Claiming Tibet or claiming Tibetanness?

On the relationship between ‘Tibet’ and national identity

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CONTENTS

Abstract. *This thesis argues that there is a hegemonic and inflexible discourse on Tibetan identity, though there are examples of dissent. This identity discourse constructs a narrative on 'Tibet' which Tibetans claim. In turn, by claiming 'Tibet', Tibetans are claiming their own identity. 'Tibet' is represented by the government in exile. This constitutive relationship between 'Tibet' and 'Tibetanness' results in a narrativising of history and an Othering of Shugden practitioners and Chinese, in order to define a coherent national identity.*

INTRODUCTION

In 1959 the Dalai Lama fled from Tibet to India. It marked the beginning of a period of exile for the Tibetan government and many Tibetans. In the years before that, China had increasingly taken hold of Tibet, leading up to Tibetan resistance and the eventual flight of many. In India Tibetans established a Government-in-Exile, which was seen as a continuation of the government from Tibet. This government is not officially recognised by any country. The political system increasingly democratised under the leadership of the Dalai Lama, who resigned from political office in 2011. Currently, Tibetans are spread over South Asia, mainly India, Nepal and Bhutan, as well as in Western regions including North America and Europe. After more than 50 years of exile, Tibetans still feel connected to each other. However, to what extent is this common identity related to the territory of Tibet?

Literature

Tibet has been largely ignored by International Relations (IR) literature. Sometimes the broader geopolitical situation in the region is discussed (Anand 2007: xiii-xv), but Tibetans as a topic by themselves only feature in research performed by Anand. He explains the lack of attention by IR mainly by referring to the Western orientation of the discipline. The limits of a discipline focused on sovereign nation-states and great power politics, are indeed becoming visible when considering the enormous gap in IR literature concerning Tibet. Tibet can provide IR with important research topics, including human rights, diaspora and national identity (Anand 2007: xvi).

The concept of 'diaspora' can shed light on the Tibetan case. The definition of a diaspora is contested, but most definitions at least imply a dispersion of the group of people, often coerced, a 'homeland orientation' and 'boundary-maintenance' (Brubaker 2005: 5-6). These criteria are met by the Tibetan case. Tibetans are coercively dispersed over the world, even though most Tibetans remained in South Asia. There is a strong homeland orientation among Tibetans. Tibetans are active in supporting an independent Tibet, have a collective

idea about Tibet, and identify themselves in terms of the homeland. The idea of return is also present, though not always in a physical sense. Not all Tibetans would physically go back, but at least the idea of return is prevalent in Tibetan discourse (Safran quoted in Brubaker 2005: 5; Anand 2003: 214). Thirdly, Tibetans are using boundary-maintenance as the members often keep a separate identity from that of the hostland. The acceptance of Indian citizenship is discouraged and many Tibetans in India are not well integrated. Tibetans in Western countries seem to adapt to host countries quite well, but at the same time they keep attached to their Tibetan identity. US citizenship is often encouraged as a strategic asset in claiming Tibet. This does therefore not necessarily mean that these US citizens feel 'less Tibetan' (Hess 2009: 2; Jampa 2014). This characterisation as a diaspora can highlight that Tibetans are bound together by a certain national identity and group consciousness, that this identity has been constructed and that the homeland plays an important role (Anand 2003: 212, 223; Hess 2009: 4-8).

The bonds between Tibetans are largely based on collective ideas, memories and identification, rather than physical or practical circumstances. Many of these members are not physically living together or dependent upon each other, but are bound by their ideas of being connected. This Tibetan diaspora is therefore also an 'imagined community'. A member of this community would not know all others, but 'in the minds of each lives the image of their communion' (Anderson 2006: 6). Tibetans are not living in the same territory, but are still connected because they imagine themselves as one community. Because of the novelty and socially/discursively constructed character of Tibetan nationalism, the 'constructionist' view advanced by Anderson fits the case better than alternatives that emphasise the natural and historically continuous existence of nationalism. Nationalism is discursively constructed, not an ontological and fixed entity (Smith 2010: 49-63, 86-7). However, imagining is a continuous process, and therefore 'imagining community' might better grasp the way it is used here (Anand 2007: 126).

The 'imagined community' of Anderson referred to modern, secular and Western nationalism. Dreyfus (2002) criticises this, arguing that Tibetan nationalism relies heavily on traditional Tibetan values and has a religious character. He argues that there was already a sense of belonging to a single country before the expulsion of the Dalai Lama. Religious and traditional values are indeed important in Tibetan nationalism. However, Tibetan political nationalism itself is recent. It started developing in the 1950s under the Chinese threat and became fully articulated only in exile. Modern circumstances, including communication networks, made it possible for the diaspora to stay coherent despite of distance. Before exile,

many Tibetans primarily identified with their region, while in exile Tibetans started identifying with Tibet as a whole (Anand 2003: 215, 222; Anand 2007: 100; Huber 2001; Lopez 1998: 197-8; Shakya 1999; Smith 2010). Tibetan nationalism thus incorporated traditional values but is itself inherently modern. It is characterised by religion, but this was used in order to emphasise a distinct national identity in a modern sense. Therefore, this religious character does not necessarily have to clash with the novel and constructed characterisation of Tibetan nationalism. It was *constructed*, because of the need to claim back Tibet (Anand 2002: 221; Kolas 1996: 62).

The novelty of Tibetan nationalism is analysed in the influential work *Prisoners of Shangri-La* by Lopez. He (1998: 196-200) argues that a common Tibetan identity was only needed in exile, and therefore only then created. However, it was afterwards discursively constructed as if it was not recent. Buddhism was highlighted as representing this nationalism. However, as the depiction of the past was only created in the present, they perceived their own past under the influences of their current surroundings of Western orientalist ideas. Lopez argues that these orientalist conceptions of Tibet have largely constructed Tibetan identity. Hereby he underestimates the role of Tibetans in appropriating and changing this discourse, as he reduces Tibetans to 'prisoners of Shangri-la'.

Others have placed more emphasis on the role of Tibetans in their identity-construction. Western ideas are appropriated by Tibetans and Tibetans thus use these ideas themselves (Anand 2000; 2002; 2007). The West had a certain idea of Tibet (peaceful, religious,…) and Tibetans appropriated this discourse and changed it in their interest. However, the idea of 'Tibet' is not *only* a Western creation. Anand frames the Tibetan construction of their identity as a reaction to Western ideas. Western ideas do influence Tibetan identity, but Tibetans also construct their own identity in relation to others. Instead of being prisoners of Orientalist fantasies, Tibetans are constructing their own identity in opposition to China. Exile and the claim on Tibet play a defining role, while orientalist ideas can be appropriated in order to support these. The construction of Tibetan identity in terms of a reaction to the West (as Lopez does), in fact essentialises Tibetan identity as inherently non-Western. It frames the issue in such a way that the West-non-West binary is accentuated, instead of overcome. This can construct Tibetan identity in only non-Western terms, thereby perpetuating and possibly even constructing its distinctive character as a non-Western region.

This thesis shows that the discursively constituted image of 'Tibet' creates Tibetan identity to a large extent. It is often noted that a maintenance of an exoticised image of Tibet can harm the Tibetan culture and struggle for independence (Anand 2002: 220; Anand 2003:

221), though this image can also be used as a 'soft power resource' (Magnusson 2002). The appropriation of Western discourse is indeed a strategic aspect in Tibetan identity making. The discursive construction of Tibet as a territory has the effect of strengthening the need to claim Tibet as a territory and therefore use Western ideas to gain support. This 'territory' provides a reason to appropriate the Western discourse, emphasising cultural distinctiveness and historical independence in order to strengthen the claim this territory. This territory thus plays a pivotal role. However, it is the discursive construction of this territory ('Tibet') rather than the actual territory that performs this role.

This thesis works from an IR perspective, while most existing literature on Tibet is more anthropological in nature. This thesis focuses exclusively on the transnational community. This community is mainly analysed as a whole, in order to theorise national processes. When works on Tibetan identity focus on discourse, this is usually done from a postcolonial perspective (e.g. Anand). This thesis uses poststructuralist theorising, offering a new perspective. The existing literature on the Tibetan diaspora usually focuses on Tibetans living in India, and sporadically the US. Europe is usually not taken into account, which this thesis is trying to rectify by adding European sources (mainly interviews). Though many works discuss the idealised image of Tibet (e.g. Lopez 1998; Anand 2007), these works usually do not question the claim they make on this territory. This thesis argues that this claim is not based on a prediscursive geographical entity, but on a discursively constructed 'Tibet'. By 'claiming Tibet' Tibetans are at the same time claiming, and thereby constructing, their own identity.

Theory and methodology

This thesis draws upon poststructuralist theorising, thereby using discourse analysis. This method focuses on how things are framed by looking at the way things are articulated, usually in speech or writing (Hansen 2006). To say that discourse is 'all that matters' does not mean that there *is* no world, but that it is impossible to objectively know about that world without interpreting it (Campbell 1992: 6). Therefore, it is useful to analyse how certain 'truths' come into being and how ideas and identities are constructed. Because language constructs meaning, identities are always in process: they are performatively constituted. There are thus no ontological fixed identities. This language and practice constructs boundaries, it constructs identities in opposition to Others. Foreign policies are such a boundary-producing practice, and thus constructs identity as well as it is based upon identity (Campbell 1992: 85; Hansen 2006: 1).

The focus on discourse necessitates a reference to the agency-structure debate, as some argue that this poststructuralist interpretation leaves not enough space for agency (e.g. Wight 1999). An explanation of the position on agency that is used here is thus necessary. As Doty argued: 'the very possibility of 'objective' structures is lodged within the self-presence of the subjects, who are themselves socially/discursively constructed', complicating the subject/object distinction (Doty 1997: 371). Practices construct both agents and structure, and the meaning of these practices is signified by discourse. However, this meaning is never stable nor determined (Doty 1997: 377-9). Tibetan identity is constructed by discourse, but this discourse is not necessarily determined by Orientalism but by practice. Arguing that Tibetans are 'prisoners of Shangri-la' (Lopez 1998) is denying them any agency, while arguing that discourse limits but also creates possibilities, gives Tibetans agency over which discourse to use and how to use it. Discourses construct possibilities for framing and understanding, but agents have agency in using these possibilities. As discourses are unstable, overlapping and often contradictory, there are many different actions possible (Campbell 1999: 6; Doty 1997: 385). The use of alternative interpretations of Tibetan identity is analysed in the section *Resistance and dissent* below.

In order to analyse Tibetan discourse, two radically different books (Thurman 2008; International Shugden Community 2013) were highlighted. These both represented a clear example of the respective discourse they were a part of, and could thus show the workings of this discourse. Other popular works that reach many people and thus are a powerful exponent of this discourse were added, including the autobiography of the Dalai Lama. Academic works based on ethnographic research and historical literature formed an important background.[1] Two in-depth interviews, one with a politically inactive young Tibetan and one with an activist Tibetan, combined with a questionnaire and the attendance of a lecture and teaching by the Dalai Lama, provided valuable additional insight into Tibetan perception.

Structure

This thesis will continue where the literature left off. It will research how Tibetan identity and the territory of 'Tibet' are related, and what processes play a role in the constitution of both. It is argued that on the one hand, a cohesive identity is created in order to claim this territory. On the other hand, the claiming of this territory, and thereby the idea of that territory itself, is constructing their own identity. By claiming Tibet, Tibetans are

[1] Especially useful as a background were: Hess 2009; Shakya 1999; Vahali 2009.

claiming themselves as Tibetans. Both these processes need the creation of Others. In order to know one's own identity, it needs to be constructed against an Other. Claiming Tibet provides a need to show that Tibetans are different from Others and therefore have a 'right' to this territory. These relationships are illustrated in figure 1.

The first section of this thesis will discuss Tibetan identity. It is argued that there is an inflexible and hegemonic discourse on Tibetan identity. This is caused by the traditional hierarchy and the authority of the Dalai Lama, as well as the claim on 'Tibet'. Discourses that differ are automatically designated as a radical Other, inspired by the Chinese. However, there are some examples of moderate dissent that can eventually lead to a more flexible understanding of Tibetan identity.

Secondly, the idea of 'Tibet' as a discursively constructed territory is explained. Tibetans have an image of Tibet that does not correspond to Tibet in the past, but less so to the present situation. It is a discursively constructed idea, rather than a geographical entity.

This 'Tibet' is present in exile, as the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan government represent, and even are to some extent, 'Tibet'. The authority of the Dalai Lama, the electoral system and even the place of residence all symbolise 'Tibet'.

The fourth section discusses the narrativisation of history that supports the claim on 'Tibet'. History is told in a way that idealises the past and underestimates divisions between Tibetans. By this narrative a particular idea of 'Tibet' and Tibetan identity is constructed.

Finally, the process of Othering is explained. It is argued that religion plays an important role, as it leads to the exclusion of some (for example Shugden adherents) in order to construct 'Us'. China as an Other serves as another exclusion that constructs Tibetan identity and supports the Tibetan claim on 'Tibet'.

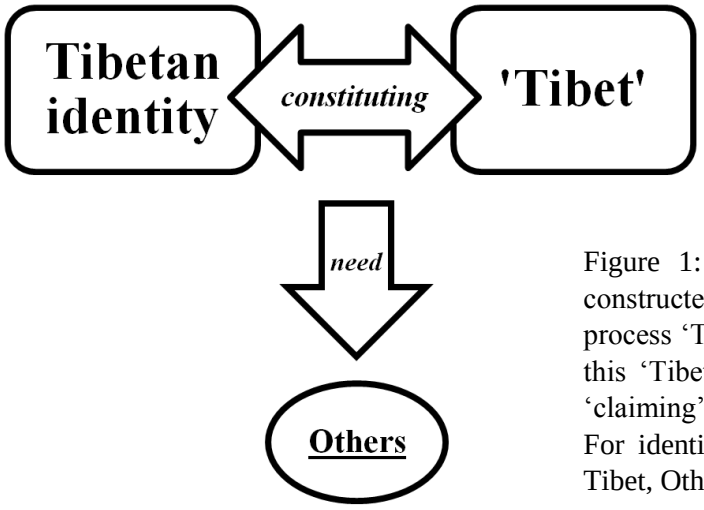

Figure 1: A coherent Tibetan identity is constructed in order to claim 'Tibet'. In the process 'Tibet' itself is created. By claiming this 'Tibet', Tibetans are at the same time 'claiming' their own identity as a Tibetan. For identity construction and the claim on Tibet, Others are needed. *Source: author.*

1. TIBETAN IDENTITY DISCOURSE

Tibetan identity discourse is limited. The dominant discourse idealises Tibetan identity. It argues that Tibetans have innate qualities that the world 'needs' and it emphasises the positive role of the Dalai Lama. The stability of this discourse is caused by power structures. The authority of the Dalai Lama and the traditional hierarchy, as well as the claim on Tibet, limit the possibility for alternative conceptions of identity.

The most dominant discourse, especially in the West, emphasises Tibetan non-violence, spirituality and the importance and goodness of the Dalai Lama. Often Tibetans are associated with environmentalism and gender equality. These qualities are often portrayed as innate to the Tibetan people (Huber 2001: 357-60). A clear example of this discourse is the book *Why the Dalai Lama Matters: his act of truth as the solution for China, Tibet, and the world* by Robert Thurman (2008). As the title indicates, it argues that the Dalai Lama has an extremely important role to play in a solution for Tibet, as well as for the world. The Dalai Lama is an 'apostle of non-violence' (2008: 12). Thurman sees him as 'a living Prince of Peace […] offering us hope and help in our stressed-out lives and calling upon us to take up our own wild joy of universal responsibility' (2008: 13). He argues that the Dalai Lama is very effective 'at representing the special qualities and precious value of the Tibetan people' (2008: 64). According to Thurman, we should care about Tibet, because 'as human beings, it's impossible not to care when you know of the appalling manner in which the Tibetans are being treated' (2008: xv). It is about 'what it means to be human, truly part of the global community' (2008: xvii). Highly idealistic, this work represents Tibetans as 'victims' of an aggressor and equates them with certain values of peace and non-violence that the world 'needs'. The 'we' in this book is thus a universal 'we'. Tibetan culture is something 'we' should aspire to, while 'they' naturally possess these values.

This discourse is not only used by Westerners. The Dalai Lama uses it as well and is an important force in creating this discourse in the first place. Because of his religious authority and good reputation he has the power to largely influence Tibetan discourse. In 2004 he stated that Tibetans are 'endowed with inborn qualities of honesty, peace, and a sense of moral integrity' (quoted in Thurman 2008: 182). In his autobiography he states: 'a future free Tibet will seek to help all those in need, protect Nature, and to promote peace. I believe that our Tibetan ability to combine spiritual qualities with a realistic and practical attitude will enable us to make a special contribution, in however modest a way' (Dalai Lama 1990: 271). The Dalai Lama has argued that Western values such as democracy are compatible with the values of Buddhism (Dalai Lama 1999). He thus stresses the innate peaceful values of

Tibetans, and portrays a future Tibet as a paradise. He associates these values with the ideals of the West, and portrays Buddhism as naturally advertising 'positive' values such as freedom and equality. This portrayal is largely influenced by his wish to claim back Tibet. He needs to create a positive image of Tibetans, as well as a differentiation from Chinese, in order to strengthen the claim on Tibet.

This does not mean that this discourse is always stable. Especially the Dalai Lama often changes his discourse depending on the audience. His speeches and writings often have a differing emphasis on either human rights or self-determination, and independence or autonomy (Anand 2002: 212). However, these differences do not question Tibetan identity.

Discourses are unstable and overlapping, while only power can create stability (Doty 1997: 397). This creates opportunities for dissent and different interpretations of Tibetan identity. However, power structures are creating stability in the dominant narrative on Tibetan identity. An important restraining factor is the religious authority of the Dalai Lama and the influence of the traditional Tibetan hierarchy. Hierarchy was an important aspect of life in Tibet, and it was not commonly accepted to voice dissent. Many (older) Tibetans do not accept that others openly disagree with the Dalai Lama, whom they see as a religious leader who knows what is best, instead of a politician that you can reason with. Therefore many Tibetans are not criticising the government. This makes the mainstream discourse more hegemonic (Vahali 2009: 106; Ardley 2003; Jampa 2014). For example in interviews, there was often not much space for critique or alternative opinions (Anonymous interview 2014; anonymous questionnaire 2014). However, this mainly applies to the older generation, especially those that lived in hierarchical Tibet. Young Tibetans increasingly see the Dalai Lama as a politician that you could disagree with, and dissent is thus becoming more common (Vahali 2009: 121, 274-6; Hess 2009: 59). Many of these, usually young, Tibetans disagree with the Dalai Lama on the Middle Way Approach and non-violence. They want a more active stance against China, only accepting independence (Hess 2009: 228-9).

Power structures such as families and schools play an important role in restricting discourse, in order to claim 'Tibet'. By creating a certain 'Tibet' they are defining and restricting 'Tibetanness'. In Tibetan schools in exile young Tibetans learn about Tibet and their own Tibetan identity, because they can play an important role in the struggle for Tibet (Hess 2009: 57). Tibetan identity is thus created in order to strengthen the claim on 'Tibet'. This unfreedom in articulating Tibetan identity is often encouraged in terms of 'freedom'. Sangay, currently the Tibetan Prime Minister, stated: 'The election law rules out parties on the grounds that, at this point in its freedom struggle, Tibet cannot afford formal partisan

divisions' (Sangay 2003: 126). In this discourse unfreedom now can eventually create freedom in 'Tibet'.

Resistance and dissent

Though power structures limit dissent, there are examples of alternative interpretations of Tibetan identity. Power structures often define these alternatives as a 'radical Other' by claiming affiliations with 'the Chinese'. However, there are some examples of more or less accepted dissent based on different interpretation of Tibetan identity.

The most prominent exponent of the radically differing discourse is the book *The False Dalai Lama: the worst dictator in the modern world*. The book questions the legitimacy of the Dalai Lama, and claims that he is lying and unjustly banning Shugden worshipping.[2] On the current Dalai Lama the book states: 'from a spiritual point of view there is no one who is more evil than this false Dalai Lama' and calls the Dalai Lama an 'enemy' (International Shugden Community 2013: 3). The adherents of this discourse also staged several recent demonstrations against the Dalai Lama. The representativeness of this discourse is questionable, as it is unclear how many people in fact support it. For example, the book has been written by the International Shugden community, but the exact authors are not clarified.

Moderately deviating texts are sometimes equated with this radical discourse, because they are not fully supporting the mainstream discourse. Some form of dissent is then interpreted as Chinese anti-Tibetan propaganda by members of the mainstream discourse. An example is an occasion the Dalai Lama describes in his autobiography. Edward Heath, a former UK Prime Minister who had visited Tibet, commented that he feels support for the Dalai Lama is diminishing in Tibet, which the Dalai Lama did not agree with. The Dalai Lama comments on this in his book: 'I am highly impressed at the effectiveness of Chinese disinformation and deception even on such an experienced person as he is' (Dalai Lama 1990: 203). When someone expresses an alternative view from the official Tibetan viewpoint, this is often interpreted as caused by Chinese influence.

Debate and dissent are more easily expressed in unofficial discourse, over which power structures have less influence. In some of these cases, Tibetans can remain anonymous. TibetBoard, an internet forum, forms such an example. As Brinkerhoff showed (2012), on this forum Tibetans more actively voice dissent over policies. Some users publicly disagreed with the Dalai Lama, and issues such as non-violence and assimilation are openly discussed. One

[2] For an analysis of the banning of Shugden see page 16.

telling post was called ‘dissent and oppositions can not be tolerated!!!’, on which others reacted that he was a ‘fascist’ (Brinkerhoff 2012: 91). This post, as well as other heated discussions, shows that intolerance of dissent is indeed present, but that there are also important forms of dissent. However, this dissent is not always expressed via official channels.

Besides informal communication, official organisations can play an important role. Political parties are still absent, but other organisations such as the Tibetan Youth Congress (TYC) articulate differing opinions. The TYC plays an important role almost similar to an opposition party. The TYC is pro-independence and more accepting of violence than the older political elite. Moreover, it critiques the representational system in which an equal fixed number of seats are given to the separate regions and sects of Tibet (Boyd 2004: 95). Though the Dalai Lama recognised the organization early on, some members of the established political elite (and the older generation) do not appreciate this organization critiquing the Government-in-Exile. Some of them tried to promote certain loyal members into TYC positions in an attempt to diminish the power of the organisation (Boyd 2004: 31-2; 90). However, the TYC still plays an important role in constructing and voicing an alternative discourse.

2. CONSTRUCTING ‘TIBET’

The current claim on Tibet does not rest on a prediscursive territory, but on the image of that territory. In *National Deconstruction*, Campbell focused not on a fixed, a priori state of Bosnia, but on the practices and the construction of ‘metaBosnia’ (1998: ix-x). The concept of ‘Tibet’ should be understood in these terms. ‘Tibet’ refers not to an a priori geographical entity but to the construction of Tibet in discourse. This ‘Tibet’ is always in process, as discourse is constantly creating it (Campbell 1992: 10). By claiming this ‘Tibet’, Tibetans are claiming their own identity and history. The claim on this constructed territory is thus an identity-making act.

Remembering Tibet plays a crucial role in keeping the diaspora united and as an ideal that Tibetans strive for (Ardley 2003: 351; Kolas 1996: 57). The ‘Tibet’ that is remembered and constructed is a peaceful country that chose to remain isolated (Dalai Lama 1990: 109) where people were living a simple but happy life. Lopez (1998: 10) states that this language ‘creates Tibet, a Tibet that Tibetans in exile have come to appropriate and deploy in an effort to gain both standing in exile and independence for their country’. This ‘Tibet’ does not correspond to the situation in the geographical area of Tibet itself. There is limited contact

between Tibetans and the diaspora, and many Tibetans have never been to Tibet. China has modernised Tibet and many Han Chinese have moved there. Tibetans in Tibet have changed by the circumstances of living in China. The situation in Tibet is thus not the same as the memory Tibetans in exile have. 'Tibet' is an idealised idea of a past Tibet, which Tibetans are constantly constructing in discourse.

'Foreign policies rely upon representations of identity, but it is also through the formulation of foreign policy that identities are produced and reproduced' (Hansen 2006: 1). Claiming 'Tibet' is constituted by a construction of Tibetan identity, but also constructs it. By claiming 'Tibet', Tibetans are claiming their own identity, because 'Tibet' symbolises this identity. 'Tibet' is what binds Tibetans, and by claiming this, they are framing themselves as belonging to this 'Tibet'. This act of claiming is thus not always related to an actual intention to go to the geographical area, but to turn to 'Tibet' as a symbol, an identity. Many, especially younger, Tibetans probably never want to return to Tibet. They have grown up in Indian or Western societies and their struggle for a free Tibet is not aimed at gaining personal access to the territory. Their image of 'Tibet' corresponds to what they have been taught by relatives and in school, which is based on remembering and imagining (Hess 2009: 56). The Tibet that these Tibetans are striving for is thus rather an *idea* than an actual territory.

3. 'TIBET' OUTSIDE TIBET

For many people Tibet is where the Dalai Lama is (Lopez 1998: 184). The Dalai Lama and the political system are symbols of what Tibet represents, now that Tibet itself has become inaccessible. The constructed 'Tibet' outside Tibet might be even more Tibetan than Tibet itself. The electoral system shows this link to 'Tibet', as the quota system represents the claim to 'Tibet' as a whole. The place the government in located, Dharamsala, as well as to some extent other settlements, also represent 'Tibet'. Tibet might have become difficult to access, 'Tibet' has not.

The Dalai Lama functions as a symbol of Tibet and Tibetan identity, and as a unifying force (Hess 2009: 53-4; Anand 2000: 282-3). He represents the Tibetan struggle and their policy of non-violence. In this sense, he is the representation of 'Tibet' as such. He unifies Tibetans, as he functions as a symbol that practically all Tibetans identify themselves with. The Dalai Lama travels to many parts of the world, including countries in Europe or North America where Tibetans have settled. For people living there, these visits form an important way to express their Tibetan identity (Roemer 2008: 98).

The increasingly democratic Tibetan government-in-exile can, and already does to a certain extent, take over this role of representing the home country. There is no Tibet to easily go back to, but there is a political system which represents 'Tibet' and to some extent even is 'Tibet' as such. The Government has some distributive functions, especially in India (for example in Tibetan education). However, especially for Tibetans living further away, the distributive functions of the government are extremely limited compared to 'normal' governments. Tibetans do not 'need' their government the way citizens of another country do, as they are already residents (and sometimes citizens) of another country. The Tibetan government-in-exile is not recognised by any country, and is therefore also limited in practice to perform certain functions. The main connection Tibetans have to their government is based on identity. The government represents Tibet, and therefore many Tibetans feel connected to it. The primary goals of this government are to keep the claim on the territory of Tibet high on the international agenda and to keep the community coherent and Tibetan culture alive. It thus has to safeguard 'Tibet'.

Tibetan discourse frames 'Tibet' as a single entity and claims the entire region of Tibet. The electoral system represents this claim. It is based on a quota system. All three regions (U-tsang, Amdo and Kham) and the religious sects (Bon and four Buddhist sects) have a fixed amount of seats in the legislature (Brox 2012: 459).[3] However, the outer regions, Amdo and Kham, fall almost entirely outside the Tibet Autonomous Region designed by China. By explicitly dividing the seats according to these three regions, the system claims to represent *all* regions, and thus makes a political statement (Ardley 2003: 352; Thargyal 1993: 43-4). However, this system risks deepening regional differences (Sangay 2003: 123) and it can impede the most capable candidates to be in office. Tsering Jampa said: "The most important I think is that people can really choose, free will, but then on the basis of capacity, ability of somebody, and knowledge, not based on regional [affiliations]. … When you elect on regional basis, within that region people vote for somebody, but maybe within that region there are not many people who have the capacity to run" (Jampa 2014). Because of these negative effects, some Tibetans are advocating an alteration of the electoral system.

Finally, the place the government is located, Dharamsala in Northern India, also symbolises Tibet, and not only because the government of Tibet moved there. Dharamshala means 'temporary home' in Hindi, reflecting the intention to return to Tibet. This name is said to be derived from 'dharmashala', which means 'house of the gods' (Anand 2007: 110). As

[3] The five religious traditions have 2 seats each, the three regions ten seats each. Besides that, two seats are reserved for exiles from North America and two others for exiles from Europe (Brox 2012: 459).

the Dalai Lama is now located there, both meanings have important symbolic value, referring to Dharamsala as the representation of the divine leadership of 'Tibet'. The town is located in a mountainous area and was (especially before the government was located there) often described as difficult to reach. These qualities match the idea of Lhasa as 'inaccessible' and the 'roof of the world' (Anand 2007: 111-22). In Dharamsala and other Tibetan settlements in India, Tibetan cultural aspects and 'free Tibet' items are widespread. It is often claimed that these settlements are even more authentically Tibetan than Tibet itself. In these places a Tibet is 'recreated'. This recreated 'Tibet' is the one that they remember and value. These images of 'Tibet' are extensively emphasised in order to 'preserve' Tibetan culture (Hess 2009: 68). Tibetan settlements *are* 'Tibet', even more than the geographic area of Tibet itself.

4. NARRATIVISING HISTORY

The claim on 'Tibet' plays a primary role in Tibetan identity-making, and this claim is supported by a certain construction of history. Both Tibet and China have an interest in presenting history in a certain way. These narratives simplify history and impose modern concepts, mainly territoriality and sovereignty, on the past in order to support (or challenge) this claim.

The Tibetan case is an example of a 'narrativizing of reality' (Campbell 1998: 34). Historical events are impossible to understand without being interpreted. Narratives give meaning to these events. There is always a choice in deciding which events are important and how they are related. The narratives of the past are thus not objective 'facts' but interpretations that can differ. Tibetans see history in light of the present and strategically (though sometimes unconsciously) construct their narrative. The specific interpretation that is used always serves a certain interest (Campbell 1998; Campbell 1999). Many narratives are constructed without official intervention, but in some cases the Tibetan government-in-exile discourages alternative readings in order to represent Tibetan history and identity in a positive light (Stoddard quoted in Huber 2001: 368). Tibetans need to argue that they have been a strong nation in the past, in order to strengthen their claim on Tibet. This territorial claim thus constructs the way the past is perceived, and this particular construction of history is part of the constitution of Tibetan identity.

Before the 1950s, hierarchy and inequality were important aspects of Tibetan society.[4] Tibet was largely underdeveloped compared to Western countries around that time. These

[4] The concepts feudalism, serfdom and theocracy are often applied here. The precise terminology is contested and an examination of it falls outside the scope of this thesis. For a discussion of this issue see: Thargyal 1993.

aspects are not always mentioned by Tibetans, or are glossed over as minor negative aspects. Tibetans usually portray the Tibetans living in Tibet before exile as 'happy' people. When the Chinese entered 'aggressively' Tibetan culture was under attack. Chinese rule is thus equated with a destruction of culture and society. A recent report by the International Campaign for Tibet was titled *60 Years of Chinese Misrule: arguing cultural genocide in Tibet.* In these narratives the facts that are used are not necessarily untrue, but the narrative that incorporates them (such as 'genocide') is political (Shakya 1999: xxii; ICT 2012).

Before the 20th century, local and 'national' authorities overlapped and borders were not clearly defined. Concepts such as territoriality and sovereignty did not exist in a modern sense. When Western powers, mainly England via India, came increasingly in contact with Tibet in the beginning of the 20th century, these ideas began to take hold. In exile, these ideas were necessary in order to gain international support for their cause. The claim on Tibet that Tibetans make is thus grounded in an idea of territoriality that did not naturally exist. 'Tibet' as a place was discursively constructed, and this discursive idea of Tibet is still present in the claim on the territory (Anand 2007: 65-71). When the question of historical sovereignty is discussed, it is often not realised that the very asking of this question is already done from the present. This question imposes the concept of sovereignty on a past in which this concept was not known, and therefore this question is impossible to answer, even though Tibetans and Chinese are both answering it.

Tibet did not have full sovereignty over all territories it currently claims, and historical Tibetan unity did not exist the way it is portrayed. Kham and Amdo were under the, mainly cultural and religious, influence of the central region U-Tsang, but full political authority did not exist (Anand 2007: 92-3). There is an ancient rivalry between U-tsang and the outer regions. These regional differences were aggravated by religious differences. The Dalai Lama belongs to the Gelugpa tradition. From 1537 until 1642 the Gelugpa and the Kagyupa sects were struggling for power in a direct confrontation. The former was dominant in U, while the later was dominant in Tsang (both located in U-tsang). At the end of this period the Gelugpa sect established its authority in Lhasa. In Kham other religious traditions such as Kagyupa still had much authority. Since then all monks in the Tibetan government in Lhasa were Gelugpas until the Chinese started promoting other traditions (Goldstein 1989: 1-2; Goldstein 1997: 5-15; Norbu 2001: 65; Shakya 1999: 132). In the second half of the 1950s a revolt broke out in Kham. Most Khampas explicitly fought for their region, not Tibet as a whole. Lhasa did not identify much with them either and was initially reluctant to support the revolt (Shakya 1999: 173). The offering of a golden throne in 1957 by traders from Kham marked

the beginning of the creation of a national identity. This event symbolised the allegiance of Tibetans to the Dalai Lama as their leader and his authority over Tibet, though this unity did not fully exist in practice yet (Dreyfus 2002: 41; Shakya 1999: 165-6). Phala, a Lhasa official at the time, has argued that without the Tibetan uprising on March 10 a civil war between Lhasa and Kham could have broken out (Shakya 1999: 193). Resistance against the Chinese and the experience of exile unified Tibetans further, though these divisions still exist. Kagyupas have occasionally expressed discontent with the rule of the Dalai Lama (Brox 2012: 460; Misra 2003: 190). However, in general Tibetans in exile nowadays refer to all Tibetan regions as one unity. The differences between regions are not a part of the official narrative, as this does not correspond to the unity of 'Tibet' as a whole and the claim of Tibetans on this 'Tibet'. Tibetan nationalism is thus a recent construct, and the past is narrativised in way to match this construct.

The narrative that is constructed does correspond to how most Tibetans have experienced and are still experiencing the situation. History can in that sense play an important psychological role in creating identities and policies. The collective trauma of flight and exile can make this trauma continuously relevant because the community is constantly giving meaning to these experiences, which influences current policies and identity discourse. Coping with these traumatic group experiences can cause a psychological need for reaction or resistance (Moses 2011), which makes reclaiming the homeland a goal of vital importance. The Tibetan experience of expulsion creates a need to reclaim this territory, which motivated by psychological rather than practical reasons, because 'the terror of history is inscribed into the minds and bodies of its victims' (Moses 2011: 101). The role of the claim on Tibet is thus psychological and discursive, rather than a practical need to live in the actual territory. The symbolic meaning of the territory thus plays an important role.

5. EXCLUSION, OTHERING AND RELIGION

The existence of an 'Other' is needed in order to be aware of one's own identity. The Other is what the identity of the 'Self' is constructed against. National identity is thus 'invented' discursively by practices of exclusion; it is not an ontological and fixed entity (Campbell 1998: 25-7). There can be different degrees of Othering (Hansen 2006: 37). Non-Buddhists, Dorje Shugden practitioners, Bonpos or Chinese are not all necessarily Othered to the same extent. Religion often plays an important role in the Tibetan cases of exclusion.

Tibetan culture and Buddhism are often equated (Lopez 1998: 200). The Tibetan constitution reads: "the future Tibetan polity .. shall endeavour to be a Free Social Welfare

State with its politics *guided by the Dharma*" (Tibetan Assembly 1991: art. 3, emphasis added). Politics and religion are not separated. Also in the daily life of Tibetans, religion plays an important identity-forming role. Religious festivals and centres form an opportunity for Tibetans to see each other and to feel connected to this community (anonymous interview 2014; Roemer 2008: 147-8). Also in Western countries, Tibetans often wear traditional clothing to these occasions (Anonymous interview 2014). At these moments people are behaving as 'Tibetans' and thus express their own separate identity as a 'Tibetan'. To some extent Tibetans are essentialising their own identity by constructing it in religious terms. Denying their own religiosity would undermine their identity as Tibetan. To stress religion is therefore also a claim on a certain identity and political position. It differentiates Tibetans from others (Chinese, Western) and thus emphasises the unique Tibetan culture, necessary for the Tibetan territorial claim.

Dreyfus (2002: 53) asked: 'how can one hold ideas, values and symbols that are sacred in any other way than absolutely?' This is indeed the danger of the equation of Buddhism and Tibetan identity: it can lead to intolerance if only one way of understanding religion, and thus identity, is accepted. Religious minorities are in a difficult position if religion and national identity are equated. Bonpos for example have been marginalised in Tibetan identity discourse and the construction of 'Tibet'. The myths of origin of Tibetans as a race are Buddhist, excluding others such as the Bonpos from the national identity (Lopez 1998: 197). Currently Bonpos enjoy the same number of seats in the Tibetan legislature, even though there numbers are smaller than those of other religious groups. Politically, they are therefore in fact 'overrepresented'. However, other minorities such as Muslims, Christians and atheists, even though their numbers are small, are not represented (Brox 2012: 261). The emphasis on religion in defining Tibetan identity thus leads to exclusion.

The Shugden controversy

The emphasis on religion can also lead to internal exclusion, as different interpretations of religion are not always accepted. A clear example of drawing boundaries is the Shugden controversy. Recently the Dalai Lama has stated that people that follow him, should not worship Dorje Shugden. Shugden is traditionally a protective deity of the Gelugpa sect. According to the tradition, he originated as the spirit of a monk who died after false accusations. The spirit took revenge by causing natural disasters and other signs, after which the Gelugpas asked the spirit to stop its revenge and to become a protector. The Dalai Lama (and his predecessors) has prayed to Shugden in his earlier years, but since 1976 he has

stopped that practice and advised others to do the same. He based this policy on advice from the Nechung oracle. The Dalai Lama does not view Shugden as a protective deity or the reincarnation of a monk, but as an 'evil spirit'. The Shugden practice would incite sectarianism as he is the deity of only one specific sect, and therefore inhibit the creation of a national identity and the independence struggle (Lopez 1998: 188-96).

The controversy divided the community. It leads to concerns about the freedom of expression in the exile community. Because of the positive image and religious authority of the Dalai Lama, many stopped the practice. However, some disagreed and continued. As a consequence, a number of Shugden practitioners were attacked by other Tibetans. Several monks that practiced Shugden were found murdered, adding fire to the controversy. Some Tibetans accused Shugden practitioners of opposing the Tibetan cause or even of being 'terrorists'. The International Shugden Community (2013) is using this controversy to 'show' that the Dalai Lama is a 'dictator'.[5] Eventually some Shugden supporters applied for Indian citizenship in order to show that they did not belong to the (Dalai Lama dominated) Tibetan community anymore (Brox 2012: 456; Misra 2003: 193). This is an indicator of how much Tibetan 'citizenship' is based upon identification and imagining.

This policy of exclusion fits within a long history in many different states to exclude certain people and frame them as threat. The Shugden practice belonged to one religious sect, and therefore did not fit within a common nationalist identity (Lopez 1998: 196; Misra 2003: 192-3). Religious and traditional disagreements over whether the Shugden tradition fits into a traditional conception of Buddhism play an important role (Dreyfus 2005). This traditional disagreement with the practice as 'not fitting' leads to the assumption that it threatens a single coherent vision of Buddhism. However, the importance the Dalai Lama attaches to this problem of divisiveness, is in turn influenced by the present situation of exile and the claim on Tibet. Thus, tradition might influence how Shugden is seen, while the decision that this is a problem is influenced by modern circumstances and nationalism. The Dalai Lama wants to maintain unity, which requires a coherent national identity. In order to define Tibetan identity, it has to be defined against something else. As Shugden represents a vision not coherent with the vision of the Dalai Lama, it represents a threat to the construction of a single national identity. If an alternative identity can question the national identity as being the 'true' identity, it can be considered a threat (Campbell 1992: 3). This was clearly the case with the Shugden practice, leading to a quite extreme Othering of the practice.

[5] See page 9.

China as an Other

Religious nationalism also leads to external exclusion, defining itself against non-Buddhist and non-Tibetan Others. The West, with its Christian values or China with atheist values, are hereby created as an Other. Tibetans supposedly have the 'peaceful' and 'Buddhist' values (often equated) that Westerners and Chinese do not have. The recent hype of Buddhism in the West corresponds to this. Buddhism is seen as a way out of the stressful life of Westerners, and in fact as a better lifestyle. Buddhism helps Tibetans to gain support from these Western Buddhists, and represents Tibetans as more peaceful people. Importantly, it represents them as different from and superior to the ('more aggressive') Chinese. In order to claim Tibet, Tibetans stress their 'unique' identity that is different from the Chinese. Othering of China is needed in order to support their claim, but also to define their own identity in the first place. This also leads to internal exclusion of Tibetans that have become 'too Chinese'.

The impact of China on Tibetan identity construction was clear from the start. The Dalai Lama was accepted as the leader of all Tibetans because of the Chinese threat. The Tibetan regions all shared resentment against the Chinese, and because of the Chinese threat they eventually all unified behind the Dalai Lama.[6] The Chinese threat thus played a defining role in the construction of Tibetan identity. Chinese suppression is equated with religious suppression. Because the Dalai Lama is a religious leader, his flight from Tibet is framed as both a political and a religious defeat. The Chinese were seen as a threat to Tibetan religion and thus identity. This Chinese threat to the 'Buddhist Tibetans' unified Tibetans, as religion was an aspect that the Tibetan regions and (most) religious traditions had in common (Kolas 1996: 55; Shakya 1999: 209).

The most important annual event that is not necessarily religious, is the Uprising Day at March 10. This day commemorates the Lhasa uprising against the Chinese that led to the flight of the Dalai Lama. This day is widely celebrated by Tibetans all over the world with traditional and recent symbols (Kolas 1996: 57). This day is important for the expression of national identity, while it symbolises resistance against the Chinese and the loss of the homeland from the Chinese.

The justification of their claim on Tibet is based on the assumption that Tibetans have a separate identity from the Chinese and therefore need the freedom in Tibet to express that

[6] See pages 14-5 of this thesis and: Shakya 1999; Dreyfus 2002.

identity. This separate Tibetan identity, different from the Chinese, is therefore an important part of Tibetan identity construction. Many Tibetans refer to their culture as being very different from the Chinese (Hess 2009: 65). Yeh (2002) argues that many Tibetans claim to be able to distinguish between Tibetans and Chinese easily, while in reality they are often not able to do this. The physical differences between Chinese and Tibetans are exaggerated by both the Chinese and Tibetans, leading to false ideas of what Tibetans must look like. Tibetans are imagining themselves as a homogenous community that is separate from the Chinese, and therefore overemphasise differences with the Chinese (Yeh 2002).

The differentiation between Tibetans and Chinese leads to a distantiating from Tibetans that have become too Chinese. Tibetans born in exile often have a very negative image of newcomers, who would have bad habits and have become too 'Chinese'. Especially Tibetans that lived in Eastern Chinese cities often feel that they are not fully accepted anymore as a 'real' Tibetan. In exile, Tibetans that only speak Chinese or a regional Tibetan dialect and are thus unable to communicate in Tibetan, are often discriminated against (Yeh 2002: 243; Vahali 2009: 26, 32).

CONCLUSION

Tibetan identity discourse is limited and stable, because of power structures. One of the most important power structures is the authority of the Dalai Lama. The claim on 'Tibet' plays an important role, as a particular discourse is advocated in order to claim back (an idealised vision of) 'Tibet'. This image of 'Tibet' unifies Tibetans, and by claiming it Tibetans are expressing their own identity. Tibetan history is narrativised in a limited way in order to support the claim on 'Tibet' and boundaries are created both in order to create a coherent identity and by that to strengthen the claim on 'Tibet'. Tibetan identity and (the claiming of) 'Tibet' are thus mutually constitutive.

Discourses might limit the options available; they are also creating these options in the first place because discourses are inherently unstable and contradictory. Power structures can stabilise discourses, but if their importance would diminish, Tibetan agency might increase. Precisely because identities are constantly under construction, there are possibilities for change. Perhaps democratisation can lead to a more flexible national identity. A public debate can lead to more openness in forming alternative discourses. This process is already underway. As Tsering Jampa said about Tibetan elections: 'last time in 2011 was also very different, people had to really come to the people and say: look, if I'm elected, I'm going to do this.. But we never had that before' (Jampa 2014).

Though this situation might lead to more openness and freedom in identity construction, it might also increase divisions between Tibetans. Without a uniting identity it is possible that alternative discourses deviate too far from the national identity to be accepted by others. Two factors could play an important role in this. Firstly, after the future death of the Dalai Lama regional and religious differences might re-emerge. Without his unifying presence, divisions can become more visible. Secondly, when 'Tibet' becomes less of a factor, the community might fall apart. Many members of the younger generation have never been to Tibet. Newcomers come from a Tibet that is different from the Tibet the first generation came from. When the older generation is no longer there, Tibetans might feel less connected to their homeland. On the other hand, many young Tibetans are very active in the struggle to 'free Tibet' (e.g. TYC). These Tibetans often interpret the policy of 'claiming back Tibet' in a different way. They more easily accept violence and thereby differ from the mainstream discourse on Tibetan identity. It is thus possible to use an alternative discourse on 'Tibet' and 'Tibetans' while still feeling connected to it.

The national identity and discursively constructed 'territory' are mutually constitutive. This suggests that an actual geographical territory is not necessarily needed in order to unite a community. As long as there is 'something' to identify with, usually a place and a narrative of the history of that place, people can feel connected. By claiming this territory, people are claiming an identity to which they belong. This would for example imply that when Palestinians or Jews are claiming a territory, they are at the same time constructing their own identity. They have idealised images of their territory and want to construct this image in reality, because it is what they are. Whether these processes are indeed similar in the Palestinian and Israeli cases, merits further research. The relationship between religion and nationalism poses similar interesting questions. This thesis showed that an 'imagined community' can be based on religion, but that this religion can lead to exclusion. Are the same processes at work in Islamic, Christian, Jewish or Hindu communities?

This thesis has shown that Tibetans provide IR with an interesting case. Because of the separation of territory and people, the relationship between territory and identity can be well researched. The Tibetan diaspora can however shed light on more aspects relevant to the study of IR. In order to understand Sino-Indian or Sino-American relations, to analyse the absence of sovereignty or to research human rights, the Tibetan case could provide valuable insights. Hopefully this thesis can inspire IR scholars to look beyond conventional research topics.

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