



Evolving “Tibetanness”: A Study of Survival

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ABSTRACT

This article investigates the evolvement of Tibetanness in the diaspora. Tibetanness is divided into four parts; unity, religion and politics, homeland and material culture. I find that Tibetans in the diaspora have deliberately changed certain aspects of their culture to appeal to a Western audience, mostly prominently in the enforcement of a Shangri-La image. I thus identify two main threats of globalisation; Westernisation and a Shangri-La myth. Nonetheless, Tibetans have maintained control over the evolvement of their culture.

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Introduction

Globalisation is often perceived as a threat to indigenous peoples. This is certainly true when indigenous peoples are actively being repressed. However, the effect on the evolution of a culture and identity are far less clear when the indigenous group in question are free to pursue their own survival after their secluded life has been disrupted. The Tibetans in the diaspora are one such people. They were separated from their homeland and launched into the modern era, where they could not avoid globalisation any longer. How has Tibetanness evolved under these circumstances? Were they able to survive, and how? Was globalisation only a threat, or has it actually aided their survival? The following text will attempt to answer these questions by analysing the process Tibetanness has gone through since the start of the Tibetan diaspora. It will show that an indigenous people can, indeed, survive the disruptions of globalisation. However, it will also show that adapting to a modern world is a difficult balancing act, whereby globalisation poses both threat and opportunity to the survival of Tibetanness.

Literature Review

Indigenous Peoples in an Era of Globalisation

Our modern world is more connected than ever before. People from all over the world are able to interact with and influence each other more than ever before. For many small ethnic groups whose identity and culture were created in a relatively secluded areas, the influence of the globalised world is often said to threaten their cultural survival. These are the so-called “indigenous peoples”. Is it possible for these communities to preserve their identity in the face of the disruptions of globalisation? Are these cultures able to survive in an era where contact with more dominant foreign powers and a loss of a traditional bond with ancestral lands are common concerns?

Many scholars have recognised the distinction between indigenous and non-indigenous peoples and included those terms in their research. In general, indigenous peoples are considered to have a more special bond with a particular ancestral territory than “normal” ethnic groups. Brower and Johnston (2007, p. 9) explain that their unique identities were shaped in secluded areas over the course of many generations. Alfred and Corntassel (2005, p. 597-601) confirm that indigeneity means that one’s cultural identity is place-based. Indigenous identity is thus a combination of land, unique culture and community, they add. Another major factor that constitutes indigenous identities, is their history of colonisation and repression (Alfred and Corntassel, 2005). Wiessner (1999, p. 57-58) sums up the harm done to many indigenous peoples as a history of conquest, (cultural) genocide, penetration and marginalisation.

It is thus clear that the “cultural survival” of indigenous peoples has been under threat since the beginning of what Hall and Fenelon (2008) call “globalisation-like processes”. For most indigenous societies, the first disruption of globalisation happened approximately 400 years ago with the start of colonisation by European powers (Smith, Burke & Ward, 2000, p. 2). Although this brought the first great challenge to the cultural survival of many indigenous peoples, and many disappeared or were greatly marginalised as a result, a great number nonetheless continued to exist. In fact, the indigenous peoples of the world nowadays consist of approximately 370 million individuals, which is about 5% of the entire global human population, spread over 90 different countries and belonging to one of 5.000 different indigenous groups (Cultural Survival, 2017). This indicates that despite the destructive power

that globalisation has had on indigenous peoples, many were able to prevent the disappearance of their culture and identity, Hall and Felon (2004, p. 153-154) point out. However, the current wave of globalisation may pose the biggest challenge to indigenous survival yet.

After all, colonialism formed only the start of foreign influence on indigenous societies; the globalisation process in recent years has accelerated the speed of this influence (Smith, Burke and Ward, 2000, p. 1). Although colonisation is still a threat, mainly due to land-grabbing by third world governments (Seton, 1999), the current globalisation trend also consists of increased political, military and economic interdependence, more and faster movement of people and goods, and a greater flow of culture due to new networks of communication (Meyer, 2000; Smith, Burke & Ward, 2000; Belton, 2010). This poses a new challenge to indigenous peoples because this intensified wave of globalisation may lead to a single, homogeneous world society, or to a complete mixture in which any person, any time, can pick the cultural aspects which he or she likes best and change them at will (Trouillot, 2002). For more traditional and different identities, Kowalczyk (2013, p. 122) states, there may be no place in the modern mentality of order and homogenisation. Kunnie (2015, p. 265) has written an entire book on the danger of globalisation as a “modern form of neo-colonisation” that threatens indigenous survival. These authors thus paint a very pessimistic picture for indigenous peoples, because the current globalisation process may mean the loss of their distinctiveness or the absorption of their cultures into a dominant, homogeneous global one (Belk, 1996; Bird & Stevens, 2003; Brower & Johnston, 2007).

However, in contrast with the pessimistic predictions, there are scholars who argued that globalisation may not be such a danger to indigenous peoples after all. Naturally, active repression of an indigenous people is harmful. But what about the indigenous peoples who are no longer being repressed but still have to deal with becoming part of the modern world? How can globalisation harm them? Is modernity in itself a threat to indigenous peoples? If we argue that, are we not forcing them to remain “authentic”? Can one not be indigenous and modern at the same time? Maddison (2013), who investigates the case of Australian Aboriginal people, addresses the problem that aboriginals living in urban areas are often viewed as the mere descendants of a dead culture. They are modern, so they cannot be “indigenous”, is the idea. It is important to remember that all cultures are dynamic, however (Hall, 1989; Bird & Stevens, 2003, p. 406). A culture, even an indigenous one, changes over

time. Kirsch (1997, p. 58) warns us for the “European myth model of lost tribes”; the idea that indigenous societies were immune to any foreign influence and completely static, resulting in the judgement that indigenous people should not change.

However, if indigenous people are instead allowed to change in the globalised world, what kind of threat to their culture and identity remains? Firstly, there is a difference between change under indigenous autonomy, and forced change (Germond-Duret, 2016). If indigenous people adapt their culture in a way they see fit, it is not necessarily harmful. Secondly, there is a difference in the degree of change. If instead of changing certain aspects of the indigenous culture all cultural aspects are exchanged for those from a global, dominant culture, then the indigenous culture would be lost.

Finally, there are some scholars who identified some positive effects of globalisation. As Smith, Burke and Ward (2000, p. 21) state: “Globalisation constitutes an unprecedented threat to the autonomy of Indigenous cultures as well as an unprecedented opportunity for Indigenous empowerment”. Belton (2010) likewise identifies a paradox in the nature of globalisation; it is a force that has disrupted traditional societies, but it enables them to guard their rights at the same time. This is mainly due to communication networks such as the internet and the ability to connect in global indigenous organisations (Osman, 2000; Wiessner, 2008; Belton, 2010). In a way, the tools of the modern world may thus prevent indigenous people becoming “museum cultures” (Belton, 2010, p. 207).

The Case of Tibet

An indigenous people who had to face the disruptions of globalisation during the twentieth century, are the Tibetans. Because of their distinctive identity and long cultural and ethnic history on a specific territory where their cultural attributes were formed, exercised and given meaning, they fit the category of an “indigenous” populations perfectly (Davis, 2008, p. 247; Samsom & Gigoux, 2016, “identity”). Since their land became occupied by the Chinese in the early 1950’s (Goldstein, 1997; Houston & Wright, 2003), they were forced to become part of the globalised world.

Studies on Tibet can roughly be divided into two parts: studies that focus on the Tibetans remaining in occupied territory, and studies that focus on the ones who left in the Tibetan diaspora. The diaspora, in this case, means that a part of the ethnic group left the homeland together and settled down in different places across the globe (Butler, 2001, p.

192). The Tibetans remaining in Tibet exemplify an indigenous people who suffer from occupation by a foreign power; but the Tibetans in diaspora exemplify an indigenous people who are autonomous but still have to deal with the effects of globalisation. As I wish to shed a light on the question how indigenous peoples can survive in the globalised world, I believe that the diasporic, exiled Tibetans are the best case to study since they may show the effects of globalisation on a people without the obvious negative consequences that would result from active marginalisation.

Method

Although there are several good studies on the Tibetan diaspora, Houston and Wright (2003, p. 217) argue that it is still an understudied theme in research literature. The studies that have been written up until now usually focus on the exile Tibetans' democratisation process and the religious/political construction of leadership (Kolas, 1996; Ardley, 2003; Sangay, 2003; Frechette, 2007), the separation from the Tibetan homeland (Klieger, 1997; Ström, 1997; Neilson, 2000) and cultural changes (Calkowski, 1997; Smyer Yü, 2015). These studies usually focus on a specific aspect of Tibetanness in exile. I will make a broader analysis of the evolution of Tibetanness by including the most important aspects of Tibetan culture and identity and see how these have changed since the start of the diaspora. By doing so, I hope to discover what the major effects of globalisation on Tibetanness as a whole have been (thus not just in specific areas, as many of the existing studies investigate).

The only methodology that is fit for studying a changing culture, is ethnography. Tibetanness, which I understand as the identification with Tibetan culture, is a very complex concept. For example, Tibetan society has always combined politics and religion in a way that is rather uncommon (Anand, 2000). This cultural component of politics is not always understood in Western social science, as Kolas (1996, p. 52) points out, because the concepts we use are shaped according to Western standards. If a concept such as "the political" cannot incorporate culture, a researcher is not adequately equipped to study politics in a non-Western environment where this might matter. The ethnographic research methodology is essential to account for such differences in the understanding of a concept. Ethnography, Kubik (2009, p. 30) states, can help uncover such cultural and social structures in ways that other methodologies cannot.

A method of ethnography alone will not provide an insight in the changes Tibetanness has undergone since the start of the diaspora however, because I am analysing a process. I will therefore use process-tracing to understand how Tibetanness has evolved as well, as this method is useful to trace narratives (Collier, 2011). As Beach and Pedersen (2013, p. 9-22) explain, process-tracing can be used in three different ways: to test a causal mechanism, to find a causal mechanism or to find what mechanistic explanation accounts for a certain outcome. The first two are theory-centric, whilst the latter is case-centric. I expect to find differences between remaining Tibetans and exile Tibetans in how their "Tibetanness" has evolved over the past decades. I will therefore use process-tracing in the third way which Beach and Pederson (2013, p. 9-22) describe: to explain an outcome. How has Tibetanness arrived at the point where it is today? This method is especially well-suited for very complex, multifactorial and context-specific outcomes (Beach & Pederson, 2013). As special benefit of ethnography in combination with process-tracing is furthermore that it may help to (re-)construct the actors' views (Kubik, 2009, p. 31-32).

I will conduct this research by mainly using ethnographic material collected from the more detailed ethnographic research that I mentioned before. I will first reconstruct the evolution of Tibetanness from these works, and eventually interpret what these processes mean for the survival of Tibetan culture and identity. The use of secondary sources is not necessarily a weakness in the research as comparing them may lead to new insights (Pader, 2013, p. 167). I will furthermore use an in-depth interview Tibetan student from the exile community conducted by myself and use several media sources from the Tibetan exile community. I will start by listing the essential historical events one should know in order to understand the development of Tibetanness in exile, then I will explain how I trace the evolution of Tibetanness. Next, a middle-part with the findings on this evolution will follow. This part is divided into four different narratives of Tibetanness; unity, religion and politics, homeland and material culture. Finally, I will use the knowledge on how Tibetanness has evolved in exile to interpret what threats of globalisation have occurred during the exile years, how Tibetans have coped with these threats and what their current situation means for their future.

Historical Background

Before I turn to the more ethnographic analysis of Tibetanness, I will first explain the important events in Tibetan history that led to the diaspora. The start of the “Tibet issue” dates back to 1949, when Chinese troops under the name of “People’s Liberation Army” marched into Tibet in order to, from their perspective, unify the motherland (Houston & Wright, 2003). Before that time, Tibet was relatively isolated; foreign powers hardly influenced the country (Mackerras, 2002, p. 22). The Chinese actions in Tibet were at right angles to the de-colonisation process of the time; whilst Western states withdrew from their occupied territories, the Chinese pursued to incorporate Tibet into their state (Korom, 1997). The Tibetans had no chance against the Chinese army, and in 1951 Tibet and China signed the “Seventeen Point Agreement”, which stated that Tibet would maintain its autonomy over internal affairs whilst the Chinese government would be granted authority over all foreign affairs (Goldstein, 1997). However, there was still opposition against the Chinese, and the latter therefore kept increasing its influence in Tibetan internal affairs (Korom, 1997). This, in turn, increased Tibetan resistance which resulted in outbreaks of violence throughout Lhasa in 1959 (Kolas, 1996; Goldstein, 1997; Korom, 1997). During this period of turmoil, the Dalai Lama had to flee Tibet. Although the exact number is not known, approximately 80.000 Tibetans went with him across the southern border to India, Nepal and Bhutan (Kolas, 1996; Korom, 1997; Yeh, 2007).

The peak of the exodus was between 1959 and 1960, after which the borders were closed; this situation of very little contact with the homeland remained for over two decades (Yeh, 2007). The first years of exile were usually spent in refugee settlements near the border, in the hope of a quick return (Methfessel, 1997). Soon after arrival, the Dalai Lama quickly negotiated the establishment of a government-in-exile with the authorities in India. This government has been active since 1960 (Methfessel, 1997; McConnell, 2009).

The situation of Tibet has been unstable; since 1980, in the years after the death of Mao Zedong, the restrictions in Tibet were somewhat loosened; but unrest and more restrictions resurfaced from time to time, mainly in 1987 and in 2008 before the Olympic games (Kolas, 1996; Yeh, 2007; Yeh, 2013, p. ix). This situation in the homeland forms the reason for the political activism in exile; usually referred to as the “Free Tibet Movement” or just the “Tibet Movement” (Anand, 2000, p. 281). The Free Tibet Movement does not aim for a separate Tibetan state, but for “genuine autonomy” called the “Middle-Way Approach”; in

other words, self-determination over domestic and cultural affairs whilst the Chinese will decide over foreign affairs (Houston & Wright, 2003, p. 224). The goal of Tibetans in the diaspora is not only the political goal of a “free Tibet”, however, but also to maintain Tibetan culture in exile (Gupta, 1973; Kolas, 1996). With this in mind, how has Tibetanness evolved in the diaspora?

The Narratives of Tibetanness

A problem with tracing the evolvement of a culture and identity of a people, is that one is tracing an enormously varied and complex concept. This is probably the reason why most studies on Tibetans in the diaspora, as I mentioned in the method section, focus on a particular aspect of Tibetanness. In a similar way, I will divide Tibetanness into four different, more specific aspects of Tibetan culture. However, these four parts are specifically meant to capture the whole of Tibetanness as much as possible. I will now explain why I chose exactly these four spheres of Tibetanness.

During the first part of my research, I came across many different definitions of Tibetanness. Most of them either name the Tibetan land or the Tibetan Buddhist religion as the most important aspects of Tibetan culture and identity. Tibetan government websites often lay emphasis on the aspects of the Tibetan land and Buddhism as well (Bray, 2000). It is true that these two are very important, but they do not cover Tibetanness enough. Some scholars have therefore attempted to broaden the understanding of Tibetanness. Ström (1997, p. 35) for example, explained Tibetan traditions as institutionalised practices such as social customs, religious rituals and arts and crafts. The most thorough description that I found, however, was that of Anand (2000). In his article, he explains the discourse of Tibetanness as shaped by the rhetoric of returning to the homeland, and by a status as refugees. Furthermore, he describes the continued presence of the homeland as a product of the imagination. Because return is out of reach, the objective is to preserve culture, a process during which often commodification of cultural artefacts occurs. This is partly a result of interactions with the West. Host countries in general also have an influence on Tibetanness. Finally, he writes that there is the important symbolic figure associated with “Tibet” by Tibetans and non-Tibetans alike: the Dalai Lama. As I want to know how Tibetanness has evolved under the influence of the globalised world since the start of the diaspora, I will not include Anand’s (2000) “new” aspects of Tibetanness such as refugeehood, the influence of

the West and the influence of host countries in my initial notion of the concept. These factors may come up in the narratives of Tibetanness if they are indeed found in the exile communities' culture and identity as a result of globalisation. Also, I will not include Ström's (1997) "social customs", since they are too hard to detect and study for a non-Tibetan.

It is quite clear that Tibet itself and Tibetan Buddhism form the source of what it means to be Tibetan. Anand (2000) also mentioned the continued importance of the Tibetan homeland in the Tibetan identity, and Ström (1997) mentions the importance of religion. I include politics together with religion, however, since Tibetan politics and religion are traditionally very much interwoven. Furthermore, both mentioned crafts and cultural artefacts, in other words; the "material culture" of the Tibetan people, which I agree is very important as well. I understand this category as including all visible display of culture; such as culture goods, artworks, literature but also (sacred) performance arts. The fourth category is the one I will start with; and this seems to be somewhat overlooked as an important aspect of Tibetanness. This is the sphere of unity. After all, Tibetans need to regard themselves as part of the Tibetan community for Tibetanness to survive. The four spheres of Tibetanness that I will thus investigate are unity, politics & religion, homeland and material culture.

Unity

All peoples need some sense of "oneness" to really be a people. Unity is therefore the first important aspect of Tibetanness that I will discuss. Of course, it is not necessary for a people to be completely homogeneous. The Tibetan people have been recognised as a distinct ethnic group for centuries, as Walter's (2009) book on the early history of Tibet shows. He portrays a unique and relatively secluded Tibetan people who were nonetheless dynamic, adaptive and varied. Tibetanness can thus show variation but there has to be a sense of *belonging* to the Tibetan people.

United in Exile

The exile community was, certainly during the first years, not an exact replica of the Tibetan people as a whole; although all kinds of ethnic and social classes were present in the flight, geographic location was a great determinant in who would seek refuge across the border and who would not (Methfessel, 1997). Those closest to the southern border of Tibet were more likely to leave the country, and this resulted in an overrepresentation of Tibetans from the

Kham region. The government-in-exile accounted for such differences by making sure that all regional and religious subgroups were represented (Anand, 2000, p. 281-282).

Not only are differences thus accounted for, many sources argue that their importance has actually diminished since the start of exile. O'Neill (2005, p. 275), for example, argues that the diaspora had the effect of creating a more unified cultural and national entity. According to Pallis (2008, p. 193), Tibetan institutions overall show more unity than in Tibet before exile. The Tibetan student I interviewed, indeed confirms that: "after the invasion, a good thing that has happened is that we are more united than before". Topden, a middle-aged Tibetan from Boston, explains the difference with Tibet before exile: "at that time, the people visiting Lhasa from Kham and Amdo they used to say, 'I'm going to Tibet,' not realizing that they are also Tibetans, right? So, therefore this regionalism was very, very conspicuous" (Houston & Wright, 2003, p. 222). He further tells that the situation of exile changed this; now, Tibetan refugees tell their children about "Tibet", not "Kham", "Amdo" or "Utsang". He continues: "therefore now the Tibetans are more integrated and consolidated and unified than it was in 1959" (Houston & Wright, 2003, p. 222). In a recent speech, the Dalai Lama himself also emphasizes that although regional and religious differences created tensions in the past, the Tibetan people are now truly unified (Shonu, March 2, 2018).

United in Rhetoric

However, we main question whether the unity is really as strong as it appears. We mainly perceive an increase in the *expression* of unity since the start of exile, but not actual prove that unity has indeed increased. Anand (2000, p. 272), for example, calls the image of a unified Tibetan identity mostly a rhetorical tool. It may be that Tibetans are pretending to be more unified than they really are because it helps their political cause.

It is easy to see that the exile community indeed has put in a lot of effort to create as much unity as possible. Dharamsala, where most Tibetans in India live, became the centre of the Tibetan global communication network to connect all Tibetans in exile together as one (Korom, 1997, p. 2). Their focus is on the preservation of the shared culture, including religion, language, traditional arts, crafts, and performance traditions. As the Dalai Lama's speech shows, the exile elite likes to emphasize the importance of unity. Shakabpa (1984, p. 324-325), a Tibetan historian and politician, also makes a plea for unity by stating that Tibetans in exile should not care for what region their families were from, but for their heritage as Tibetans.

Well-organised and united they should defend their rights under the leadership of the Dalai Lama, he writes.

New Divisions

These sources address the divisions in society *before* exile, however. It may not be surprising that new divisions have emerged since the start of the diaspora. One is the divide between exile Tibetans living in communities in countries neighbouring Tibet, and exile Tibetans living individually in Western countries. Yeh (2007) investigates this difference and finds that both groups tend to regard themselves as the truest to traditional Tibetan culture. Another new divide is that between the older and the younger generation in exile, with the younger often being more critical and more politically assertive towards China than the elders (Moran, 2004). Both these divides will also be visible in the following narratives of Tibetanness.

Religion and Politics

Before the start of the diaspora, religion was central to Tibetan daily life. Tibetan Buddhism, sometimes referred to as “the Dharma” (Moran, 2004, p. 9) is an important element of Tibetan identity and culture (Thargyal, 1997). Remarkable about Tibetan life before exile is the presence of religion in nearly every aspect of society and the way religion was interwoven with Tibetan leadership. This combination of politics and religion is called “chos srid gnyis ldan” (McConnell, 2013, p. 162). Tibet before the 1950’s was thus not a democratic society; instead, it was a theocracy lead by an elite composed of monks, aristocratic laypersons and the religious figure of the Dalai Lama (Norbu, 1979; Goldstein, 2007, p. 2). There are thus two major aspects of the religious/political sphere that were especially important aspects of Tibetanness prior to exile: the importance of Tibetan Buddhism in Tibetan life and the interconnectedness of religion and politics.

Continuation and Expansion of the Buddhist Tradition

Although it is possible that active practice has somewhat diminished (as this is expected to be more difficult in a modern environment in new host countries), Moran (2004) shows that Buddhism is still a very important and vivid aspect of Tibetanness in exile. This is partly due to the general understanding that Tibetans are born into Buddhism, and do not necessarily require active practice and extensive studies to be Buddhist. Moran (2004, p. 167-168)

illustrates this by asking a Westerner-turned-Buddhist whether he thinks Tibetan lay people practice their religion in the same way as Westerners do, to which the interviewee answers: “No. They practice in a different way. It’s, um – they could be doing the job – but they [Tibetans] are from Dharma. It’s like natural for them”. The Tibetan student I interviewed mentions that he, too, is a Buddhist but does not actively practice. Nonetheless, he adds: “I’m definitely religious. From my personal experience: what you’ve learned during your childhood, that never goes away”.

The Tibetan monastic system has undergone some change though. Before the diaspora, the monastic system was a very large and fundamental part of society (Goldstein, 2007, p. 13-14). Nowadays however, less parents from the exile community send their children to monasteries to be raised as monks (Ström, 1997, p. 40-41). This trend is compensated by the arrival of many new monks coming directly from Tibet though (Ström, 1997, p. 40). A further interesting development in the monastic system has been the recognising of incarnations in countries other than Tibet (Moran, 2004, p. 30). Visser (2014, p. 158-162), for example, meets a boy from the USA on her trip to the Tibetan community in India who has been recognised by Buddhist monks as a reincarnation.

This is illustrative for a major change in Tibetan Buddhism in the diaspora: the religion is no longer confined to a specific territory (Moran, 2004, p. 14). From the 1960’s onwards, the Dalai Lama started to receive Westerners interested in Tibetan Buddhism (Sangay, 2003, p. 122). This has resulted in the inclusion of non-Tibetans as Tibetan Buddhists (Moran, 2004, p. 130-156). Visser (2014, p. 124-129), for example, encounters a Dutch monk in a Tibetan monastery in India. He tells her that he studied biology until he met a Tibetan monk; at that same moment, he decided to become one himself. Apparently, Tibetans were prepared to help him with this. Universality itself is not at odds with the principles of the religion (McLagan, 1997), and many exiles told Moran (2004, p. 46) that they do not regard their religion as something exclusively meant for Tibetans. In fact, many Tibetan monks, like Trungpa (1985, p. 254), deliberately try to spread Buddhism to the Western world. However, although most Tibetans see the spread of Buddhism to the West as something positive, the younger generation is more critical. They think the image of Tibetans as “holy” people turns them into a caricature, therefore they do not like the propagation of Buddhism to the West (Moran, 2004, p. 46-47).

The Dalai Lama and Democratisation

As the temporal (political) ruler and spiritual (religious) authority of the Tibetan people (Houston & Wright, 2003; Sangay, 2003; Pallis, 2008, p. 173-174), the Dalai Lama is very much associated with “Tibetanness”. Furthermore, by rebuilding Tibetan life in exile, creating a transnational political network and through his global profile, the Dalai Lama has been of major importance in the Tibetan diaspora (Houston & Wright, 2003). During the first decennia of the diaspora he maintained this dual role. However, he brought about several very important changes over the last decades regarding his own role and the religious nature of Tibetan politics. One of his most important actions right after exile was the establishment of a government-in-exile, also known as the “Central Tibetan Administration” (McConnell, 2009; Whalen-Bridge, 2015, p. 2). Ever since then, the Dalai Lama has increasingly shared his power with the new political institutions, thereby diminishing the feudal and theocratic nature of traditional Tibetan society from before the Chinese invasion. He thus started a move towards democracy (Thargyal, 1997).

There has thus been a change from a society without democratic values to a society led by a government, with officially elected representatives and officially guaranteed civil liberties for all Tibetans (Frechette, 2007). The government-in-exile initially operated under a constitution that allowed the Dalai Lama to appoint his own members of cabinet, but this was replaced by the charter of Tibetans in exile in 1991, which determined that the members of the assembly should appoint the members of cabinet instead (Frechette, 2007, p. 112). The position of “kalön tripa”, which is comparable to the position of prime minister, was first indirectly chosen by the Assembly, but is now chosen by two-phase general election (Frechette, 2007, p. 112-113). Furthermore, according to the Dalai Lama’s wish, the government-in-exile now makes use of a quota system that elects an equal number of representatives from each of the three regions of Tibet, representatives for all five major religious sects, some representatives from outside South Asian countries and a few specially nominated members (Anand, 2000). Whilst Tibet before the Chinese occupation was ruled by the Dalai Lama and mainly the aristocracy, most of the full-time employees in the current government-in-exile are from “commoner” backgrounds (Sangay, 2003, p. 119-120). Only one out of hundred has family ties to the old aristocracy.

However, although I agree with Thargyal’s (1997) article that the first decades of exile have showed a move towards democratisation, there has been a process of secularisation in

recent years as well. Perhaps the biggest shift in the nature of Tibetan politics and religion, has namely been the Dalai Lama's decision in 2011 to give up all his formal political power to the Kalön Tripa, whose position is comparable to that of prime minister (McConnell, 2013). This is a major step away from an almost 400 years old theocratic/feudal tradition with the Dalai Lama as the ultimate religious and political leader. One could argue that Tibetan exile politics are still not fully democratic however, due to the absence of an established party system and opposition (Ardley, 2003, p. 354-355); and not fully secularised, due to the continued influence of the Dalai Lama as the unofficial leader, to which I will come back shortly.

Not only has the Dalai Lama's position thus changed, its continuation has become less certain. It is not yet clear whether there will be a 15th Dalai Lama. In 2011, the current 14th Dalai Lama gave specific instructions on how the position of Dalai Lama should be managed in the future (McConnell, 2013). He stated that only the current Dalai Lama or the Dalai Lama's institution (which was created when he transmitted his authority to the government-in-exile) have the authority to decide on the Dalai Lama's lineage. A more important statement in this announcement, has been the Dalai Lama's implication that the next Dalai Lama will likely not be a reincarnation but an emanation; a manifestation that takes place before the source passes away (McConnell, 2013, p. 166). The Dalai Lama stated in his speech that superior Bodhisattvas are capable of doing this (Dalai Lama, September 2011). But most importantly, he states that when he approaches his ninetieth birthday, he will decide together with the high lama's and the Tibetan people whether the Dalai Lama lineage should continue.

However, although the Dalai Lama has thus decreased his political might and spoken of the possible end of the Dalai Lama lineage, he does not seem to have lost his importance to the Tibetan people. Furthermore, since the start of the diaspora, he has gained the favour of many non-Tibetan people as well. Not only Tibetans, but also Westerners are usually full of praise for him (Parenti, 2003, p. 579-580). Overall, Tibetans were not in favour of the Dalai Lama giving up his political role (Ardley, 2003). The Dalai Lama's support in the exile community thus seems to be very strong: he is mentioned as the rightful and respected leader of Tibet on virtually every Tibetan activist website. A Tibetan exile in the USA says that if the Dalai Lama was "not in this world then ... Tibet [would be] nothing", and a refugee in Nepal adds that without him Tibetans would be "lost sheep" (Houston & Wright, 2003, p. 217). It can

easily be argued that the worldwide attention for the Tibetan situation is mainly due to the Dalai Lama (Houston & Wright, 2003).

Homeland

The Tibetan people were closely connected to the land they lived on before the Chinese invasion. The role of the homeland prior to exile does not need much further explanation; Tibet's territory formed an important and essential part of the Tibetan culture; as is a shared characteristic amongst indigenous peoples. Of course, after the start of the diaspora exile Tibetans were no longer able to live in their own land. This was a major and abrupt point of change for this particular aspect of Tibetanness.

Recreating Home

The first change that can be identified in the sphere of homeland is that some host countries started to replace the Tibetan homeland. An interesting process from the very start of exile is the making of a "new Tibet" in India. Many exiles, often from Dharamsala and often a younger generation, have come to regard Dharamsala as a "little Lhasa"; it is the new centre of Tibetanness for many (Yeh, 2007, p. 662). The exile environment in the Tibetan community has been, as Ström (1997, p. 35) describes it, "domesticated". The use and placing of prayer flags, stupas, sacrificial fireplaces, engraved mantras and spiritual beings show that the cultural bond that existed between Tibetans and the Tibetan territory is recreated with the land in neighbouring exile countries. Furthermore, many monasteries were built to give certain places in India the same "sacred geography" as was present in Tibet (Ström, 1997, p. 35).

Although Tibetan sacred geography has thus been recreated in India, this is much more difficult for Tibetans in Western countries. The main reason seems to be that the communities in Western countries are not as tight as those in India or Nepal (Yeh, 2007). A Tibetan in exile states: "[g]oing to the States within two generations you are American. It's not like staying in India. In India you can stay Tibetan" (Houston & Wright, 2003, p. 228). A Tibetan woman in exile in the USA says that her children are becoming more American not only in their manner of speaking, but in their behaviour too (Houston & Wright, 2003, p. 228).

Tibetans in exile are no longer completely cut-off from the homeland though. Although during the first decennia of exile contact between exile Tibetans and Tibetans remaining in

Tibet was very difficult, a major change occurred with the coming of the internet. It provided the tools needed to establish a global communication network for the Tibetan people, and it was a means of broadcasting information from inside Tibet to the outside world (Bray, 2000).

Shangri-La

Contemporary studies of Tibet have increasingly given attention to non-Tibetans' image of Tibet, and the phenomenon of the "imagined Tibet" (Smyer Yü, 2015, p. 2-3). To Westerners, Tibet is a land of mystery (David-Neel, 1936, p. v). Although this process originates in the Western society, it is worth investigating because it may have had certain effects on diasporic Tibetans as well. The idealised image of Tibet as "Shangri-La"; an isolated place completely unaffected by the outside world, can be traced back to the 1933 novel "Lost Horizon" by James Hilton (Neilson, 2000, p. 95). Tibet is portrayed as an historical place of spirituality, without materialism, egotistical lifestyles and corruption (Parenti, 2003). This is more a hyperreality than a truth, however; it simplifies and exaggerates some appealing aspects of Tibetanness into some sort of caricature (Klieger, 1997).

More remarkable than the existence of this idea of Tibet in the Western mind, however, is that Tibetans have encouraged this fantasy of their homeland themselves. Literary works by Westerners like David-Neel (1936) create an idealised image, but are also quite famous and therefore likely to generate more attention for Tibet. Klieger (1997) believes that Tibetans in exile have recognised this, and therefore encouraged this image of Tibet to gain Western political support. Anand (2000, p. 272) agrees; he writes that Tibetans themselves have invested in the "neo-orientalist" notion of Tibet because it suits their political plans. McLagan (1997) gives an example of this; he investigates the "International Year of Tibet" starting on the tenth of March 1991. McLagan (1997, p. 70-71) describes that one of the opening speakers was famous actor and non-Tibetan Richard Gere, who told the audience that he wished to "blitz" New York city with what he called "Tibetan spiritual energy". He projected, as MacLagan concludes, a rather "mystical" view on Tibet, emphasising their image as enlightened beings whilst reminding us of how endangered they are at the same time. We should note that it were Tibetans who invited Gere to project this Western vision on Tibet in public.

The Imagined Homeland

There have been increasing concerns in the exile community regarding this Shangri-La syndrome, however. The first concern, as a scientist in the Tibetan community in India mentions, is that “for many Westerners, Tibet is Shangri-La, but maybe Tibetans don’t want to carry the burden of a Buddhist paradise, they want a mobile phone too” (Visser, 2014, p. 97). In other words, an idealised image creates certain expectations. An overstatement of Buddhism as the presentation of Tibetanness, for example, makes secular Tibetans seem inauthentic to foreigners; they expect all Tibetans to be like monks (McLagan, 1997). Tsering Shakya, a Tibetan historian, explains another danger of the Shangri-La myth: “the politics of Tibet are seen as how to preserve a dying civilization, whether it is best to preserve it in jam jars or museums” (Bray, 2000, p. 164). He adds that whilst Tibet gets a lot of support from the West, the actual political problem is not taken seriously.

A final concern in Klieger’s (1997) article is that Tibetans themselves may have started to believe in the Shangri-La myth, although he does not find any evidence that this is indeed the case. Of course, Ström (1997, p. 35) states; up to a certain extent, Tibet is inevitably an imagined community, a mental concept. This is especially true for those generations that never got to see the real Tibet. For them, there are two conflicting images of Tibet: on one hand, the idealised, unspoiled land to which exiles wish to return; and on the other, the real, changed land occupied by the Chinese (Ström, 1997, p. 37). Both visions can indeed be found in interviews. A young Tibetan woman in India says that although she has never been to Tibet and only knows it from tales, she is convinced that it must have been a beautiful country before the Chinese came (Visser, 2014, p. 143-144). According to a scientist in Vissers (2014, p. 97) book, most Tibetans actually see Tibet more as a horrible place now.

Material Culture

In his photography book, Nelson (2013, p. 274) names a perhaps somewhat stereotypical, but also concise list of Tibetan material culture: amongst others the skyburials, tsampa (food), Lhamo (Tibetan opera), spinning wheels and prayers. Snellgrove and Richardson (2003) mainly discuss culture in terms of cultural products, architecture, clothing and food and (monastic) performance rituals. Naturally, having a skyburial in the diaspora may be difficult. Many of the other forms of culture may have a good chance of survival though.

Preservation and the Global Stage

Tibetan artworks and performances are still actively practised within the exile community. An important goal since the start of exile has been to preserve Tibetan culture; for that purpose, institutions like the Tibetan Institution of Performance Art (TIPA), were quickly established after arrival in India (Calkowski, 1997, p. 52). It represents different types of Tibetan arts, such as Tibetan opera, music from Lhasa, folk songs and dances, and sacred monastic dances. Apart from preserving culture, there has also been a major change; Tibetan culture is increasingly distributed across the world. The most important result of the diaspora, according to Tethong (2016, p. 155), is that Tibetanness has found its way onto a global stage, and many aspects of Tibetan culture are therefore becoming part of the global mainstream. As a result of this foreign interest in Tibetan material culture, the trade in cultural goods has become an important source of income for the exile community. A significant part of the exile communities' economy depends on this trade (Moran, 2004, p. 48). Rug weaving in particular has become an important occupation (O'Neill, 2005).

Tibetan material culture has gained a lot of attention from Westerners in particular. Tibetan performance arts and artworks have become increasingly popular in the West since the start of exile (Snellgrove & Richardson, 2003, p. 281). Tibetan art was not commonly known or displayed in foreign countries during the 1950's, but after only twenty years of exile this had already radically changed; Tibetan art is now displayed and sold for very high prices in all big Western cities (Snellgrove & Richardson, 2003, p. 277-278). Furthermore, I find that there are several different "Tibet shops" in the Netherlands alone. The Western interest in Tibetan goods is not only visible in Western countries, but also in the exile communities in India and Nepal; Tibetan sellers of cultural goods in India, for example, confirm that they mostly aim at Western tourists as potential buyers (Moran, 2004, p. 50). Indian tourists, they say, are less likely to buy anything.

The reason for the distribution of material culture in the West is not just economical but also very much political. An early example of this is the travelling Tibetan opera troupe from India, sent to many Western countries in 1974/1975 and 1986 (Calkowski, 1997, p. 54). Sending these performance troupes became a political statement and tool for gaining support. There are more recent examples of strategically distributing Tibetan material culture to other countries as well. The Tibet shop based in Amsterdam, for example, is part of a larger political campaign group ('Tibetwinkel', Stichting Tibet Support Groep Nederland). Not only does this

shop sell Tibetan art, books, jewellery, and Buddha statues (to name a few), but they also present a lot of information on Tibet's history, culture and political situation. On their website, they ask for support for the political cause. Another way in which Tibetans in exile try to reach Western audiences for their political cause, is the new wave of Tibetan literature. Dickie (2018, p. 11-18) explains that although the Tibetan literary tradition is thousands of years old, and stories are one of the most important artforms of contemporary Tibet, the outside world is not yet familiar enough with Tibetan fiction. Her book containing Tibetan stories, she explains, is especially meant to be a debut of Tibetan literature in other cultures. Another example of the spread of Tibetan material culture onto a global stage are the many Tibetan (auto)biographies written and sold in English (McMillin, 2001).

Authenticity and Adaptation

However, there are indicators that material culture may have lost its "authenticity" in the diaspora. Tibetan goods are often especially designed to make them appear as traditional as possible to Western buyers (Moran, 2004, p. 48-50). O'Neill (2005), for example, finds that the carpets sold in Nepal are in many aspects not like traditional Tibetan carpet weaving. Most were inspired by Western artists, and new designs were directly sent from the West. O'Neill (2005, p. 280) draws the conclusion that "Tibetan carpet exporters were becoming wealthier, but at the expense of a vastly transformed weaving tradition". Tibetan operas too are adjusted so that they appeal more to a Western audience Calkowski (1997, p. 51-57) mentions. In 1986 and 1991, she adds, the operas were even directed by non-Tibetan artistic directors. This may even happen unintentionally though: when Yeh (2007, p. 659) visited a Tibetan cultural performance in San Francisco, a Tibetan woman from Lhasa told her that "watching them is so funny: it's hilarious", because: "they don't know anything about Tibetan culture, they only know the very surface". Whether this woman was right is up to debate though, as Yeh (2007) argues that the same accusations can be made towards "Sinicized" Tibetans remaining in Tibet.

Finally, an obvious process is that expressions of Tibetanness mix with expressing other cultures. By looking at performances during the 2017 International Youth Concert organised by the Global Tibetan Student Union (GTSU, 2017) in Bangalore, India, I noticed that five of the fifteen performances are announced as "Tibetan song" or "Tibetan dance"; the rest are English dances and songs, or Indian dances and songs. There is also one Korean dance. It shows

that the Tibetan youth in exile does not only wish to express their Tibetan culture. At the same time, it shows that the Tibetan youth can be eager to display their Tibetanness in a cultural performance as well.

Discussion: The Paradox of Globalisation

I will start this discussion section with a summary of findings from the narratives of Tibetanness. First, I found that the diaspora may have increased a sense of unity within the exile community. Internal differences in terms of regional and religious background seem to matter less than before the exile due to a common political cause. However, I found indicators, also in the other narratives, that there are new divisions in the form of age and place of residence. Young people are more critical of Buddhist universalism, but also more vulnerable to the Shangri-La myth. Exiles in Western states are not only further removed from the homeland, but also from the recreated homeland in Dharamsala. So, the diaspora may have unified the old divisions more (although we do not know this for certain), but has also created new divisions. It is furthermore quite certain that there has been an increase in the use of unity as a rhetorical tool.

Secondly, I found that the amount of monastic education has decreased, although this type of monastic education has become more universal at the same time. This has been a trend in Tibetan Buddhism as a whole; many Westerners are drawn to the religion and this has often been encouraged by Tibetans. The narrative of homeland, however, shows that stereotyping Tibetans as monks may spread a false image of Tibetans, which is harmful because it does not allow them to be normal people. The Buddhist religion nonetheless remains a very important, albeit certainly not the only, aspect of Tibetan identity. The importance of religion in Tibetan politics has diminished however, and the government-in-exile has become increasingly more democratic and secular. This was for a large part the work of the Dalai Lama, who has limited his own power in the process. He remains to be a very important religious and unofficial political leader for the exile community.

Third, I found that Tibetans in India have recreated a small-scale Tibet in their new country. For all exile Tibetans, but mostly those in Western countries and mostly for the younger generation, the homeland is a mental image. Overall, Tibetans seem to hold on to their sense of belonging to the Tibetan homeland, but they are also influenced by their new host countries and other cultures. Many seem to have recognised the appeal that an idealised

Shangri-La image has on Westerners, however. This image has been used to gain political support. It has been suggested that due to their separation from the Tibetan homeland, the Shangri-La myth affects Tibetans as well, but I found no evidence to confirm this.

Finally, material culture is still present in the exile community in the form of cultural goods, literature, artwork and performances. The exile community made effort to preserve this. A major change has been the display of material culture on a global stage. Most of this is aimed at Western audiences, to generate money or attention for the political cause. Sometimes, however, Tibetan material culture has been changed from the traditional form to be more appealing to Westerners.

The question now remains what this evolution means for the Tibetan people. What implications does it have for the future survival of Tibetanness in exile? At the beginning of this paper, I suggested that the exposure of Tibetanness to the force of globalisation might bring both threats and opportunities. I will first address the threats: I argued that the main dangers of globalisation for indigenous peoples are the invasion and repression by foreign powers, cultural homogenisation and forced separation from the homeland. The first of these is not applicable here; this may be what is happening in geographical Tibet, but the aim in this paper is to investigate the subtler forces of globalisation found in the latter two. In the narratives of Tibetanness, I did indeed encounter these two threats: first, the possibility that the influence of the West may lead to cultural assimilation; and second, that the separation from the Tibetan homeland may have caused a loss of authenticity due to a new-formed connection with an imagined homeland instead of the real Tibet.

The Threat of Westernisation

The influence of the West is visible in all four narratives of Tibetanness. Tibetans have adapted their material culture to appease Western taste, they presented unity to confirm the Western image of Tibetans, they reinforced the Shangri-La myth to appeal to the West and they changed their political system to conform Western ideas. But is this harmful to Tibetan culture and identity? First of all, as the literature review described, indigenous peoples do not lose their culture and identity just because they change or adapt to new circumstances. An important difference between threatening change and non-threatening change is whether or not it was done autonomously, as explained in the literature review. From Sangay's (2003) article, we can derive that the Dalai Lama has been very open to the West since the start of

the diaspora because he recognised that Western countries would be valuable allies. His political changes were thus out of free will. Although the Tibetan people were not necessarily in favour, neither did they oppose this process. Similarly, as Calkowski (1997) mentioned, Tibetan operas were changed especially for Westerners because Tibetans wanted to make it appealing. Inviting Richard Gere to talk of Tibetan “mystical energy” in New York (McLagan, 1997) was a deliberate choice as well. Not only are these changes deliberate, however, they are clearly done with a certain goal in mind: to gain Western support for the political cause. The only change to appeal to Westerners that I found was not done for political reasons, is probably the rug-weaving industry mentioned by O’Neill (2005).

However, despite the changes being autonomous, I did perceive the threat that pleasing the West in the areas of material culture and the depiction of the homeland may have gone too far. This trade-off between culture and the political goal may damage authenticity. In her article, Calkowski (1997) makes it clear that Tibetans in exile are very able to keep their own cultural autonomy, unlike Tibetans in China. They may still be well in control of their own culture. The slow change in the religious/political sphere indicates that changes according to a Western model were carefully planned. Also, changes in the way Tibetanness is displayed towards the outside world does not mean the change is an internal one as well. Kolas (1996), for example, makes it clear in his article that secular rhetoric does not equal secular feelings amongst the Tibetan people. Even though the Dalai Lama is officially only a religious leader now, he may thus still be perceived as the political leader. Finally, not all attempts to gain Western support required adaptation; none of my findings suggested alterations in Tibetan artwork, and literature is specifically aimed at familiarising Westerners with the real Tibet, Dickie (2018, p. 11-18) writes.

The Threat of Losing Home

The second threat, however, is more dangerous than the first. The first, as we have seen, mostly derives from autonomous decisions to adapt. Opening up to the West was not so much inevitable as well as a choice. Separation from the homeland, however, is an imposed change that is not only unwished for, but also touches the core of Tibetan indigenous identity. The bond with the homeland, as I argued before, is an essential aspect of Tibetanness. The main question that may thus come to mind here; is how it is at all possible to maintain Tibetanness in the diaspora. Can an indigenous people have an ancestral homeland without living on the

ancestral homeland? I find that the answer is probably yes; the Tibetans have found ways to maintain this special bond. The narrative of unity showed that Tibetans still identify as Tibetan, which is, after all, a source of identity which originates from a specific place, even though they no longer live in that particular area. Furthermore, the recreation of Tibet in new host countries, particularly “Little Lhasa” in Dharamsala, enables them to recreate this special bond.

However, it seems that the longer the exile continues, the more likely it will be that the homeland is truly just an imagination. This is a point where Tibetans have created a difficult position for themselves; the image of Tibetans as non-violent has prevented them from taking on a more assertive stance against China. The lack of a more assertive stance against China makes it unlikely that they will achieve a free Tibet anytime soon. The Dalai Lama often speaks of non-violence; he is against any aggression towards China (Donnet, 1990, p. 175). The current president of the Central Tibetan Administration also emphasized that “support for Tibet means support for non-violence, dialogue, freedom, human rights and democracy” during his trip to Germany (Shonu, May 12, 2018). Western admiration for Tibet has been based on these values. Changing attitude would certainly lead to a loss of Western support.

In Conclusion: The Future of Tibetanness

Tibetanness has certainly managed to survive in the diaspora up until now, since Tibetans seem to be in control of their own development and changes were usually made under Tibetan autonomy. Both threats of globalisation have not yet had a major harmful impact on the chances of survival. However, it is a thin line on which Tibetans in exile have decided to balance. In order to reach the dual political and cultural goal of working towards a free Tibet and maintaining Tibetan culture in exile, the Tibetans have changed certain aspects of Tibetanness to appeal to the West, thereby limiting their own freedom. If they do not display their created identity, they run the risk of losing political support from Western states. Furthermore, the line between Tibetan as staged for a Western audience and real Tibetanness may eventually be blurred. Although Tibetanness has survived in exile for several decades, time still remains an enemy. Perhaps a more assertive stance against China is needed, even though it risks damaging the carefully build-up Tibetan image. For further research, investigating the possibilities of gaining actual freedom in Tibet, along with investigating the

way younger generations perceive the homeland may be especially interesting for Tibet's future.

Thus, the globalisation paradox that is, as described in the beginning of this paper, a common occurrence amongst indigenous peoples worldwide, is present in the Tibetan exile community as well. Globalisation presents threats to Tibetanness in exile, but also enables Tibetans to adapt and spread their culture to other countries to gain more support for their political goal. Therefore, globalisation has, in a way, provided a tool for empowerment. Ironically, these threats have not harmed Tibetanness much, as my analysis showed that Tibetans have been quite able to survive as a people. By actively turning Western influence and false notions of the homeland into political tools, however, Tibetans themselves created the danger of a false Tibetanness. For now, Tibetanness has shown a remarkable ability to survive, but time may still catch up.

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