan community for support. Some participants mentioned that their community was formed by their family – not only their immediate family, but their extended family that also resided in Toronto. Hence, the larger Tibetan community is not as important to those that have pre-existing familial ties in Canada. For Dechen, her community is found in familial relations:

> My younger cousins and all, I would try to keep in touch with them. Even family friends who are younger than my age group, I actually make an effort to hang out with them and keep the relations. [...] I want a connection to the community. I mean I'm not as involved as other people, like I won't go to the cultural events that we have and all, but just keeping the relationships alive and you know. So I do think community is important. Like if you're not going to make a new community, at least maintaining the ones that you're already a part of.

Sisters Jetsun and Karma do not interact with the larger Tibetan community, partly because they do not have pre-existing connections, and feel awkward to interact without these connections. They state:

> If we had relatives here we would obviously go. But we don't have close relatives, like aunts and uncles. If we had then I'm sure they would be involved and then we would be involved. But we don't have close relatives. That's another thing.

However, they do have cousins in Toronto whom they are quite close to, and that forms their Tibetan community for them. It should also be noted that Dechen, Jetsun and Karma
are all unsure if they want to permanently settle in Canada, and hence could be unsure of investing much time with the larger Tibetan community, especially since they have some familial community that gives them the feeling of familiarity. Further, Dechen, Jetsun and Karma are also from a higher socio-economic standing, and hence, do not need to access the community for support – whether emotional, cultural, social, or financial. The ability to disengage with the larger Tibetan community, thus, also has class connotations, with those that are of a lower class relying more heavily on the larger community for support in a new environment.

Gender and Nationalism

As a project, nationalism is inherently gendered. Yet, it is not only the project that is gendered – the women of the nation are also depicted in certain ways, by both the colonizer and the colonized. The colonizer depicts the women of the colonized nation as backward, with colonization providing the necessary ‘civilizing mission’ to save the women, whereas the colonized depict the women of their nation as epitomizing the ‘inner’ domain, which is deemed to be the non-Western path to emancipation. These depictions of women are also present in the Tibetan case, with different projects constructing different versions of the Tibetan woman.

Constructions of Tibetan Women

Makley (1997) analyses the depictions and constructions of Tibetan women to conclude that three different projects have constructed three different representations of the Tibetan woman – these projects include Chinese nationalism, Tibetan nationalism, and Western feminism. The issue with such constructions, as Makley (1997) states, is that
it paints Tibetan women with a broad brush and does not allow for a heterogenous and nuanced understanding of the realities of Tibetan women. Yet, her own constructions are based on the assumptions of the status of Tibetan women prior to Chinese occupation. These depictions, thus, do not help understand the current status of Tibetan women and only serve to capture Tibetan women as static entities.

Makley (1997) states that the Chinese nationalist construction of Tibetan women assumed that modernization under Chinese rule would improve the status of women. Since Han women were also subjugated under a “feudal patriarchy” and this alone could not be highlighted as the reason for Chinese interference, Tibetan Buddhism became the focus of the Chinese justification for occupation. The narrative of saving the Tibetan women from their own culture is not a new one – indeed, all other colonizers in the past have harnessed similar narratives of emancipation and civilization to justify their occupation. In the case of Tibet, the focus on Tibetan Buddhism has meant that the Chinese have imposed a “state regulated monogamous family structure and control (or eradication) of monastic system” (Makley, 1997, p. 8).

On the other hand, the Tibetan nationalist construction of Tibetan women represents them as already emancipated, citing examples from pre-colonial Tibet like egalitarian marriages, independence in the household, and opportunities to engage in Buddhism. The Tibetan nationalist movement has created an image that Tibetan women do not need to “spend their energy struggling for equality within their society. Women in exile, therefore, always believed that their first priority is the struggle for national survival” (Thonsur, 2003, p. 334). Thus, the push for changing gender relations in
Tibetan society is superseded by the larger movement for independence. Makley (1997), however, is critical of such a narrative, since it does not adequately depict the inferior position of women in more orthodox practices of Tibetan Buddhism. In addition, such a framing also fails to account for the regional and lifestyle differences between different Tibetan groups.

Makley (1997) also posits that Western feminist frameworks of Tibetan women have been preoccupied with “carving a space for their own Tibetan Buddhist practices,” and hence have emphasized that there is nothing within Tibetan Buddhism that oppresses women (p. 11). Yet, as Makley (1997) notes, such a view frames Tibetan identity to overlap with a Buddhist identity, and does not consider other local deities or religions. This third framing of Tibetan women is a particularity of the Tibetan case, where the colonizer itself is another Third World nation, and the West appears as a separate entity to both Chinese and Tibetan nationalisms – thus, instead of two competing framings, the case of Tibet has three distinct framings of Tibetan women.

Contesting ‘Gender Equality’ in Tibetan Communities

These three frameworks, as provided by Makley, fail to consider how Tibetan women understand their own position in Tibetan society. They are not given any agency to understand their own identities as Tibetans and as women – Makley only seeks to understand how others view Tibetan women, but not how they view themselves. Further, Makley’s framework only looks to the pre-colonial Tibetan society to understand how different projects frame the status of women in that time – there is no scope to understand the status of women and gender relations in contemporary Tibetan society, whether inside
Tibet or in exile. Thus, Makley’s framework does not transpose well on to the current situation or understanding of gender relations in Tibetan society.

**Tibetan Nationalism and Women in Exile**

Though Makley only examines how Tibetan nationalism represents women in pre-colonial Tibet, a similar narrative has persisted in exile. In my interviews, I found that older participants as well as those participants that were educated in the Tibetan schooling system celebrated the equal gender relations in Tibetan society. As the elder Dolma noted:

> At the moment, Tibetan women don’t face much problems.

Diki stated that exile has provided the opportunity for true gender equality to exist:

> I think that women, the Tibetan women have equal rights. I notice that most of the Tibetan women are more stable and more professional and who take more responsibility in the family. […] Nowadays, in exile, all equal.

Kunga compares the status of women in current Tibetan society to pre-colonial Tibet, stating:

> Compared to earlier in Tibet, things are quite good now. […] In the community, compared to Tibet, things are much better. In parliament and everything you can see more Tibetan women coming up. It is good because women are softer compared to men, but it is important to have that. They think about other people more than [themselves].

Both Diki and Kunga believe that exile has allowed for gender equality and do not believe that gender disparity exists. Kunga appeals to essentialist notions of women, which can be understood as the epitome of the ‘inner’, to highlight the importance of both femininity and masculinity in society. Kunchen, who was born and brought up in India, compares Tibetan society to the larger Indian society, to conclude that Tibetan women have more equality in their society:
I can compare Tibetan community and Indian community. I've seen that. So compared to Indian community, I think women in Tibetan community are given more respect. And there isn't that discrimination between like men and women. [...] So yeah, but compared to Indian community, yeah I feel like there is no... Tibetan women are in a much better situation.

For Kunchen, thus, the comparison is not with the Tibet of the past, but rather with the exile context that she was brought up in. For these women, influenced by the nationalist rhetoric that is prevalent in the exile communities of South Asia and in Tibetan schools, Tibetan women are equal members of society, as per the projections of the nationalist movement. Yet, unlike Makley’s claims that Tibetan nationalism harks on the equal status of women in ‘old Tibet’ prior to Chinese occupation, these women highlight that Tibetan society is more egalitarian now, in exile, as compared to the society in ‘old Tibet’. Thus, following the framework of Third World nationalism, the inner has been modernized, not by the colonizer, but by the nation itself. This modernization has relied on essentialist notions of femininity and womanhood, congruent with Chatterjee’s framework.

**Beyond Nationalist Frameworks – Complicating Gender Relations**

Many other participants, however, were critical of the gender relations in Tibetan society – a framing of Tibetan women that does not fit any of the frameworks provided by Makley. Yeshe is critical of how Tibetan women are treated by the men, stating:

Because men are always in power and have always been in power, they think that we don't, we can't do much as well, so they always try to put us down. I think that just general, I think that's something that just happens everywhere also, but yeah like even in Tibetan communities.

Dechen also confronts the patriarchy in Tibetan culture:

[Tibetan culture is] also patriarchal, for sure. Like women have to do all the housework [...] The woman has to go to the man's house when they get married. The dad is the head
of the family - the woman can't make decisions for the family. So like that dynamic is there.

Jamyang challenges the narratives that compares the status of women to women in other communities, and also critiques the latent sexism and ageism in Tibetan society:

Something that is very prevalent in the Tibetan community and in the dialogue narrative of Tibetan women is that we have it pretty good compared to other communities. You know, look at the, I don't know, look at the Muslim community, compared to them we have way better. Look at the whatever community. […] We're clearly not looking to progress if we're going to compare ourselves to other communities saying we're good compared to them. That should never be the case. We should always want to do better and to do more. So I think oftentimes maybe there isn't as much explicit oppression against women in the Tibetan community in exile, but there's a lot of sexism, there's a lot of patriarchy, there's a lot of ageism. And those are all things that I experience, especially working very closely as a leader in the community. I think I would experience very different things versus a young woman who isn't as involved in the Tibetan community.

Nyima corroborates Jamyang’s views that Tibetan society can be sexist and ageist:

It would be great if there's an investment in young people, in young women especially because we're never listened to. When it comes to leadership and stuff like that, we're not there. A lot of people are discouraged from being in these settings, because they're sexist and ageist.

These Tibetan women are able to dissociate their identities as Tibetan and as women, and understand that they can demand more equality from Tibetan society without compromising the nationalist movement. If, as Chatterjee (1993) posits, the inner can be modernized from within the nation, then women, as part of the nation, must also have a voice in how the modernization project is carried out, especially with regards to gender. While Chatterjee does not allow for much agency to women themselves in his understanding of how the nation deals with women, these Tibetan women are leading the way to challenge existing structures in Tibetan society that are barriers to equality.
Conclusion

Tibetan nationalism is simultaneously a case of Third World and exilic nationalisms. While exile has been the main arena for the development of Tibetan nationalism, it is both the championing of the superiority of the Tibetan ‘inner’ as well as the reality of the situation inside of Tibet that has determined the agenda of Tibetan nationalism in practice. At the same time, Tibetan nationalism has had to appeal to a larger, Western audience to justify their demand for independence – this has meant that the movement has had to frame its demands in transnational language, to emphasize the effect of Tibetan colonization on the larger world.

The focus of the nationalist project has been on language and religion – both issues have been mobilized as essential to Tibetan culture, and their maintenance has thus been prioritized. Community has been a key factor in maintaining Tibetan identity and nationalism in exile – the historical roots of Tibetan settlements in South Asia laid the foundation of the need for community for survival and has ensured that Tibetan communities have continued even in further migration to the West.

The nationalist project is inherently gendered – different framings of Tibetan women have been produced by different interest groups, namely the Chinese nationalist movement, Tibetan nationalist movement, and Western feminism. Yet, these official narratives of Tibetan womanhood deny the multiplicity of ways in which Tibetan women exist and negotiate their identities as both Tibetan and women. The demand for modernizing gender relations in Tibetan society coexists with robust Tibetan nationalism, highlighting that the ‘inner’ is not static, but rather must be revolutionized from within.
the nation. The contested versions of gender equality in the Tibetan community show that
Tibetan women are challenging homogenous understandings of the Tibetan community
and the nationalist movement; the varying understandings of gender relations reveal that
multiple narratives can coexist in the nationalist movement.

The next chapter will build on the themes presented in this chapter to analyse how
notions of citizenship change in different parts of exile yet remain congruent with a
strong Tibetan nationalist movement. Differing notions of citizenship in South Asia and
the West will be explored, and an understanding of Tibetan citizenship will be presented.
Chapter 6: Citizenship and Identity

Introduction

Citizenship in the host nations can prove to be a conundrum for many refugees – while some refugees see the refusal of citizenship as the ultimate sign of nationalism (Malkki, 1995), other refugees understand that the privileges of citizenship can be used to further promote the nationalist movement (McGranahan, 2018). Indeed, as the Tibetan case highlights, claims to nationalism have been made by those who have refused citizenship as well as those who have accepted. However, there are different patterns to the refusal and acceptance of citizenship – refugees in South Asia have tended to refuse citizenship, while those who have migrated further West have chosen to accept citizenship. The politics of refusal and acceptance are not only mediated by refugee choice – indeed, the host state can often be the biggest hurdle in accessing citizenship.

For Tibetans in exile, citizenship in Canada confers security, but also gives them tangible rights that they have never had before, as stateless individuals. Yet, citizenship in Canada is not a personal victory for individuals – it is a means to promote the community’s wellbeing, by spreading the Tibetan nationalist movement to the host nation. The persistence of a robust nationalist movement in Canada is signified by the limited claims Tibetans have made on the Canadian land and the strong desire to return to the Tibetan homeland.

Citizenship, however, has predominantly been limited to the notion of the state, and the inability to extricate the state from citizenship has complicated the claims that Tibetans in exile make to Tibetan citizenship. While the TGIE has attempted to create a
fully-functioning state apparatus in exile, the inability of the TGIE to claim statehood has limited the ability of Tibetans in exile to understand themselves as Tibetan citizens. Yet, while Tibetans may be cautious to claim Tibetan citizenship, their claims to Tibetan identity are uncontested.

This chapter on citizenship and identity is divided into two sections. The first section highlights the relationship between citizenship and identity. It analyses some of the frameworks of citizenship, to understand the claims that the exile population makes to Tibetan citizenship. These claims to citizenship are contrasted with the participants’ claims to Tibetan identity. The second section details how citizenship and nationalism are intertwined, and how Tibetans navigate citizenship differently in different exile locations, namely South Asia and Canada, while still retaining a strong connection to Tibetan nationalism. The section ends with the limits to claiming citizenship in a state that does not coincide with the Tibetan nation, and the temporary understanding of such citizenship. The questions this chapter aims to answer are: how are citizenship and identity interlinked? What are the claims made to Tibetan citizenship by exiled Tibetans? What is the relationship between citizenship and nationalism? How are claims to nationalism mediated by Tibetans through citizenship in South Asia and Canada?

Citizenship and Identity

Frameworks of Citizenship

Dominant notions of citizenship have asserted that citizenship must coincide with the nation-state – that is, there is an assumed relationship between citizenship and the idea of a state (O’Byrne, 2003). This notion of citizenship is considered a modern one,
which has come about with the rise of the modern nation-state. Such an understanding is also rooted in a Western framework of citizenship. Yet, such traditional notions of citizenship are being challenged in the face of globalization, which has given rise to an idea of a ‘world citizenship,’ and by the rise of transnational movements, which has developed a ‘non-modern’ idea of citizenship (O’Byrne, 2003). ‘Non-modern’ citizenship is primarily a cultural identification, which can correspond to an affiliation with a religion or ethnic community (O’Byrne, 2003).

Though scholars have challenged the notion that citizenship requires the presence of a modern nation-state (O’Byrne, 2003; Hoffman, 2004; Tandon, 2005), the dominance of this narrative in academic as well as common dialogue has resulted in a narrow understanding of citizenship, which was reflected by the participants in this study as well. For the Tibetan case, the question arises if a nation can exist without a state, and if citizenship in this nation can be asserted, even if the state is under occupation. Yuval-Davis (2006) acknowledges that T.H. Marshall’s (1950) classical definition of citizenship did not mention the state, but rather understood it as being “full membership of the community, with all its rights and responsibilities” (p. 206). Though the state was assumed in this definition, taking a broader understanding of this definition allows us to understand the different forms of citizenship that exist, beyond the state (Yuval-Davis, 2006).

*Citizenship and the Tibetan Government in Exile*

T.H. Marshall’s (1950) definition of citizenship establishes it as membership in a political community that is also associated with certain rights and responsibilities. He
premised citizenship on civil, political, and social rights and obligations. The civil dimension includes “the rights necessary for individual freedom” and is mediated by the legal system; the political dimension includes the “right to participate in the exercise of political power” and refers to the right to vote, and; the social includes welfare and security that the state provides to its citizens (Marshall, 1950, p. 10-11).

According to the framework presented by Marshall, the TGIE provides Tibetans in exile with all – civil, political and social rights. The Charter of Tibetans in Exile, adopted in 1991, establishes a Tibetan judiciary, which is responsible for “protection of the rule of law by guaranteeing justice to all” (Central Tibetan Administration, 2019). Yet, because the TGIE and Tibetans in exile operate within the state they reside in, they have to abide by the laws of that state, and their civil rights are also mediated by their host country (Brox, 2012). In terms of political rights, the Charter ensures that all Tibetan adults have the right to vote and hold political office – these voting rights are mediated through the Green Book33, which every Tibetan in exile must hold to claim refugee status with the CTA (Central Tibetan Administration, 1991). The TGIE also provides some social welfare to those in exile. Those who have the Green Book can claim school admission, school and university scholarships, and employment in the exiled community (Central Tibetan Administration, 2019). In addition, the Charter ensures that the TGIE will provide economic assistance to those that are physically handicapped or economically

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33 The Tibetan Green Book is issued to all Tibetans that contribute Chatrel, a monthly voluntary contribution to the CTA by Tibetans in exile. The payment of this chatrel signifies the recognition of the CTA as the legitimate representative of Tibetans. The CTA claims that over the Green Book has “become the passport of the exiled Tibetans to claim their rights from the CTA. Also in future it will become a base to claim Tibetan citizenship” (CTA, 2019).
disadvantaged (Central Tibetan Administration, 1991). Thus, as per Marshall’s framework, the TGIE is operates as a state, with formal access to citizenship to its nationals, as well as fulfilling responsibilities towards its members.

The Charter asserts citizens of Tibet as those that were born in Tibet, or those who were born outside of Tibet, but whose biological mother or father is of Tibetan descent (Central Tibetan Administration, 1991). The Charter allows for dual citizenship, and also allows any individual who is formally a citizen of another country but who has been married to a Tibetan national for more than three years to acquire Tibetan citizenship. Thus, under these conditions, all the participants interviewed are considered Tibetan citizens. Yet, many participants, especially those born in exile, hesitated to claim Tibetan citizenship. Most of them took a narrow understanding of citizenship as tied to state and did not feel that they had to right to claim Tibetan citizenship. However, the older generation that had been born in Tibet, problematized such simplistic notions of citizenship, to take a boarder understanding of the term.

*Claims to Citizenship by Tibetans in Exile*

The older generation who were born in Tibet were quick to assert that they identified as citizens of Tibet. For them, the notion of citizenship was not tied to just a legal identity – it was an ethnic identity as well, and an emotional connection to a nation and community, not only a state. One of the elders, Dolma, did not hesitate before responding to my question:

Tariqa: Do you also identify as a Tibetan citizen?

Dolma: Of course, yes.
Another elder, Tsewang, elaborated further on her identity as a Tibetan citizen. While Tibetan citizenship was an emotional connection, this connection was solidified by her possession of a Tibetan Green Book. As she stated:

Tibetans have a Tibetan Green Book, which is a tax book, and we do our monthly contributions. So both myself and my husband try to contribute without any delay. The Tibetan Canadian Cultural Centre, we also have a membership system there. So a lot of Tibetans here in the community are members, the membership is $10 a month. So because we are under social assistance we cannot afford to pay both, so we try to pay the Tibetan Green Book, because I identify that as the citizenship, Tibetan citizenship.

For her, the tax that she paid to the TGIE and the Green Book identity that she had were the markers of her Tibetan citizenship. These elder participants, who did not have much education and were not socialized into the Western modes of thinking, were the ones who applied a broader, ‘non-modern’ understanding of citizenship.

While all the participants had a Green Book, the younger generation, most of whom were born in exile, were cautious of claiming Tibetan citizenship. As Nyima explains, the Green Book signifies membership to a nation, but not to a state:

What that membership is, is a membership into nationhood, what we construct as nationhood outside of it. It is our passport, it is our citizenship, it is our everything. And it's special to us because nobody else recognizes it.

The fact that no other sovereign state recognizes the Green Books as an identity of Tibetan citizenship negates the citizenship that the TGIE confers on exiled Tibetans and complicates the understanding of Tibetan citizenship for the younger generation. As Yangchen mentions, there is no sovereign Tibetan state to be a citizen of:

I first and foremost identify as Tibetan, but when you say a Tibetan citizen, I'm not sure if... I say I am ethnically Tibetan and I identify as Tibetan but would never say that I am a Tibetan citizen. […] I obviously know that nobody will probably understand when I say I'm a Tibetan citizen because there's no country to be a citizen of.

Jamyang reiterates this statement:
I'm just thinking about citizenship means that there is a sovereign nation that you are a citizen to, I mean in technical terms. I don't think I would [identify as a Tibetan citizen] because I've never been to Tibet, you know. [...] So for me I've never lived in a free Tibet, I've never lived in an occupied Tibet, and I've never even been to Tibet. So I don't think I can say that I am a citizen of Tibetan. But I would definitely say that Tibetans inside of Tibet are citizens of Tibet.

Jamyang states that ‘technically’ there needs to be a state and a residential affiliation to the state to claim citizenship. For her, having never lived or even visited Tibet, she does not feel she can claim Tibetan citizenship. Thus, an ethnic and emotional affiliation with Tibet is not the only criteria for the younger generation to claim Tibetan citizenship – the absence of a sovereign state denies them accessing citizenship of Tibet. Rinzen ponders her citizenship, stating:

I think Tibetan is part of my identity, but I wouldn't...if someone asked if are you a citizen of Tibet, I would probably say no. Because I see that as a distinctly legal category, and I have never lived in Tibet.

The legality of not having an independent state prevents Rinzen from asserting Tibetan citizenship. She disassociates Tibetan citizenship from her Tibetan identity, and while she claims the latter, she does not feel like she can claim the former. Not having ever lived or even visited Tibet is a major factor in determining how some participants relate to being Tibetan citizens. As Dechen explains:

Dechen: I wouldn't say I consider myself a citizen of Tibet, I would say I am like a Tibetan refugee. Yeah. I don't know if I'd say I'm from Tibet though. Like when people ask me, oh you're Tibetan so you're from Tibet, I say no, I'm from Nepal.

Tariqa: Why the distinction?

Dechen: Because I've never really been to Tibet so I can't claim that I'm from Tibet. Like even if I had maybe visited I would consider it but I haven't stepped foot there.

Thus, these participants were careful to make a distinction between being Tibetan, as an ethnic identity, and being a Tibetan citizen, a politico-legal identity. These participants were brought up in an educational and social system that emphasized the predominance
of Western modes of thinking, and hence this could have contributed to their narrow understanding of the term ‘citizenship’. Yet, it must also be considered that having a weak connection to the physical space of Tibet also complicated their notions of citizenship.

Two participants who were born in exile in India and were brought up in the Tibetan schooling system also identified as Tibetan citizens. Kunga, for example, equates citizenship to the various identities that she holds in relation to where she has lived and her ethnic identity:

Tariqa: Do you also identify as a Tibetan citizen?
Kunga: Yes of course. I am lucky, I am Indian, Tibetan and Canadian.

Her identification with Tibet signifies her membership to the Tibetan nation, and her identification with Canada and India signifies her journey through life in two different states. Thus, Kunga takes a traditional as well as a non-modern understanding of citizenship to answer this question. Kunchen, on the other hand, while identifying as a Tibetan citizen, finds that there are limitations to this identity:

So politically...it's kind of difficult. I'm Tibetan because I was born to a Tibetan mother and Tibetan father, who were born in Tibet. So I identify myself as a Tibetan citizen, but geographically and like politically, I don't know what I am.

Thus, for her, the ethnic Tibetan identity confers Tibetan citizenship upon her, but the lack of a politico-legal state of Tibet, and having never been to Tibet, limits her claims to this Tibetan citizenship.
Gendered Logics of Citizenship

Such differing understandings of and claims to citizenship reveal how the ideas of citizenship are inherently gendered. The rational and legal understanding of citizenship within a state is trumped over personal and emotional understandings of citizenship and belonging in a nation. These ‘public’ notions of citizenship emphasize objectivity, reason and rationality, and can be understood as a more ‘masculine’ (and Westernized) notion of citizenship (Dahlgren, 2006). In contrast, ‘private’ notions of citizenship, which emphasize belonging, intimacy, identity and emotions, and can be understood as a ‘feminine’ notion of citizenship, are de-emphasized as pathways to citizenship (Dahlgren, 2006). As was reflected by the younger participants, emotions and identity are undermined when compared to rational understandings of citizenship boundaries. Though most of the participants are active members of the Tibetan nation, and their activism forms an intrinsic part of their Tibetan identity, since their activism is based on an emotional sense of belonging, rather than a rational and legal form of citizenship, they dismiss their claims to Tibetan citizenship.

Tibetan Identity – “Where Are You From?”

While the participants had varied understandings and responses to the questions of Tibetan citizenship, they unanimously identified as Tibetans, holding that identity proudly. While they may have questioned their membership to a Tibetan state, they did not question their membership to the Tibetan nation. In addition, their citizenship to another state, whether Canada, Nepal or India, did not take away from their membership
in the Tibetan nation – thus, a hybridized identity, where citizenship is flexible and de-linked from an ethno-cultural identity, emerges.

When asked how they respond to the question “Where are you from?,” most participants took this as an opportunity to highlight their Tibetan ethnicity. For those that were born in Tibet, the answer was simple – they would respond that they were from Tibet. Diki, however, understands that while she identifies with being from Tibet, the person asking the question may not know much about the current situation of Tibet. She says:

It's not that easy to know about Tibet. […] Like where's Tibet, all those kind of questions come. So, based on the other person's reaction I explain them, and if they have, like, if they are okay to listen, I try to explain like how, what's the current status, how it happened, what was before, [the] situation.

She takes the opportunity to explain the political situation in Tibet and Chinese colonialism. An elder, Tsewang, also considers the position of the person who is asking the question:

Tsewang: If someone asks me in Nepal, I would say I'm from Tibet, but if someone asks me here, I would say I came from Nepal.

Tariqa: Why the [distinction]?

Tsewang: Depends on who asks the question. Which country are you from or where I am from? Depending on how the question is phrased.

Tariqa: So if country was asked, you would say Nepal?

Tsewang: Yes.

Thus, she distinguishes between the country she is from, and the nation she is from. She comes from the country of Nepal but belongs to the region and nation that is Tibet. These distinctions, though minor, reflect the complex identities that Tibetan women in exile hold, and their answers reflect their personal journeys through exile.
For the participants born in exile, the answer is never straightforward. Many of the participants circumvent the question “Where are you from?”, and answer instead with their ethnic and national identity, in a way similar to Tsewang. Thus, they respond by saying “I am Tibetan”. Having not been born in Tibet, living in Tibet, and, in many cases, ever visiting Tibet, those born in exile are hesitant to assert that they are from Tibet, as Dechen was quoted previously. Their citizenship does not necessarily match how they self-identify, as Yeshe found in an encounter at the United States border:

I say I'm Tibetan. Yeah. That's the instinct that comes in. I recall an incident where when I was travelling to US by myself by bus and then the army or someone came, the police officer came, and just suddenly started asking questions to everybody, so he was like “state your citizenship,” and that was the first time I was asked, and I was like what do I say, I always said Tibetan but that's not what he wants to hear, right. He wants to know what passport, papers, documents I have. And then I'm like okay I have to think kind of like, Canadian.

The participants born in exile also contend with who is asking the question. For Jamyang, her answer is rooted in her identity as a racialized immigrant in Canada:

The reason why I'm asking you it would depend on who is asking is if some random old white man asks me where are you from I would say I'm from Toronto. I'm from Parkdale. Whereas again in this context, you know, especially it is someone, for Tibetans in exile a big part of our identity is also having a lot of South Asian influence, growing up in India or Nepal, so I think if you asked I would be like, yeah I'm Tibetan. I'm not from Tibet, I've never been there, but I'm Tibetan. My ancestors are Tibetan, my dad is Tibetan, my mom is Tibetan. And then I'll probably get right into politics. I'll start telling you 1959 we lost independence.

Racial politics play out in the South Asian context as well, where those born in India or Nepal have to clarify their identity, since they do not look Indian or Nepali. As Kunchen states:

Kunchen: I usually say that I'm a Tibetan, born and raised in India. That's how I answer. Tariqa: But you don't just say that you're Tibetan? You do say that you're born and raised in India?
Kunchen: Yeah. Because I feel like when you talk to a stranger, when you say you are born and raised in India, they look at me and they're like really, but you don't look Indian. So I have to say that I'm a Tibetan, born and raised in India.

In Nepal, Jetsun and Karma also have to clarify their ethnic identity:

Jetsun: I say Nepal. But then I say that I'm Tibetan from Nepal. I'm a Nepali-Tibetan.

Karma: Because then they say that...

Jetsun: Because they're like you don't look Nepalese. They always say that. Then I say that I'm actually Tibetan.

[...]

Jetsun: I won't really say it when I first meet the person [that I'm Tibetan]. Unless they ask that oh you don't look Nepalese.

Nyima realizes that the answer to this simple question is quite complicated for her, and explaining the situation to the person asking the question can sometimes take an emotional toll on her:

I say it's complicated. Because I'm from Nepal...so sometimes I try to mess with people and I'm like ‘I'm Himalayan’, because that's not untrue. The Himalayas are a region, it's a geographical area, it's a landscape, it's a hotbed of many different cultures, and that is also where my parents are from. But it also allows me to not necessarily name a state because if I name my state, it is confusing to people, and it becomes very laborious for me to explain again who I am, where I'm from, that I exist, that my people exist. It's just very taxing. At first...I obviously would tell people ‘I'm Tibetan’ and then they would be like ‘huh’, and then I have to be like ‘oh but I was born in Nepal, and most of my family actually lives in South India.’ And then people are like ‘what?’

She further goes on to explain that though she does identify as a Tibetan, she is careful in assessing if she wants to invest in educating the questioner on her history. In fact, she has gone ahead to play with the notion of identity itself, to make the questioner interrogate their own assumptions when asking the question:

For the most part I try to tell people I'm Tibetan, and then if I have the energy now, I will tell them all my long-winded stories, […] I think it depends on who they are and if it warrants a real explanation or if I really care to invest in this person's knowledge of my own peoples.
Kunga is the only participant that responds to the question differently. She says:

I say I'm from India. I say that because no matter what, India is my first home. [...] Then if I see an Indian...Indians don't share the same face [features] as us, and Indians talk more in English. [...] But even now if I see an Indian, I ask them [in Hindi] “where are you from?” I talk to them in Hindi. It feels nice - you feel like home when you talk in Hindi. Whoever asks, I say I'm from India.

She clarifies, however, that though she identifies as Tibetan, she does not feel she can claim to be from Tibet, and hence, she answers differently:

I am Tibetan, but I've never seen Tibet. That is why it just comes out of my mouth that I'm from India.

Thus, a simple question has varying answers from the participants. The participants assess not only how the question is framed and ponder over the semantics, but they also consider the identity of the person asking the question. Their answers to this question are not always stable, and the context of when it is asked is important. Yet, while they might have varying answers to where they are from, all the participants do identify as Tibetans, and that is one aspect of their identity that they do not question.

**Citizenship and Nationalism**

The charter of the CTA allows exiled Tibetans to claim dual citizenship. That is, Tibetans can take on citizenship from a foreign country while still retaining their status as CTA refugees. Yet, while Tibetans in the West have taken on citizenship in their new countries, those that have remained in South Asia have been weary of doing so. While refusing citizenship is seen as a political act and an assertion of nationalism by those Tibetans living in South Asia, accepting citizenship in the West is also viewed as being consistent with Tibetan nationalism. The differing views on citizenship in different parts
of exile highlight the difference in access to citizenship, as well as the multiplicity of ways in which nationalism can be maintained with different citizenship statuses.

**Citizenship in South Asia**

**Refusal as Nationalism**

While most Tibetans in India and Nepal do not get Indian or Nepali citizenship, almost all the Tibetans in Canada aspire to naturalize as Canadian citizens. There are a few reasons for these different attitudes to citizenship. Tibetans in South Asia contend that gaining citizenship in India or Nepal is seen as diluting a ‘pure’ Tibetan identity (Houston & Wright, 2003; Falcone & Wangchuk, 2008). For many Tibetans, the biggest signifier of authenticity and purity in exile in India is their refusal to take up Indian citizenship, choosing to live a liminal life as a refugee instead. As Malkki (1992) asserts, refugee status is valued as a “sign of the ultimate temporariness of exile and of the refusal to become naturalized, to put down roots in a place to which one did not belong” (p. 35). McGranahan (2018) notes that, “by refusing citizenship in South Asia, Tibetans both make a political statement and position themselves morally: they are citizens of Tibet, a people with a sovereign country, a people still fighting for their country and for truth” (p. 370). Refusing citizenship in South Asia is, thus, an assertion of Tibetan identity and nationalism – it is a political statement, meant to distinguish Tibetans from their host societies and to establish Tibet as a distinct nation from China.

**Strategic Considerations**

Further, the TGIE, while allowing dual citizenship, does dissuade Tibetans in South Asia from getting citizenship. This is because the TGIE would lose their constituency for
governing if all Tibetans in South Asia get citizenship in India or Nepal (Falcone & Wangchuck, 2008). Citizenship would also increase the mobility of Tibetans, both within and outside of South Asia, and this mobility could jeopardize the settlement life that has been integral to the maintenance of a distinct Tibetan identity in exile. Thus, strategically, the TGIE has to discourage Tibetans in South Asia from gaining citizenship, so as to not undermine their own political position.

South Asian Bureaucracy

It is not only political and identity factors that prevent Tibetans in South Asia from acquiring citizenship. Though Tibetans have been in exile in South Asia for more than 60 years, the path to citizenship in South Asian countries like India and Nepal has been quite difficult. Citizenship in India and Nepal is based on *jus sanguinis* – thus, individuals born in these countries are only able to gain citizenship if one of their parents was a *legal* citizen of the country during the time of their birth. Since neither India nor Nepal are signatories of the UN Convention on Refugees, Tibetans are also not technically recognized as refugees in either country. In India, they are issued Foreigner’s Registration Certificates (RC) and Identification Certificates (IC) (McGranahan, 2018). Since they are treated as foreigners, the government “is free to expel refugees as it would any other foreigners” (Hess, 2006, p. 82). In Nepal, McGranahan (2018) states the situation is worse: “the government has never had an official program to identify and provide documentation to all Tibetan refugees” (p. 371). Thus, most Tibetans in India and Nepal have been unable to access citizenship, and their position there is precarious. They are often unable to apply for many jobs – for example, in Nepal, Tibetan refugees are
unable to obtain employment in hotels and businesses (Moynihan, 2003). The precarity is not only in terms of security – it is also economic.

The difficulties in getting citizenship in India and Nepal were reiterated by the participants in this study. As Kunchen stated:

I'm Tibetan born and raised in India, but I don't have, like, the right that the Indian people get. Even like, the right to vote, right to leave country as you wish.

One of the elders told me that she had never applied for Indian citizenship because:

I won't be given citizenship, because I was born in Tibet and because Tibet is under Chinese occupation, and Tibetans live in India as stateless persons, so they don't qualify.

Another elder, Tsewang, from Nepal, also recounted a similar story:

In Nepal, even if you're born there, or even if your children are born there, even if they become old and die there, you won't get citizenship. There's no such thing as naturalization. If you have a lot of money, you will get it. […] In Nepal, even if your children get the highest education and complete whatever is needed to be done, you won't get a job if you don't have the national identity document. My son completed very high education, and he applied for various jobs and got offers, but because he didn't have the national identity, they were not willing to give a job. So I used all my resources, all my life savings, to buy him the identity document, and then finally he got a job.

Though some Tibetans have successfully challenged the law in India to gain citizenship, Falcone and Wangchuk (2008) highlight that Tibetans in exile that have sought Indian citizenship are routinely refused Indian citizenship, even though the laws do allow them access to it. In addition, they claim that “citizenship seekers are bureaucratically impeded by Indian ministries” (p. 169). Nyima substantiates these claims by telling me the story of her cousins:

There's been like a case or two now of Tibetans who have taken it to court to be able to get citizenship, but you know that system is only going to work for people who a) have capital to fund that, because you don't just fund the process, you fund all the people you have to pay, because of the bureaucracy and corruption, so the average Tibetan cannot do that.
Hess (2006) also adds that “like all bureaucratic processes in India, obtaining citizenship is likely to be complicated by the whims of individual bureaucrats who may expect bribes” (p. 84). Kunga corroborates that though the bureaucracy can be avoided through corrupt mechanisms, these avenues are only available to the wealthy:

In India, to be honest, if you don't have money you cannot do anything. Especially if...I'm born there, but I still can't do everything [because I am not a citizen].

Thus, in the highly bureaucratized settings of India and Nepal, many Tibetans have been unable to access citizenship, even if they are eligible for it. In addition, those that do have citizenship or status in these countries have often obtained them through illegal means and remain in precarious situations.

*Citizenship in Western Countries*

**Ease of Access**

The path to citizenship is sometimes easier in Canada than compared to the South Asian countries of India and Nepal. Citizenship in Canada is based on *jus soli*, where any individual born on Canadian soil is deemed a Canadian citizen. The naturalization pathway is also more straightforward, and thus, access to citizenship is not as lengthy and bureaucratic a process in Canada. McGranahan (2018) contends that the process, though not easy, is more accessible in Canada than it is in the US. Applying for asylum in the United States, she states, requires knowledge and resources which are not always readily available. In addition, the burden of proof for claiming asylum is higher in the United States – Tibetans must prove that they have been, or fear a future of political persecution in either Tibet, India or Nepal. Kunga, who had attempted to apply for asylum in the United States, recalled:
I stayed in New York for 6 months, because I had to work because my daughter was in [a private boarding school in India] and the fees is high. And so I have to work, right? So I worked maybe like 12 hours [a day]. For 6 months I worked. And then I thought to apply for [asylum] papers. But if you apply for the papers in New York, you have to pay for the lawyer, you have to pay so many things. And if my papers were not made, it would make things very difficult. So I went back to India.

The institutional barriers, high cost of legal fees, and lack of community support made claiming asylum in the United States an impossible task for Kunga. She decided to come to Canada because one of her cousins was already based here, and she felt she would get the support needed. In Canada, Tibetans only need to prove that they are Tibetans, not necessarily being actively politically persecuted, to claim asylum (McGranahan, 2018). Hence, the easier bureaucratic access to asylum, and then citizenship, in Canada may make Canadian citizenship more accessible to Tibetan exiles.

Inability to Refuse

While it is easier to continue living as a refugee in India and Nepal, this is not a path necessarily available in Western countries. In South Asia, Tibetans can continue living as stateless persons, with their RCs and ICs or other identity documentation, especially since the countries are not signatories of the UN Convention on Refugee rights. Yet, as states that have ratified the UN Convention on Refugees, Canada and the US are not supposed to let refugees remain as such over several generations (McGranahan, 2018). Indeed, there are limited options for remaining in these countries without applying for a permanent resident status. In addition, social and economic precarity for Tibetans is often more severe in the West than in South Asia, where Tibetan communities have been established for a longer time and live in larger settlements.
Therefore, structural considerations for accepting citizenship in Canada versus refusing citizenship in South Asia must also be considered.

Acceptance as Nationalism

Citizenship in Western countries also allows Tibetans to actively engage with the political community and general population to rally around the issue of Tibetan occupation. Hess (2006) refers to this role as ‘immigrant ambassadors’, stating that “Tibetans in the United States are adopting US citizenship, and are encouraged to do so by the exile government on the grounds that gaining a political voice in the United States enables Tibetans to be ‘ambassadors’ for their lost homeland (p. 80). Such a view is not limited to the United States – similar motivations are also in play when Tibetans gain citizenship in other Western countries, including Canada. Indeed, Tibetans are encouraged to use the opportunities provided by civil rights in Western nations to press the political and larger community of their host nations to support Tibet (Hess, 2009).

Citizenship in Canada, thus, is not obtained only for a personal reason – it is to further the Tibetan nationalist movement and to spread it beyond the South Asian region. In India, most of the population is indifferent to the situation of Tibetan refugees (Falcone & Wangchuk, 2008), a point that was made by Nyima to me in her interview. Falcone and Wangchuk (2008) attribute this apathy to:

A lack of information in Indian mainstream media regarding the plight of Tibetan refugees, the enormity of the Indian population in contrast to the relatively small number of Tibetans in exile in India, and the separation of Tibetans from the mainstream Indian education system (p. 185).
The very fact that Canada has a smaller population than India and that Tibetans have had to assimilate into the mainstream ensures that they can spread information about the Tibetan occupation and further the nationalist movement to the larger Canadian population, as citizens of Canada.

Citizenship in a country like Canada also allows for stronger transnational ties with the larger Tibetan diaspora, and can be a way to “marshal resources that increase the effectiveness of the transnational Tibet movement (Hess, 2006, p. 92). The power and security that comes with a Canadian passport thus allows for Tibetans to have stronger relations to Tibet, and to strengthen the transnational activism around the Tibetan freedom movement (Hess, 2006; Hess, 2009). The ease of international travel granted by a Canadian passport is not limited to personal travels – as Hess (2006) finds, “US citizenship allows Tibetans to more easily maintain transnational connections, through ease of travel, whether it is to Tibet or to India and other places where diasporic Tibetans live” (p. 97). Similarly, for the participants I interviewed, they recognized how easy international travel due to Canadian citizenship allowed them to connect with different aspects of their Tibetan identity. An elder, Tsewang, mentioned that she wants citizenship so that she can travel freely for religious pilgrimages:

Once you become a citizen, you don't need to apply for a travel document, you just apply for passport and can independently travel, go for pilgrimage […]. So you get that flexibility to travel. […] I want citizenship to go to Bodh Gaya - once I have citizenship I can easily travel to Bodh Gaya. […] I am eagerly waiting to become a Canadian citizen so that I can freely go to Bodh Gaya whenever I wish.

Religion being a big part of her identity as a Tibetan, gaining Canadian citizenship would allow her to travel to the Buddhist pilgrimage sites. Nyima has also taken advantage of her Canadian citizenship to travel around different Tibetan communities around the world.
and build relationships with other Tibetans. She states that she went to India to learn Tibetan in Dharamsala, and with her language skills she connected with other Tibetan communities:

I started to do that language building, and it was in my travels to different diasporas of Tibetan communities, even in America. I went to New Mexico in the fall, and there's a small Tibetan community, and I spoke to them in Tibetan and I was so proud of myself, because I was like I've come so full circle, I've come to the ends of the Earth, and I've found my people here in a small pocket, and they're so happy to speak with me, and to speak with me in Tibetan.

Canadian citizenship becomes an avenue for Tibetans to assert and spread Tibetan nationalism. This is done by both engaging with the local population of their new host country, as well as by exploiting the ease of travel granted by Canadian citizenship to engage in transnational activism. Citizenship, hence, is not only a personal gain, but one that affects the larger Tibetan community and nationalist movement.

Gaining citizenship in Western countries, however, does not imply that Tibetans disassociate from their Tibetan identity, which is rooted in an identity as a refugee. McGranahan (2018) states that “refugee status is, with or without citizenship, posited as a political claim to Tibet” (p. 372). While Tibetans in South Asia maintain their refugee status by refusing citizenship, the possibilities of citizenship in Canada and the United States has changed the politics of refusal – “[Tibetans] no longer refuse citizenship but instead refuse the idea that citizenship cancels their refugee status […] and thus cancels Tibetan claims to sovereignty” (McGranahan, 2018, p. 372). This notion was also asserted by one of the participants, Jamyang, who states:

I always tell this to people, but you know Tibetans in India right now many of them are technically and by law they are stateless, so whenever I introduce who I am, where I'm from, I always make sure, I self-identify as stateless. Because technically I'm not, I hold a Canadian passport, I'm very, very privileged. Wherever I go I have this passport and I
have the Canadian government to support me in anything that I do, so that's why I always say that I self-identify as being stateless. [...] I'm fighting to get back something that I never had - my Tibetan identity.

In further exile, accepting citizenship does not mean that Tibetans disassociate from their Tibetan identity. In contrast to Malkki’s (1992) claim, then, refugeeness is not the only way to assert an ‘ultimate temporariness’ and robust nationalism – indeed, new ways of reconciling their Tibetan identity and their citizenship are found, which includes self-identifying as stateless.

Citizenship and Security

In her research, Hess (2009) found that many of the Tibetans she interviewed in India and the US claimed that insecurity was not a motivation for migration to the West, insisting that the motivations were purely economic. However, most of the participants I interviewed viewed Canadian citizenship in terms of security and did not mention economic reasons. The reasons for getting Canadian citizenship, as most participants stated, was to have the rights of a citizen and to have a sense of security. Most of the participants interviewed were born in exile and did not hold any citizenship previously – thus, they have not known the security that comes from having citizenship. Jamyang told me the importance of citizenship for Tibetan exiles:

I think that a lot of Tibetans who have lived in exile, many of us who are born in exile, I think many Tibetans are always looking for that security, always looking for that, you know, being able to feel safe. So I think, yeah, a lot of Tibetans are looking for citizenship, whether that is in the West, in North America or Europe or anywhere.

While four of the participants interviewed did hold Nepali citizenship and were in the process of applying for PR in Canada, two of them mentioned that their Nepali citizenship still did not confer a sense of security on them. Dechen explains her weariness
of the Nepali government, stating:

The government in power, right, like right now is not such a good time to be a citizen of Nepal. Because the government is like leaning towards strong partnerships with China. So obviously as a Tibetan I want to be in a country where I know that I am going to be safe.

Yangchen also explains that she did not experience the freedoms that come with citizenship, because her Nepali citizenship was based on false papers:

Yangchen: [Citizenship means] somewhere that I can be without worrying. Like a place I can be me without worrying about, you know, will I be repatriated, will I be able to do what I please without having to worry about little things.

Tariqa: Was that an issue...? So you used to have Nepali citizenship, right?

Yangchen: No I didn't really have Nepalese citizenship, but I did have false Nepalese papers, which sort of granted me citizenship in Nepal, but at the same time...

Tariqa: But you didn't have real freedoms?

Yangchen: Yeah. So I never experienced the problems, but going through this [refugee] case, I realized the problems that my dad has experienced. […] My dad owns a carpet factory, so for him he had multiple opportunities to expand and buy property and stuff like that, but he was always afraid to do it. He's like he doesn't want to draw too much attention to himself because he knows his papers are faulty and...

Tariqa: He might be sent back?

Yangchen: He wasn't so worried about being sent back but about being exploited and stuff, because he was like being sent back was something he could always work around. […] He just didn't want to draw too much attention to himself.

Tariqa: So for you citizenship, like, what is...are the rights that are given to you important? […]

Yangchen: […] Mostly it's the sense of safety you get from being, at least especially a Canadian citizen or US citizen.

Further, while Jetsun and Karma, who also had Nepali citizenship, did feel that they were citizens of Nepal, and felt a sense of security with their citizenship, they recalled that they sometimes faced issues while travelling, especially at airports:

Sometimes the airport, like, Indian airport when we have a Nepali passport, they're like you don't look Nepalese, your name is not Nepalese. So we tell them that oh we're
actually Tibetans. So sometimes that gives us a little problem because we don't look Nepalese. Then we just have to tell them that we're Tibetan, and that's why we don't have Nepali names. [...] Even in like Nepal airport, we don't know Nepali that well, and we also don't look Nepali, so then they always like questioning us.

Dechen also recalled similar experiences at the Indian airport, where the immigration officers would not believe she was Nepali because she did not look Nepali and did not have a Nepali name. Thus, the sense of security of having citizenship in a country is of great importance to Tibetans that do naturalize in Canada.

For many participants, the biggest security that citizenship bestowed was the right to freely travel around the world. The experiences as stateless refugees in India and Nepal made many of the participants realize the ease of travel that comes with citizenship. Kunga recounts the process she would have to go through while trying to get visas to travel, and her encounters at Indian airports:

Then going to the embassy, going for visas, then they don't give us passports. Then they look at our yellow book and send us to a corner. Then they call the police and then they check. We are all human, but...we are always sided, asking questions. [...] I went to India with my [Identity Card], then they kept calling others to check. This has happened to me many times, and that's fine, but I don't want my children to go through the same thing.

For Kunga, the burden of not having citizenship was something she could endure, but she did not want her children to go through. For Yeshe’s parents, similar considerations were at play when they looked to apply for citizenship in Canada; she recalls the troubles she and her family faced while taking trips from Nepal to India34:

[Citizenship] means that now I have the freedom to just go anywhere I want, without being [bothered] by other authorities and border customs, right? [...] That was a major concern for my parents because every time we used to take our trips like during October

34 This journey does not require either Nepali or Indian citizens to travel with a passport – they can travel with local identity cards.
festivals and when we did long vacations my parents would take us to India for [a tour] and stuff, so every time we crossed the border we couldn't fly by plane\textsuperscript{35}, so we had to go to the border by bus or taxi […] I recall, my dad getting into arguments and then my parents arguing with each other like, "Oh why did you give them money," or "Why didn't you say something". So I think they didn't want to see that kind of future for us.

Kunchen recalls the difficulties she encountered while going to the US for further education:

For us, when you leave, even like when you leave from within India, you have to go to the registration office and you have to let them know that oh I'm [leaving]. You have to get like a departure signature, arrival signature. And when I went to study in the US, I needed to get like an exit permit.

Rinzen also mentioned the ease of travel that Canadian citizenship has afforded her, which in turn has given her a sense of security she did not have previously:

[Citizenship] means security, it means not being afraid, not being afraid to travel. Yeah, like international travel is so easy now, with a Canadian passport.

Hence, the sense of insecurity that comes with being a stateless or undocumented person is erased by obtaining Canadian citizenship, the security and privileges of which are most apparent to the participants when they travel internationally.

\textit{Citizenship Beyond Security}

Beyond security, citizenship also confers other tangible rights, which are important to the Tibetan community. Citizenship is an equalizer for Tibetans, who sometimes feel that they are treated as second-class residents in South Asia (Falcone & Wangchuk, 2008). As Diki states:

\textsuperscript{35} As Moynihan (2003) highlights, this journey became difficult for Tibetan refugees only after the 1999 hijacking of an Indian Airlines flight from Kathmandu to Kandahar – after this incident, Tibetan refugees were not permitted to travel by air in or out of Nepal.
[Citizenship] is a kind of a big opportunity to be equal, equal in the society, no matter whether what colour we are, or whether we belong to the minority or not.

For Yeshe, citizenship also gives her the rights to voice her opinions:

Having citizenship also means that now I have a voice, I can do something for other people. I can vote, right. I get the rights of being [calling] another place like that, and however, you know, I can do something for other people. So that's what I take it as.

Thus, unlike in South Asia, where the lack of citizenship means that Tibetans are weary of engaging in political activities (Moynihan, 2003), citizenship in Canada allows Tibetans to engage in political issues and assert their voice. Kunga finds that Canadian citizenship has given her the rights to pursue whatever she desires, and to be able to make something of herself:

[Canadian citizenship is] like living another life. […] This citizenship I'm thankful for, grateful for, that this country has given me this where I can do something if I want to do it. My kids can become whatever they want to. This comparison I can do that in India you cannot do whatever you want to do, but here, this citizenship [allows you to do whatever you want].

Kunga reiterates how important Canadian citizenship is for her children, so that they can pursue their dreams for their future:

I didn't come from India to here so that I can earn money, buy a car, buy a house, I came thinking that I would make a future for my kids.

The political, social and economic rights that are bestowed by citizenship are equally important to the Tibetan community as the sense of security. Indeed, the freedoms granted by Canadian citizenship are extended not only to the migrating generation, but to the generations that come after, which is an important factor for many Tibetans migrating to the West.
“This is Not Our Land”

Though many Tibetans are naturalized citizens of Canada or are in the process of becoming so, this does not mean their nationalism towards Tibet has been ‘diluted’. While the participants were grateful for Canadian residency and citizenship, they understood that they were on borrowed land, and that this was not their homeland.

Dolma, an elder who was born in Tibet, said

Even though we are citizens here in Canada, this is not our land, if Tibet regains independence, I would like to see [it].

Kunga, though born in exile, reiterates this stance:

There is so much land beneath my feet, but it is not mine. But in that country, that is my land. All of this has been given, all the land in India has been given. But the land in Tibet is mine. That is what I think and get emotional sometimes. Even my children cannot say that this is my home. This is home, but it has been given on rent. It doesn't really belong to me. That country is mine, whatever it is.

Nyima finds her relationship with Canada and her Canadian citizenship is quite complicated, due to Canada’s history as a settler-colonial state. McGranahan (2018) states that “for Tibetans and many others, empire is not a past-tense phenomenon, nor is decolonization a historical event” (p. 375). Nyima recognizes the parallels between her situation, as a Tibetan, and the situation in Canada, vis-à-vis the First Nations groups, questioning how her presence in Canada contributes to a settler-colonial project:

As I've gotten older I've been able to unpack it a little more, because […] when you get that piece of card that says you're a citizen, […] that's one step closer to becoming a settler. […] And even like to own land, so now we have a house that sits on a piece of land, but that's not our land. […] I struggle with it as a sense of feeling like we are […] contributing to another colonial project. […] I don't really have an attachment to this state - this state was built off of the erasure of indigenous peoples and continues to do that. […] And I can't align myself with that narrative because that narrative is very similar...the nation-building that is China is built off of the erasure of Tibetan people, of inner Mongolians, the Uyghurs. […] I'm proud of my parents for working and surviving
and for giving me the opportunities and the access and mobility that now this citizenship card allows me, that my passport allows me, but I don't hold it with pride because I understand it is rooted in another community's suffering, another indigenous community's suffering.

Thus, regardless of where they were born or their citizenship status, many participants pointed out that Canada is a borrowed country, and ‘Canadian’ is a borrowed identity.

The temporariness of Canada as their residence is highlighted by the participants’ desires to return to Tibet. The myth of return holds not only for those that were born in or who had visited Tibet – even those participants that had never been to Tibet enthusiastically asserted that, if given a chance, they would go to Tibet. When I asked the participants for their hopes for the future of Tibet, all wished for an autonomous or independent Tibet. When further asked if they would return if independence was achieved, most replied in the affirmative. Lhamo, an elder, stated:

I desire to return back to Tibet but it is not possible, given the situation in Tibet. But because that is the country I was born in, I wish to return back, if possible.

Diki, who was also born in Tibet, stated that she would return to Tibet, though she was unsure if her children would go back with her:

Yeah, I would [return and settle in Tibet]. Yeah, because I don't know about my kids, yeah definitely they have a choice, right. For me, I always would love to. I envision myself sometimes - oh that season if I am there, like you know, I miss nowadays like my overall village, scenery, and all those kind of things. Yeah.

Jamyang was born in exile, but is ready to go to Tibet:

I'm ready. So, I always say that tomorrow morning if I hear on the radio that Tibet is free I'm ready to pack my bags.

Some of the participants even had plans that they had mapped out, if Tibet gained independence. As Yeshe noted:
I would go back. I would like to have - I mentioned this to someone else as well, I would like to have a business where I can be here and there as well, and then I want to go back and work [...] there. Yeah. I have imagined that, kind of planned it ahead, like okay if that happens what are going to be my options, what am I going to do.

Dechen had also thought about ways in which she could maintain a connection to Tibet:

Yeah, I would build some sort of connections. [...] I would try to build some connection either like visiting there often, starting maybe a business, some plot of land or something. If I had the option, somehow I would try to build a connection to the land.

There is no question for Tibetans that Canada is borrowed land, and Tibet is their true home. For Tibetans, as “a people still fighting colonialism, home with a capital H is always Tibet. Canada is someone else’s home” (McGranahan, 2018, p. 375). For Dolma, ‘home’ is not Canada:

Home is very important, especially when we were living in Tibet before the loss of independence. We rely on farming, everything comes from the land that we plough. And the clothing we have from livestock, so everything is very simple and easy and we don't need to go out and do shopping. We were quite independent.

Home is Tibet, where she was independent, and where everything belonged to them.

Thus, the Tibetans do not recognize Canada as their ‘own’ – Tibet is the country, the land, the identity that is theirs, and they are striving to take it back.

Conclusion

Tibetans in exile have different understandings of citizenship, and navigate the terrain between citizenship, nationhood and identity cautiously. While the younger generation is hesitant to claim Tibetan citizenship due to the lack of a legal Tibetan state, even with the guarantees set in place by the TGIE, the older generation takes a broader view of citizenship, to understand it as a form of emotional membership to a nation. Though notions of Tibetan citizenship are contested, Tibetan identity is not. Citizenship in exile has also been a different journey for different individuals – while most have not
accepted citizenship in South Asia, they have chosen to take on citizenship in Canada. Regardless of their citizenship status, participants maintain robust Tibetan nationalism. Citizenship in host nations, however, are considered temporary measures, as the myth of return holds strongly for the Tibetans in exile.
Chapter 7: Conclusions

This year marks 60 years of the occupation of Tibet by Chinese forces, and 60 years since the Dalai Lama, along with thousands of Tibetans, fled Tibet to seek safety in exile in India. Though perhaps the beginnings of Tibetan nationalism can be traced to when the PLA first entered Tibet in 1950, it was not until 1959 when Chinese occupation, and hence the Tibetan nationalist movement, was solidified. For 60 years, Tibetans in exile and inside Tibet have been fighting for true freedom, and those in exile have been yearning to return to their homeland.

As the rest of the Global South was gaining independence from Western colonialism and decolonizing, Tibet was being colonized by the Chinese forces. For Tibetans, then, colonialism is not a relic of the past, but their current reality. Tibetan nationalism is a unique case of both Third World and exilic nationalisms, yet it is also a case that transcends both these frameworks. The rise of the nationalist movement has been supported by official narratives, by the TGIE, the Chinese state, and academics on both sides of the debates. Yet, this has not meant that all Tibetans have abided by such official discourses of nationalism – indeed, as interviews with 14 Tibetan women residing in Canada highlighted for me, women are pushing against these narratives, to create their own vision of Tibetan nationalism. Nationalism, thus, is not only a top-down project that has been imagined by the elite – it is also continually being reimagined and refashioned by those on the ground. Nationalism is not a uniform movement, but manifests in different ways as different imaginations emerge. In the case of the Tibetan nationalist
movement, exilehood in South Asia, and then further into Western countries, has complicated the notions of nationalism that have developed.

Tibetan women in Canada challenge the official and academic notions of nationalism by challenging the very frameworks that have been established. They challenge notions of purity and authenticity, and what constitutes Tibetan-ness, allowing for a fluid understanding of identity and belonging. Further, the Tibetan nationalist movement questions the validity of existing theoretical frameworks of nationalism to study and understand the unique case of Tibetan nationalism – by transcending the scope of both Third World and exilic nationalisms, Tibetan nationalism challenges the generalizability of the established academic understandings. Finally, Tibetan nationalism challenges the ways in which citizenship has been understood, by demanding the deterritorialization of citizenship from state- and nation-hood to include those stateless and in exile, and the broadening of notions of self-identification into notions of citizenship. By challenging these notions of nationalism, the Tibetan movement has established itself as a dynamic force that is constantly shifting and evolving, as it is reimagined by the different people that constitute the nationalist movement. New versions and visions of Tibetan nationalism arise as those on the ground challenge the top-down nature of nationalism, as is evident by my interviews with 14 Tibetan women residing in Canada.

**Implications of Research**

This research highlights the limits to nationalist frameworks that have been presented thus far to explain the form that has been taken on by Tibetan nationalism, and
questions the generalizability of such frameworks. It also presents a need to reconsider the ways in which academia has discussed nationalism, demanding a more nuanced understanding of different nationalist movements to be taken to understand their importance for nations’ existence. This research presents the scope of robust identity formation and fostering of nationalism, even in exile. It presents a case for multinational and multicultural states to find ways in which it can support such identity formation and nurture such nationalist projects, and questions the notion that all immigrants can and want to be included in the folds of the new state. Instead, it shows how a host nation can sometimes be a stepping stone towards the ultimate goal of the independence of the homeland.

Further Research

This research only presents a small slice of the life of Tibetan women in Canada, and their relationship to the nationalist project. Many future research areas remain to be explored for a holistic understanding of the Tibetan nationalist movement. A comparative study of the diaspora in South Asia versus different countries in the West with a substantial Tibetan population would help understand how a unique nationalist identity is formed and maintained in different contexts. Most research has focused on only one location and the impact of the structures and institutions in identity formation – a comparative study would help establish the different variables that contribute to Tibetan identity formation in different states. Further, a comparative study of exiled and non-exiled Tibetans would be helpful to understand how the different groups perceive the nationalist movement and their own identities. The differences, or similarities, in the two
groups of Tibetans would have an impact on the future of the Tibetan nation, when it
gains independence from Chinese occupation. Yet, this strand of research would be
harder to conduct, given the Chinese crackdown on research and information that is
produced on and in Tibet.

       Given that the Tibetan diaspora is relatively new to the Canadian society, very few
studies have looked at second-generation Tibetans who have been born in exile in
Canada. Looking exclusively at this group will help determine the successes and limits to
preserving the nationalist project in exile in the Canadian context. It will also help
understand how Tibetan-Canadians juggle their different identities, and how they
perceive and cope with the Canadian socio-political context. Framing this research in the
larger diasporic literature will help understand how the case of Tibetan exiles in Canada
is similar to other diasporas and also how it is distinct. It would also be worthwhile to
look at Tibetans that have not settled in communities like Parkdale or Toronto, and may
be removed from other Tibetans – this will help solidify an understanding of the role of
community in maintaining identity and nationalism. Further, a comparative study of the
different Western nations in which Tibetans have settled will help understand how states
prohibit or encourage Tibetan nationalism from growing. Additionally, with Tibetan
women and girls doing better in Canada than men and boys, further research should look
at how exile has inverted gendered achievements, and how these changing gender roles
impact the nationalist project.

To understand gender relations in Tibetan society and the gendered way in which
the Tibetan nationalist project has manifested, it is important that further studies look at
men, women, and non-binary individuals, to understand the creation of gendered roles. Since gender is relational, it is imperative that perspectives from all sides of the gender spectrum are heard. While this project was focused on exploring women’s narratives on nationalism, future research should expand the scope to include a multiplicity of voices. Further, there is also scope for research to be conducted on sexual minorities in Tibetan communities. Some research has been done on Tibetan perspectives of sexual minorities (Champagne, 2018) and solidarity networks for Tibetan LGBT+ individuals exist (for example, Ningtam). Yet, no links have been made to the nationalist project. It is important to understand how sexual minorities would understand their own role in and be perceived by the larger nationalist movement, and how individuals from sexual and gender minorities would challenge the official narratives of the Tibetan nationalist movement.
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List of Interviews


Appendix 1 – Tibetan Grievances

Institutional Grievances

Tibetan grievances regarding the Chinese state mostly stem from the China’s inability allow Tibet to operate as a genuine autonomous zone, as stipulated in the Chinese constitution. This has meant that China has often been repressive in Tibet, and the population has been subjected to limited freedoms, amounting to human rights abuses. China has envisioned “autonomy […] under a unified state leadership” (He, 2005, p. 68). As He (2005) states, “self-governing organs must implement the laws and policies of the state and place the interests of the state as a whole above anything else” (p. 68). This has meant that higher political authorities, like the National People’s Congress (NPC), have the power to approve the statutes and regulations governing autonomy rights (He, 2005).

Borders

There is no understanding of collective ‘ethnic’ land in China (He, 2005). This has meant that the institution of autonomous regions, and the determination of their borders, has been a top-down process, and “the state has appropriated historical lands of ethnic minorities, made them a common asset of the state, and denied any ethnic affiliation to them” (He, 2005, p. 68). Autonomous regions are not acknowledged as a type of homeland, and minorities do not have an inalienable right to the territory (Dodin, 2008). Tibetans have protested the formulation of the TAR, as they claim that it does not consist of all areas traditionally considered to be Tibet. Tibet has been divided into different provinces, with only half the Tibetan population residing in TAR, and the
The Tibetan regions of Amdo and Kham have been allocated to the provinces of Qinghai and Sichuan, respectively.

The population transfer programme initiated by the Chinese has been a major grievance for Tibetans – Donnet (1994) notes that an investigation found that 71 percent of the Han had come to TAR after 1980, and almost every major town boasted a Han majority. Tibetans have been particularly worried about this policy, since the history of inner Mongolia shows that regaining ancestral territory would not be useful if the overwhelming majority in the territory would consist of Chinese settlers (Topgyal, 2013). China has denied its minorities with true autonomy, and the minorities remain very much under central control of the Chinese state.

Representation

China’s lack of true democracy and any independent verification mechanism has implied that the rights to special representation by minorities is only in name. There is no independent court in China, and the CCP has controlled all decisions pertaining to minorities. Though China claims minority representation by stating that major posts, including those of the chairman of the Standing Committee of the People’s Congress of TAR, chairman of the People’s Congress of the TAR, and the chairman of the government of the TAR have all been Tibetans, the state fails to mention that they have been chosen by the Party, and do not hold any decision-making powers (Dodin, 2008). All these positions, in addition, are subordinate to the Party secretary, who holds actual decision-making powers, and this position has usually gone to Han Chinese individuals, regardless of the region. In TAR, no Tibetan has ever been party secretary, and no
Tibetan has made it higher than the position of deputy Party secretary (Dodin, 2008).
Since the centre chooses all these positions, the minorities themselves have no say in
their representation, and party secretaries and military commanders in these regions have
usually been Han Chinese.

China also presents ethnic participation in the local chambers of the Chinese
People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) in the autonomous regions, but
these participants are also chosen by the CCP, from among ‘patriotic’ individuals, who
are usually “clients of the Party, and it is unlikely that their ‘advice’ will ever extend
beyond the framework established for them by the Party” (Dodin, 2008, p. 196). In TAR,
the Tibetan membership in the CPPCC is much lower than the percentage of ethnic
Tibetans in the region. At the national level, effective representation of minorities is also
limited in the NPC, because there are no competitive elections for the positions, and the
representatives are chosen by the Party (He, 2005). The limits to genuine participation by
Tibetans, and other minorities, in dialogue, including limited representation of Tibetans
and other minorities in positions of power within the CCP, has meant that Tibetans do not
actually have a say in how they are governed.

*Constitutional Grievances*

China has maintained that ‘national unity’ comes above all else, including any
demands made by minority nations. Authoritarian measures have been used in Tibet for
the purpose of ‘long-term stability’. While this goal seems innocuous, “in Tibet [long-
term stability] will be achieved by eradicating dissident ideas” (Human Rights Watch,
2017). Though the freedom of speech, publication, and assembly are granted to all
citizens, these are limited and conditional – “they are allowed only if the activity does not threaten the Communist Party, the state socialism, China’s territorial claims, the ‘unity of nationalities’ (minzu tuanjie), state security, and other variable political criteria” (Barnett, 2008c, p. 86). Further, the Chinese state’s driving ideologies of Confucianism and Marxism have undermined traditions and cultures of the “Other”. Minorities have been consistently reminded that their religion, language, and culture are incompatible with the vision of the state, whether it is deemed ‘barbaric’ under Confucianism, or as ‘non-progressive’ under Marxism (He, 2005). Thus, the failure of the state to extend constitutional guarantees to its citizens has been an issue for the Tibetan people.

Freedom of Religion

The constitutional guarantees to the freedom of religious practice are limited in Tibet, especially because Tibetan Buddhism is inextricably intertwined with politics, and religion in Tibet is part of their national culture and national identity (Heberer, 1989). Since the Chinese state has maintained that Party interests and ‘national unity’ trump all other freedoms, the state has been particularly repressive towards Tibetans’ religious activities during times of political strife in Tibet or in other parts of China (Blondeau, 2008a). The state made an effort to relax the religious repressions after the ‘errors’ of the Cultural Revolution, but the restrictions were re-imposed in the 1990s. Tibetan families are not allowed to have photos of the Dalai Lama or say prayers for his long life, and are subject to house searches for photos of the Dalai Lama, religious paintings, and traditional fumigation hearths. The ‘patriotic education’ of monks and nuns, and the general population, includes the disavowal of the Dalai Lama. In 1999, a campaign to
spread atheism was launched, which entailed forbidding students from entering monasteries or celebrating Buddhist festivals (Blondeau, 2008b). These repressive measures are brought in whenever the Tibetan nationalist movement gains momentum, for example during the protests in 2008 (Smith, 2010). Instances of violence were reported in 2013, when regional police fired indiscriminately against those who celebrated the Dalai Lama’s birthday (Benedikter, 2014). Restrictions on religious freedoms have also included the “demolitions and evictions at Larung Gar monastic complex in Serta county, Sichaun, which will see the world’s largest Tibetan Buddhist community shrink [by half] by September 2017” (Human Rights Watch, 2017, p. 195).

**Education and Language**

The Dalai Lama and TGIE have accused the Chinese government of depriving Tibetan children of the right to education (Barnett, 2008b). Though scholars acknowledge that education in Tibet has significantly improved since the Chinese takeover of Tibet in 1951, the enrolment levels in TAR are the lowest in China, and these figures are based on only those who attend the first day of the term (Barnett, 2008b). There also remains a significant urban-rural discrepancy in school enrolment in TAR (Barnett, 2008b).

In addition, there are issues regarding the language of instruction among Tibetans. Though the Chinese state ensures that Tibetans and minorities have the right to education in their own language, Tibetan is the medium of instruction only till primary school (Postiglione, 2008). In secondary school, Chinese language takes primacy, which entails high dropout rates, especially in poor rural and nomadic areas. Most Tibetans are in favour of learning Chinese and understand that it is important to survive if one wants to
move away from a rural and nomadic lifestyle to join the market economy. Yet, bilingual education, in Tibetan and Chinese, is only available in urban areas, and this bilingualism shifts towards Chinese language instruction post primary school (Postiglione, 2008). Scholars have recognized that the low achievement in levels of education among Tibetans can be attributed towards the language policy. On the other hand, the issue with promoting a Tibetan medium of instruction is that the state tends to view such actions as separatist, and individuals promulgating these ideas are viewed with suspicion and repression (Smith, 2010).

*National Unity over Minority Appeasement*

As Barnett (2008c) notes, though the Chinese state has provision of equality for Tibetans in their culture and political system, which is backed by legal commitments, there are two caveats to these commitments. First, any activity that questions the state or the policy of ‘national unity’ is forbidden, and; second, affirmative action policies towards non-Han do not apply to the Communist Party or the military. The main issue for Tibetans and indeed many other minorities has been that they disagree with many Party policies, yet since the power lies with the Party and the military, it is difficult for the commitments that are granted on paper to actualize. In addition, the freedoms that are accorded to minorities in China are subject to the arbitrary wills of the centre, since laws and legal decrees are suspended during periods of “ideological and political radicalization” (Heberer, 1989, p. 43). China’s preoccupation with national unity has, thus, implied that it has taken precedence over minority appeasement – for order to prevail, then, the state uses repressive measures in Tibet.
# Appendix 2 – Participant Information

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age range</th>
<th>Place of Birth</th>
<th>Countries of Residence prior to Canada</th>
<th>Arrival in Canada</th>
<th>Status in Canada</th>
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<td>2018</td>
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</table>
Appendix 3 – Sample Questions

1. When and where were you born? How old were you when you arrived in Canada?
   What other countries have you lived in?
   • What were you doing there? How was it there? How is it different in Canada?
   • How do you describe where you are from?
2. Who in your family fled Tibet? Why?
   • Do you have any family currently living in Tibet?
3. Have you ever been to Tibet? Did it live up to your expectations?
4. What were you taught as a child about your Tibetan heritage? What stories have you been told about Tibet and your culture by your parents/grandparents?
5. What is your citizenship status?
   • What does citizenship mean to you?
6. How important is it to maintain links with your heritage and culture?
   • How do you feel connected to your homeland, heritage and culture?
7. How easy or difficult is it to preserve your culture in Canada?
   • (If applicable) Was it easier to do so in your previous country of residence? Why/why not?
8. How important is religion to you?
   • Have you ever met the Dalai Lama?
9. How important is language?
10. Who is a Tibetan? What does Tibetan identity mean?
11. How do you keep a sense of community here in Canada? What is important?
12. What are the main challenges that Tibetan women face?
   • Are these challenges different from the challenges in Tibet (or other country you lived in)?
13. What do you want for Tibet and its future?
   • Would you return to Tibet if it was to gain independence?