FLEXIBLE LIMINALITY AMONG THE TIBETAN DIASPORA: TIBETAN EXILES ADJUSTING CULTURAL PRACTICES IN DHARAMSALA, INDIA AND THE UNITED STATES

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Digital Object Identifier: https://doi.org/10.13023/etd.2019.023

Recommended Citation
https://uknowledge.uky.edu/anthro_etds/37

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FLEXIBLE LIMINALITY AMONG THE TIBETAN DIASPORA:
TIBETAN EXILES ADJUSTING CULTURAL PRACTICES IN DHARAMSALA, INDIA
AND THE UNITED STATES

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the
College of Arts and Sciences
at the University of Kentucky

By

Sneha Thapa

Lexington, Kentucky

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2019

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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

FLEXIBLE LIMINALITY AMONG THE TIBETAN DIASPORA:
TIBETAN EXILES ADJUSTING CULTURAL PRACTICES IN DHARAMSALA, INDIA
AND THE UNITED STATES

In this dissertation, I investigate the characteristics and quality of liminality among the Tibetan exile community in Dharamsala, India, and the United States. I argue that the quality of their liminality defines this exile community’s ability to maneuver and voice their influence to geo-political community of states that surround them, all while within their liminal condition. The Tibetan exile people live as stateless foreigners in India but have a better standard of living and better opportunities to acquire transnational resources than their surrounding host community. In the U.S., Tibetan diaspora people live as asylum-seekers and naturalized Tibetan-Americans but have established a popular political campaign (which enjoys the support of considerably many Americans) addressing the plight of Tibetans imposed by China. I argue that the Tibetan diaspora have achieved this unique social and political success as a marginalized community by adopting a cultural practice that I call “flexible liminality.” Flexible liminality is a Tibetan cultural practice that helps transient people adjust to any situation, people, and geo-politics circumstance.

Flexible liminality relies on two factors: first, political interest from various nation-states; second, a group’s ability to adjust their cultural practices to match external influences. In the case of the Tibetan exile community, it is important to note that they are excluded by multiple nation-states (China, India, the Western countries) in different ways simultaneously. Therefore, the world collective of Tibetan refugees are not fixed in one state of liminality but experience a variety of liminalities in relation to different nation-states. Second, the Tibetan exile community has adjusted their cultural practices to assimilate with host communities in whichever countries their exile-hood has landed them. Since Tibetans cannot acquire Indian citizenship, the Tibetan exile community uses India as a space to promote their political activism against China, and form better relationship with Western foreigners. In Dharamsala, the Tibetan community has organized institutions that guides Tibetan individuals to form relationships with foreign tourists, and acquire skills (i.e. language, behavior, education, philosophy) that would help them assimilate better when resettling in Western host countries. In both, Dharamsala and the U.S., the Tibetan diaspora have a cultivated cultural practice to advocate Tibetan political plight against China, and to communicate Tibetan religio-socio traditions with the foreign host community. As a result, Tibetans are able to achieve political popularity, and to socially draw empathy from foreign communities that aids in producing a space for Tibetan cultural preservation in exile.

The case study on Tibetan exile community sheds a new light on the study of marginality/liminality. This dissertation showcases that there can be a spectrum for the quality of liminality that goes from flexible at one end to inflexible at the other end. Not all exile groups have the same condition of liminality, being an exile community can be beneficial or crippling somewhere in the spectrum. Tibetan exile community has achieved a flexible end of liminality in exile but there are other exile groups who may not have the same maneuvering ability as the
Tibetan exile community. This theory of flexible liminality can be used to better understand the lives of exiles by characterizing and measuring the quality of their liminality.

KEYWORDS: Exile population, Diaspora, Strategic Cultural Practice, Tibet, Transnationality, Liminality
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my advisor, Dr. Mark P. Whitaker, for his constant support, encouragement, and guidance throughout my graduate studies and the dissertation process. I would extend my gratitude to my entire dissertation committee members (Dr. Hsain Ilahiane, Dr. Diane King, Dr. Monica Udvardy, Dr. Patrick Mooney) who have been great mentors for my doctoral studies.

I am thankful to the financial support provided by the University of Kentucky Gatton College’s A.P.J. Kalam India Studies Research Program, and to the Anthropology Department’s Susan Abbott-Jamieson Award, which funded my ethnographic fieldwork in Dharamsala, India and the US.

My deepest appreciation goes out to all the participants from India, Nepal, and the United States, without your insights I could not have done this work. I would like to thank two amazing friends and fieldwork assistants Kunsang in Dharamsala, India and Jordan Neumann in Louisville, KY. It is their hard-work and thoughtful counsel that led me to all the ethnographic data. I would like to thank and specially recognition the Tibetan monastery in Louisville, Drepung Gomang Center for Engaging Compassion, for helping me throughout my fieldwork in the U.S.

I would also like to thank my family and friends for their emotional and financial support. Simon and Cassius for providing me most-needed company throughout the graduate school; Frank and Lauren for reading and editing all my chapters; my parents, Nigma and Vijendra, for accompanying me to many interviews and fieldwork sites; and many others who have time and again been a shoulder I could lean on. I dedicate my dissertation to you all, thank you!
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Chapter 1: Flexible Liminality of Tibetan Exiles from Dharamsala, India to the United States

Introduction

This dissertation’s journey draws on fieldwork with four communities – first, the Tibetan community living in India; second, the Tibetan community surrounding a Buddhist monastery in Louisville, Kentucky (United States); third, contact from a distance with members of the Tibetan community living in the United States, India, and Nepal; and fourth, the American host community surrounding a refugee resettlement agency in Louisville, Kentucky. I have conducted traditional ethnographic fieldwork and digital ethnography from 2014-2018 to analyze the type of exile-hood experienced by the Tibetan exile community living in India, and the U.S. The Tibetan community I am speaking about in this dissertation are people who are affected by geo-political exclusions from China, India, and the West; consequently, these Tibetans are people who claim origins from Tibetan geographic area but are living outside their home country as stateless exiles. In India, the Tibetans that I am speaking of are living as prolonged foreign guests without citizenship to any country; and in the United States, the Tibetans that I am speaking of are immigrants (including offspring born to immigrants), who already are or aim to become naturalized U.S. citizens, and claim to have Tibetan heritage. I will address each group individually in later chapters.

Project Aims

In this dissertation, I explore a theoretical concept describing the quality of liminality experienced by any excluded group; especially what I will call ‘flexible liminality’. Flexible liminality, as I have been using it, has two meanings: first, it is a cultural practice; and second, it is a condition or form of liminality. I will analyze the cultural practice of ‘flexible liminality’ used by the Tibetan exile community. At the same time, I will also argue that the ideology of

1 Tibetan exiles have also fled to other surrounding countries like Bhutan, and Nepal. However, for my research I mostly interacted with Tibetan exiles living in North India, and some from South India and Nepal via virtual social media.
flexible liminality can be analyzed as a condition that can be more or less flexible. My intention is to provide an additional characteristic for the condition of liminality for further theoretical understanding. In this dissertation, however, I focus largely on analyzing the practice of flexible liminality by ethnographically presenting the case of a Tibetan exile community, surrounded by multiple nation-state structures creating different exclusions for Tibetan exiles, that has created a cultural practice that allows them to respond differently to different nation-states to acquire better life chances. Still, I will be using both meanings of liminality in this dissertation, but these two meanings of flexible liminality should not be confused as one in the following chapters.

In this dissertation, I aim to show the workings of macro forces (e.g. nation-states, geopolitics, and popularity of Western liberalism) alongside the micro agents (e.g. individual relationship of Tibetans with Westerners and Indians, and re-making Tibetan identity in exile). In viewing both the macro and micro agents, I aim to present a holistic perspective that will help us understand the social, economic, political, and legal conditions of the Tibetan exile community. This dissertation will produce snapshots not only of the larger geo-political forces influencing the everyday lives of Tibetan exiles but also of the Tibetan exile community’s strategic responses and adjustments to each of these geo-political forces.

The three main inquiries that frame my dissertation are as follows:

1. I seek to understand how the Tibetan exiles are performing their agency under the external influence of multiple vectored geo-politics. In conducting fieldwork in two sites, India and the U.S., I have noticed that Tibetan exiles are taking different opportunities granted in different countries to push for better life chances, and to propagate Tibetan identity, Tibetan nationalism, and so on. Thus, Tibetan exiles are tactically adapting their cultural practices according to the different types of exclusions they face in various geo-political environments. Their different cultural adaptations in two sites will be visible by the end of this dissertation.

2. I will analyze in what ways the Tibetan diaspora actively transforms the different geo-politics influencing them. Rather than passively receiving exclusions from various geo-politics, I will
show that Tibetan exiles are actively partaking in transforming the very agents (institutes, government policies, individuals) that are influencing them. In looking at individual expressions of Tibetan identity, Tibetan non-profits, Tibetan community centers in the West, Tibetan nationalist duties, and so on, we can see that the Tibetan diaspora is interacting and transforming various geo-politics.

3. I will characterize the quality of Tibetan exile’s flexible liminality. This will be a different procedure from counting the degree of liminality, in the sense of determining just how jurally and socially excluded a group might be, because Tibetan exiles have already been conditioned to liminality. Flexible liminality attempts to examine how “flexible” their situation is; that is, how much Tibetan exiles can maneuver within their liminal conditions. I will be exploring the quality of the Tibetan exile’s flexible liminality through various aspects of their exile life like their political activism, nationalist identity, social assimilation in Dharamsala (India) and Louisville (KY), Tibetan Buddhism in the West, and so on. I plan to use the idea of flexible liminality to provide a window into the world of Tibetan exiles, and where and how they are creating and participating in their shifting cultural landscapes.

**Positionality and Methodology**

In this section, I will describe my positionality in two different field sites and the methodologies I adapted according to my roles in those field sites. I first started my research in Dharamsala in 2014, and added the U.S. field site later in 2016. I will be talking about my position in those field sites and the type of role I held in those communities. I will also describe the other people surrounding me during my research because their presence influenced the way my interlocutors in Dharamsala, and Louisville (KY) viewed me.

I arrived in Dharamsala in 2014 with my (now) husband, Simon, and met my parents who had flown straight there from Nepal. Dharamsala is the maternal home of my father; however, he had not visited Dharamsala in a long time so my research fieldwork gave him an opportunity to
visit his family members. I only learned of my father’s family relations in my field site after I had started my proposal writing for my doctoral research. I was pleasantly surprised to learn that my extended family members were eager to help me with my research work. My second cousin gave us a tour of the Tibetan boarding school, the surrounding hills where young couples go on dates, and the abandoned huts in the woods where the first generation of Tibetan exiles had lived. My aunt-uncle took me on a formal city site-seeing tour to see the Kangra fort and Dharamsala’s popular Hindu temples, during which I learned about Indian social etiquette and expected behaviors for guests and hosts in private versus public spaces in Dharamsala. My cousins also educated me about how Tibetans in Dharamsala live differently (have a different social etiquette) than Indians so I could behave in respectful manner when I visited Tibetans in their homes or offices.

My parents and I “look Nepali” and blended in with the ethnically (Nepali) Gorkhali community in Dharamsala, but my husband Simon is a tall, white American so he stood out as foreign tourist. For most of my Tibetan-related research work, Simon accompanied me to all my interviews, social gatherings, and participant observations. Casually, Simon and I were able to make a lot of young (ages 16-30) Tibetan friends very easily. Most of the young Tibetans were college students on summer and winter breaks visiting family in Dharamsala. Later I would learn that this was a unique social opportunity that I was able to gain through my husband’s presence as the foreign tourist. The ability to make friends with young Tibetans opened my eyes to how, and in what spaces, Tibetans in Dharamsala were making friends with foreign tourists. When I was alone for fieldwork, Tibetan people often asked if I was Tibetan, and when I said answered, “no I am Nepali”, most of their responses were delightful remarks like, “Oh I went to school with a Nepali person” or “Nepali people are so much like Tibetans”, etc. As a result, when alone, my ethnic identity, and phenomenological look, helped me have access to social conversations with the Tibetan community in another mode. In other words, I was treated as a native anthropologist in Dharamsala because of my Nepali ethnic identity and Tibetan-like physical features. This was
another factor that led me to experience and understand components of ethnic identity and ethnic differences in the Dharamsala community.

My methodology for my Dharamsala fieldwork involved mostly using traditional ethnographic methods of interview and participant observation. I also attempted to use social network analysis, using ego-network analysis for UCINET software, to better understand the Tibetan social groups and their relationship with foreigners. While I received good responses for formal, informal, and semi-structured interviews and participant observations, the ego-network analysis data collection did not go so well. I felt unwelcomed when I asked social network related questions. I was sometimes asked to come back another time, told to go away, told ‘no’ with hand gestures from the front door, and so on. These social network questions were changing my perspective of the Tibetan Dharamsala community because once friendly people were getting annoyed in my presence. I started to notice those signs on the office doors stating, “No researchers allowed” or “Need one-week notice for interviews.” When I asked about this to my Tibetan friends, they pointed out (what I had overlooked in my first visit) that Dharamsala is oversaturated with researchers, journalists, students, and activists, all going around town asking for interviews with Tibetans. Since my transition from simply having conversations to getting ego-network analysis data, which involved using a formal, structured, listing questionnaire of Tibetan and foreigner social groups, I was discouraged by closed doors and cold responses in Dharamsala. After that I decided to abandon using ego-network analysis for my research work on this dissertation. Although it may be useful in other research with the Tibetan diaspora, I observed that all my Tibetan interlocutors become uncomfortable with network questions. I was only able to figure out why this was so, as will be discussed later, when I came to understand the importance making and maintaining transnational connections, and maintaining a certain kind of public image, has for Tibetans in diaspora; and the extent to which those tasks opens them up to public exposure in ways that are both beneficial and, to them, exhausting. In any case, at this point I decided to move my research to the U.S. where I thought I could get a fresh start using
traditional and digital ethnography methods. Nonetheless, attempting to do ego-network analysis in Dharamsala was important because it demonstrated to me that the Tibetan Dharamsala community felt over-researched; and that drew me to look at how the work of publicly performing Tibetan-ness and hiding community differences were central to the Tibetan experience of liminality and refugee-hood.

After coming back to the U.S. from Dharamsala, I started my digital ethnography by contacting U.S. based Tibetan activists via social media and phone; thereafter, I carried out traditional ethnography. For this I mostly relied on semi-structured interviews and participant observation, including physical and online interview venues (via Facebook live, Whatsapp chats, organization web-pages, etc). The positive feedback from the U.S. based Tibetan community gave me a boost of confidence in my research that I desperately needed after observing the over-researched and exhausted Dharamsala Tibetan community. I realized that my Tibetan interlocutors in the U.S. were willing to open up about their political views easily, and they only needed my university credentials to know I was a real researcher. This opened my eyes to the different type of lives Tibetans live in the U.S. in comparison to Dharamsala. Additionally, I noticed that while carrying out digital ethnography in the U.S., I was able to hide my physical appearance and ethnic identity; I did not have to represent any ethnic community but rather I simply could be a face-less university student. Similarly, my Tibetan interlocutors had the option of hiding the physical appearance of their Tibetan-regional identity during digital ethnography, and I observed that this anonymity allowed my interlocutors to more freely express themselves. I also reached out to Tibetan community in Nepal and India via social media from the U.S., and, interestingly, this time, most people were willing to participant in the interviews without evident discomfort or irritation.

At the same time, I started participant observation at a refugee resettlement agency based in Louisville, KY to understand the U.S. government’s refugee policies. I experienced a drastic difference in positionality when I approached people a staff member representing a refugee
resettlement NGO from when I approached people as a researcher. Unlike in Dharamsala, where my interactions with people were relatively free and open (except when doing network analysis), as a staff member I found myself more constrained. I had to carefully choose how I talked with refugees about the U.S. government; I had to decline taking food/drinks in refugee houses; and I had to set a formal tone with refugees even when talking about personal topics like, income, health, and hygiene.

Coincidentally, my employment with the U.S. refugee resettlement agency came to an end during the U.S. Presidential election, after which the United States soon began adopting anti-immigration policies, which gave me another opportunity to understand the relative inflexibility of US racial discrimination (especially for Spanish and Arabic speaking populations), and to compare that with the Tibetan migrant’s flexible liminality in the U.S. Soon after, I also started participant observation and in-person interviews with the Tibetan community in the larger tri-state area of Kentucky, Ohio, and Indiana. For those interviews my positionality changed again, from a refugee resettlement staff member carrying out policy to a university student interested in the Tibetan diaspora. I found it much easier to talk to Tibetan and American community members as a student because I did not have to juggle any other professional roles; I could simply ask questions as a researcher. Additionally, during this time, I did not experience any special acceptance or rejection because of my physical appearance or ethnic identity; rather, my credentials from a reputable university were good enough for Tibetan and American community members to participate in the research. I started carrying my business card from the university in order to prove my credentials, and I found that my interlocutors appreciated that extra bit of trust from the business cards.
**Background: Tibet and The Tibetan Exile Community**

The Tibetan government in exile states that the political boundaries of Tibet, the whole of Tibet or *Cholkha-Sum*, covers three regions in the Himalayan plateau; namely, U-Tsang, Amdo, and Kham (See Fig 1) (CTA 2018). However, historians and Tibetologists argue that the Tibetan central government had direct control over the U-Tsang region but not over Amdo and Kham (Goldstein 2007; Schaik 2010). I found geographic origins to be an important aspect of their heritage for Tibetans in exile. For example, the Tibetan government in exile’s parliamentary representation and general body elections takes place according to these three regions where a few members from each region (U-Tsang, Amdo, and Kham) run against each other. I will explain the ethnic diversity of Tibetan exile community, and the lack of recognition of their diversity, in a later chapter.

In order to understand why China does not want Tibetans to have their own governance, let me briefly explain the history of the Tibetan state. Scholars do not know when the Tibetan state came into existence; however, we have records of Tibet from the historical accounts of its neighboring states, China, India, and Nepal (Goldstein 1978, 1987, 1991, 2007; Childs 2003; Schaik 2010). From these historical records we know that the Tibetan state was held as a patriarchal monarchy from the early 7th-11th century (Schaik 2010). The ruling monarch of the Tibetan empire held the central power, and under him were regional imperial authorities, or, chiefdoms. However, these regional chiefs were constantly at war with each other, and
eventually, a group of them contested the authority of the monarchy, which led to the demise of the Tibetan empire in the 11th century (Laird 2007; van Schaik and Galambos 2011; Schaik 2010).

During the 11th century, the era of changes in political power, the School of Sakya Buddhism was gaining popularity (Choeden and Norbu 1998, Davidson 2002, Thurman 1998). The Sakya School of Buddhism was a form of Vajrayana (Tantric) Buddhism\(^2\) that was spread in Tibet from India and Nepal in early 11th century (Choeden and Norbu 1998, Davidson 2002, Thurman 1998, Thurman 2008). The Vajrayana school of Buddhism is one that puts its emphasis on “path and result” (lam ‘bras) as a system for meditation in which each stage of religious development requires mastery of the one before it before proceeding to the next step (Huber 2008; Keown and Prebish 2013). By the early 13th century Vajrayana was hegemonic in Tibet. At the same time, however, noticing a power vacancy in central Tibet, the Mongols invaded, conquered, and would rule Tibet with a puppet Monastic administration of the Sakya School from the early 13th Century till the mid-14th Century (Laird 2007; Schaik 2010). During this peaceful time, though, several different forms of Buddhism arose in the Tibetan region, including the future power-holder, the Gelugpa School of Buddhism (Laird 2007; Schaik 2010).

In the mid-14th century, Je Tsongkhapa, a Tibetan Buddhist scholar and religious leader, founded the Gelugpa (or Gelug) School of Tibetan Buddhism (Jinpa 2008). He was highly influenced by the Kadam school of Buddhism that holds that an individual practitioner may perceive all of the doctrines of the Sutras and Tantras as complimentary methods to achieve enlightenment; this is commonly known as ‘The Four Divinities and Three Dharmas’ (Jinpa 2008). The Gelug School was founded to combine the dharma teaching from the Kadam School

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\(^2\) Vajrayana Buddhism is a form of Mahayana Buddhism that uses tantric ritual as a faster vehicle to achieve liberation. The religious practice involves using mantras (prayer chants), dharanis (incantation and recitation), mudras (bodily gestures used to seal spiritual energy), and mandalas (diagram or geometric pattern representing Buddhist cosmos), and the visualization of deities and Buddhas. For more information see Ronald Davidson (2002) *Indian Esoteric Buddhism: A Social History of the Tantric Movement.*
with the Nagarjuna’s philosophy of *Madhyamaka* (middle way) and *Sunyata* (emptiness). The Gelugpa School founded three sub-divisions of monastic colleges in Tibet; namely, the Ganden, Drepung Gomang, and Sera monasteries (Choedon and Norbu 1998, Davidson 2002, Thurman 1998).

The Ganden monastery gained the state political power after the third incarnation of the leading teacher, Sonam Gyatso, formed an alliance of patron-client relationship with the Mongol leader, Altan Khan (Laird 2007; Lopez 2001; Schaik 2010). The word ‘Dalai’ is a Mongolian name for Gyatso that means ocean in Tibetan language; and the word ‘lama’ means wise teacher in Tibetan (Lopez 2001). This alliance made the Gelug School the most powerful institution in Tibet and the dominant sect of Tibetan Buddhism (Laird 2007; Lopez 2001; Schaik 2010). The relationship with Mongols provided the military protection and political support to Tibet from 16th-18th cent; thereafter, the Mongol-Tibet alliance broke because of disagreements over the reincarnated 7th Dalai Lama (Laird 2007; Lopez 2001; Schaik 2010). During an invasion by the Mongols to decide the future Tibetan leader, the Manchu-led Qing dynasty protected Tibetan interests and the Gelug School’s chosen 7th Dalai Lama (Schaik 2010). An alliance was formed between Tibet and Qing dynasty until the demise of the Qing dynasty in 1912 (Schaik 2010).

Overtime, the Central Tibet or U-Tsang became the space of power for Tibetan governance headed by a religious leader, the Dalai Lama (Choedon and Norbu 1998). Today, the Dalai Lama we recognize is the 14th in power for the Tibetan leadership. On a communal level, the general structure of pre-colonialized Tibet was similar to a medieval European feudalistic hierarchy (Goldstein 2007). However, at the local level, social relations worked differently from medieval Europe; the religious and aristocratic family corporations owned the arable estates in Tibet, where the estates could range from 30-300 acres (Goldstein 2007). Each estate had a

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3 The Madhyamaka doctrine teaches the value of taking the middle path when practicing Buddhism, rather than extremes, in order to achieve enlightenment. The *Sunyata* doctrines claim that all things, including all experienced phenomena, are empty of intrinsic existence because they do not have any permanent and eternal substance (Jinpa 2008; Lopez 2001; Thurman 1995).
village of serfs (*mi ser*), that is, literally, ‘human subjects’. I will use the English term, serf for *mi ser* because that is the closest proximity I can find in the English language. However, I should note some differences between Tibetan *mi ser* and European medieval serfs. In pre-colonized Tibet, each taxpaying serf family were given a certain portion of arable land to support themselves, and in return, serfs had to provide one family member each day to work on the estate of the religious or aristocratic corporate family, whose land they inhabited, as a form of tax payment (Goldstein 1991; 1971). The rights and ownership of these estates were hereditarily passed down to each generation’s male offspring, and the serf families, like aristocratic families, were tied to the estate in heredity perpetuity (Goldstein 1991; 1971). According to the written history of Tibet, the lords did not care much about the working of serfs until there was wealth peacefully coming from their territories (Goldstein 1991).

The united Tibetan national identity (U-Tsang, Amdo, and Kham) comes from having similar cultural traditions, i.e. a nomadic life, an agricultural economy, a manor-based land system, and Tibetan Buddhist religious belief (Schaik 2010; Goldstein 1991; Choedon and Norbu 1998). The communal ties of people were intricately woven with Buddhist monastic institutions and Buddhist religious beliefs. Tibetan Buddhism is a form of Mahayana Buddhism (Schaik 2010; Goldstein 1991; Choedon and Norbu 1998; Huber 2008). At that time in Tibet, monasteries were the most powerful institutions in the society—the monasteries were the largest landholders, were important to commoners who wanted to escape the agricultural life, were the only source of scholarship and education for Tibetans, and the local community surrounding the monastery had the option to benefit from prayers to ward off illness or gain good karmic values (Nowak 1984; Schaik 2010). Even today, Tibetan exiles I interacted with spoke of differences of each three regions but strive to come together in exile for the Tibetan identity. I observed that sharing a Tibetan Buddhist tradition is a major turning factor for most Tibetans in realizing the obstruction of a traditional lifestyle caused by Chinese occupation. Mao Zedong, the Chairman of the Chinese
Communist Party (CCP), was a firm believer that religion was the root of all things evil in a society, so he already had plans to eradicate the religious leadership in Tibet (Schaik 2010).

In the late 1940s, the young (17 year-old) 14th Dalai Lama was invited by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to modernize Tibet’s social structure and learn of the communist changes made in mainland China (Schaik 2010; Goldstein 1991; Choedon and Norbu 1998). Despite Tibetan elites’ and Western allies’ (United States and Britain standing against Chinese communist values) urged that he stand strictly against the CCP, in 1954 the 14th Dalai Lama spent a year in China learning about Mao’s Marxist reforms in China (DIIR 2001; Schaik 2010). When he got back from the trip, the Dalai Lama was unwillingly accompanied to Lhasa by a large Chinese army and was forced to admit that Tibet needed a social reform and they needed help from outside. It should be noted that the Dalai Lama was actually in favor of Marxist reforms (Schaik 2010). To this day, he still calls himself a Marxist Buddhist—meaning, socio-economically, he would like to see a decrease in the gap between the rich and the poor, and for everybody to have an equal playing field (The Dalai Lama 2011; 2017). The Tibetan community think the 14th Dalai Lama has strived to achieve his goal by creating a Tibetan government in exile⁴ (Bod mi'i sgirg 'dzugs), introducing democracy to the exile community, and actively establishing institutions (public old age home, hospitals, schools, etc.) that could help improve the lives of Tibetans living in exile (H.H. The14th Dalai Lama of Tibet 2018).

In the 1950s, the Dalai Lama lacked the foreign allies, domestic military power, and international political experience to assert his true desire to change the old Tibetan feudal system (Goldstein 2007; Schaik 2010). Moreover, he had did not have enough experience to know with what to replace the old system. Thus, after a failed attempt to negotiate with China, and, given the likelihood of Tibetan military defeat, the Dalai Lama agreed to sign a 17-point agreement with China to let the Chinese government develop Tibet while still allowing Tibetans to govern their

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⁴ The Tibetan government in exile is officially called the Central Tibetan Administration and is logged as a non-profit organization under the India government.
own region (DIIR 2001; Hasmath and Hsu 2007; McGranahan 2007; Goldstein 2007; Schaik 2010). During this period, there was a great divide between Tibetans who thought Tibet could bring reform under China, and the other Tibetans who thought Tibetans should rule Tibet by themselves; the aristocratic reformists, who could afford to transfer their wealth, saw their cause dying and left Tibet to resettle in Northwest India (Schaik 2010).

It was during the ‘great leap forward’ (1958-1962) period that the full purpose of CCP’s invasion was realized. Great leap forward was and economic and social campaign started by the CCP’s chairman Mao Zedong to rapidly industrialize and transform the country (Goldstein 2007; Schaik 2010). In Tibetan region, the CCP forcefully pushed out the large monasteries in Amdo and Kham, the strain of land reform to forcefully industrialize the region pushed people to take refuge in central Tibet (Schaik 2010). For the CCP these civil uproars in Tibetan regions (U-Tsang, Kham, and Amdo) were unexpected and threatening, which is why the CCP decided to swiftly silence the growing civil uprising with Chinese military force (Schaik 2010). During this period, Tibetan-organized large civil protests in the capital of Tibet, Lhasa, mostly composed of commoners or the serf class (Schaik 2010). Meanwhile, the residents from Kham and Amdo were leading their own rebellion against the CCP in Lhasa as well (Schaik 2010). This civil protest was later named the Tibetan People’s Association. This was the first public political outcry led by commoners in Tibet, including the first public all-women’s protest (TWA 2016; Goldstein 2007; DIIR 2001). Before this event, there had never been such a large number of demonstrations by the serf class, nor one that included women (TWA 2016; Goldstein 2007; DIIR 2001).

Ironically, the CCP thought of themselves as revolutionaries bringing liberation to the ‘poor’ Tibetans (Schaik 2010). This Chinese ‘liberation’ met with little resistance from ill-equipped and poorly trained Tibetan forces. Soon after, Chinese troops forcibly occupied Tibet, killing, detaining and arresting thousands of Tibetans citizens (Schaik 2010). However, the Chinese military had plans to annex the Tibetan state, and so the military set up a plot to murder
the head of the Tibetan state, the 14th Dalai Lama (Hasmath and Hsu 2007; McGranahan 2007; Goldstein 2007; Schaik 2010). Fortunately, the plan leaked, and in 1959, the 14th Dalai Lama was able to escape by fleeing the country to India (Hasmath and Hsu 2007; McGranahan 2007; Goldstein 2007; Schaik 2010). More than 80,000 Tibetans followed the Dalai Lama to India, and since then there have been many more who have fled the country (CTA 2018; Nowak 1984; Davis 2007). As a newly independent country India sympathized with the Tibetan’s political flight and accepted the Dalai Lama and other Tibetan refugees (Hasmath and Hsu 2007; McGranahan 2007; Goldstein 2007; Schaik 2010). India has allowed more Tibetans to enter the country for asylum since 1959 – the total number of Tibetan refugees living in India today is approximated between 94,000-120,000 (CTA 2009; TJC 2011).

In short, since the foundation of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in early 1920s, with its goal of unifying the surrounding states with ‘motherland’ China, the Tibetan State has been in turmoil (TJC 2011; Hasmath and Hsu 2007; McGranahan 2007; Goldstein 2007; Schaik 2010). The CCP’s goal of forceful unification required China to claim that Tibet never existed as an independent state (TJC 2011; Hasmath and Hsu 2007; McGranahan 2007; Goldstein 2007; Schaik 2010). I will argue later in a chapter that China’s narrative that Tibet never existed as an independent state shapes how Tibetan exile community express their nationalist values. Nonetheless, something that started as mild political propaganda in Tibet changed into a violent occupation of Tibet by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). In 1959, the 14th Dalai Lama fled Tibet to escape the CCP’s plot to murder him, and soon after, thousands more Tibetans fled to neighboring countries out of the fear of prosecution and to escape cultural genocide (TJC 2011; Hasmath and Hsu 2007; Davis 2007). Today, China calls the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR) as part of the Chinese nation-state’s territory but the Tibetan exile community claims that the Chinese government is occupying their Tibetan state and that Tibetans are hence victims of cultural genocide (TJC 2011; Hasmath and Hsu 2007; Davis 2007). It is this facet of the Tibetan exile community that I am inquiring about: their exile-hood and experiences of liminality.
The 14th Dalai Lama first established the Tibetan government in exile in 1959 to better oversee the Tibetan exile population (CTA 2018). The Tibetan Government in Exile (TGiE) is not an internationally recognized entity but it functions as a pseudo-government by providing public service to the Tibetan exile community and by collecting voluntary donations (*Chatrel*) from the Tibetan exiles (CTA 2018). Inspired by the democratic institutions of the U.S. and India, the Central Tibetan Administration has evolved into a stable form of governance with an elected parliament, a constitution, and three bodies of the government: a judiciary, a legislature and an executive (called the *Kashag*) (CTA 2018). Thus, the official name of the exile government is the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA), which is registered as a non-profit in India. In this dissertation, I will use the term CTA and TGiE both because this is what the Tibetan community does, and using the Tibetan Government in Exile also helps to better recognize the community services and authority wielded by the institution of the Central Tibetan Administration.

Tibetan exiles have spread to various different parts of the world, like Switzerland, France, Australia, South Korea, Canada, U.S.A, U.K. etc. (CTA 2018). In order to better serve the Tibetan exile community all around the world, the TGiE also has opened various branch headquarter around the world (in the U.S., Australia, Canada, France, Switzerland, Nepal, etc.) but the headquarter of the TGiE is in Dharamsala, India (CTA 2018). Tibetans in exile call their own exile government, a ‘model government’, speaking of it as an experimental model that could be transferred to govern the geo-political Tibetan region in the future, if Tibet were to gain independence from China (Interview 2016). This model exile government provides necessary community services to the Tibetan refugees, as mentioned above. The Tibetan government in exile has become an intricate and expansive web of power with the purpose of serving the needs of exiled Tibetans, and although not officially recognized by the international community, it is acquiring international recognition of its effort to win back the Tibetan Autonomous Region in China (Nowak 1984; Mishra 2015; McGranahan 2013; McConnell 2011; Hess 2009). The model
Tibetan government in exile does not have military power, geographical territory or international economic relationships to substantiate its governance but its legitimacy rests on the services it provides to its exiled people (Mishra 2015; McGranahan 2013; McConnell 2011; Hess 2009). Thus, the Tibetan government in exile has spent all of its energy on public services in order to make organized citizens out of the Tibetan exiles.

A recent survey by the Tibetan exile government from 2009 reported that there were approximately 127,935 Tibetans outside of Tibet (CTA Planning Commission 2009, TJC 2011). This demographic survey reported that about 74 percent of their population currently resides in India (CTA Planning Commission 2009, TJC 2011). Recently arrived Tibetan refugees are allowed to stay in the residential institutions run by the Tibetan government in exile (CTA 2018). The Tibetan government has made a big impact on the settlement of the Tibetan refugees outside of Tibet. Tibetans have been living in India since 1959, but the Indian government still treats them under the foreigner act of 1946 so Tibetans are not legally considered refugees in order to avoid Indo-Sino relationship problems (Artiles 2009; Mishra 2015; McGranahan 2013; McConnell 2009). However, since Indian government officials I have talked to refer to them as, and Tibetan exiles conversationally call themselves, a ‘refugee’ population, so I will sometimes do the same, though I will mostly use the term ‘exile’ since it better represents the situation of Tibetans in India. Nevertheless, it is important to understand that sensitivity to the reactions of the Chinese government have insured that Tibetans are not, anywhere, refugees in the legal sense. In India, for example, Tibetans are legally classified as foreigners and also call them foreign guests (HRLN 2007; Artiles 2009). Hence, for their stay in India Tibetans carry two legal documents: a Registration certificate and an Identification certificate (Artiles 2009; CTA 2018). Despite the legal restrictions, India has allowed Tibetans to work and travel within the country, to run non-profits and small businesses, and to operate their Tibetan government in exile (CTA 2018).
Theoretical Framing of Dissertation

Flexible Liminality

My first week in Dharamsala, India, I was in complete awe of the fashion statement made by Tibetan exiles. I am usually not a person to care much for fashion myself but I could not help but notice Air Jordans on young-adult monks, the shiny motorbikes of teenaged Tibetan men, the American pop music playing on their cell phones, their dreadlocks, beats headphones, and Michael Kors purses. All these accessories that I was used to seeing on my undergraduate students at the University of Kentucky back in the U.S., I was seeing on a marginalized population in India.

I remember one particular time when I was sitting at a café just watching the market crowd starting to stir in the morning. Vendors were setting up their items for sale by the sidewalk, and the early morning vegetable markets, chai-shops, and breakfast parathas [flat bread] were slowly winding down their businesses. Then, I saw a Tibetan man, probably in his late 20s, walking up the hill on the market road that was yet to be cleaned of the garbage thrown from the days before. The Tibetan man had my attention due to his bright pink plaid shirt, bowtie, dyed blond hair, khaki shorts, and boat shoes. There were a few Indian women covering their hair with shawls walking past him, and a few other Indian men in faded shirts and pants walking by to start their day. He walked into the same café that I was sitting in, greeted the barista behind the counter and ordered his Americano. At this point, I knew I had to include this Tibetan man’s cosmopolitan lifestyle in my research. I immediately walked up to the Tibetan man, Phurbu (pseudonym), introduced myself and asked if I could interview him. Today, I know this man, Phurbu, as a good friend and a kind human being, who has helped me immensely with my research work. I will mention Phurbu throughout the dissertation so I have anonymized his name to protect his identity. As a side note, all the participant’s names in this dissertation have been anonymized for their privacy, instead, I have used pseudonyms for all of the participants. I have
tried to maintain the ethnic identity of each participant by using Tibetan pseudonym for Tibetan participants, and western pseudonym for western participants and so on.

Phurbu told me the first day I met him that he deliberately dresses ‘nicely’ every day because he wants to distance himself from the old image of ‘refugees’ as dirty and barbaric people. The idea of Tibetans as refugees is an integral aspect of Tibetan exile community, and in later chapters, I will explain why the symbolic idea of the refugee is important for Tibetans in exile. Regardless, Phurbu’s cosmopolitan fashion and attitude spoke loudly to me about the position that Tibetans have in the town of Dharamsala. Dharamsala is an active place for Tibetan politics, social activities, cultural preservation, and is also a main tourist spot for Western and Asian tourists interested in learning about Tibetan exiles. I found the town of Dharamsala abuzz with events and activities related to Tibetan journalism, political activism, workshops, concerts, and so on. This also meant that the tourists, journalists, students, and researchers like me were closely observing the Tibetan population in Dharamsala. Which is why Tibetans like Phurbu always feel they have an audience before them to which they can make statements on behalf of the Tibetan exile community. I also noticed that the cosmopolitan image that Tibetans portrayed naturally pushed them closer to Western and Asian tourists. It also helped that most Tibetans I met spoke English very well – I never felt the need to hire a translator in Dharamsala because I could speak with Indians in Hindi or Nepali, and I could speak with Tibetans in English. Even with elderly Tibetans there was always someone else around who would offer Tibetan-English translation.

There are 46 Tibetan exile settlements spread across India, Nepal, and Bhutan (CTA 2018). From my observations, though Dharamsala is unique among them in being the only Tibetan settlement where the town is set up to lend itself so definitely towards the Tibetan exile community’s political, socio-cultural activities, and where foreign tourists solely visit for chance to meet the Tibetan exile population. In other words, the other Tibetan settlements do not experience the same volume of tourist traffic, or attraction, as does the Tibetan exile population.
of Dharamsala. However, Dharamsala’s unique situation helped me notice a Tibetan cultural practice, cultivated in exile, that has spread to other places where Tibetan exiles reside. I call this Tibetan cultural practice “flexible liminality”. I have used two different lineages of social theory to put together my theory of “flexible liminality.” First, I have used Victor Turner’s term, “liminality,” which he explains as a phase in the lives of individuals who are pushed beyond the boundaries of the social system (Turner 1969). Second, I have borrowed the term, “flexible”, from Aihwa Ong’s theoretical modeling of ‘flexible citizenship.’ Ong’s notion of ‘flexible citizenship’ arose out of her ethnographic description of Hong Kong elites who strategically used multiple citizenships, and the image of Chinese humanistic capitalism, to thrive in a global neoliberal environment (Ong 1999).

Flexible liminality arises in circumstance where the Tibetan exile community has to use their liminality to achieve better life chances. The flexible liminality of the Tibetan diaspora can be characterized as their ability to adjust to any situation, people, and geo-politics. Their flexible liminality relies on two factors: first, interest from various nation-states; and second, the group’s ability to adjust their cultural practices to match their external influences. In the case of the Tibetan exile community, it is important to note that Tibetans are excluded from multiple nation-states, including, China, India (Nepal & Bhutan), and Western countries, in different ways simultaneously. Therefore, Tibetan refugees are not fixed in one state of liminality but experience a variety of liminalities in relation to different nation-states. Second, Tibetan exile community has adopted a Western humanist philosophy. I describe Western liberal humanism as the emphasis on United Nation’s model of human rights combined with the values of Western Buddhism that draws on the ideals of compassion, mindfulness, and multiculturalism. The adoption of Western liberal humanist values has brought the Tibetan exiles and Western liberals closer to each other in terms of moral and ethical values. As a result, a rich transnational social network for the Tibetan exile community has been produced. Tibetan refugees, being a marginalized group, have been put under politico-legal-socio constraints; however, in a globalized world their fragmented exclusions
and advanced transnational network and cosmopolitan abilities provides Tibetan refugees with varied choices from different sources despite their constrained positions.

*Life Chances*

Although, in many ways, and considered in solely financial terms, Tibetans and the Indian host community that they live within share a roughly similar, modest, rural Indian condition, Tibetan exiles nevertheless have better life chances. That is, in concrete terms, Tibetans have more access to international sources of support and influence, and are better able to move across the globe than their Indian co-residents. This can be seen from census reports: the average literacy rate for Tibetans is 82%, whereas, for Indians it is 74% (CTA Planning Commission, 2009; Census Bureau of India, 2011; CDC 2008). Moreover, even without the help of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugee Agency (UNHCR), the Tibetans refugees have managed to acquire asylum status and citizenship in the West. The Tibetan exile community have self-promoted themselves for asylum grant in the Western countries and has managed to have 22.903% (23% or possibly more) of their diaspora securely resettled in the Western nation-states (U.S. Census Bureau 2013; CTA 2009, 2008, 1998; Canada Census Bureau 2011; Australian Census Bureau 2006; New Zealand Census Bureau 2006). I argue that the Tibetan exile community has better ‘life chances’ because they have more cultural and social capital, and this can be measured by computing their cultural and social capital with standard Human Development Index (HDI).

I define ‘life chances’ here as cultural and social forms of capital that affect a person’s ability to achieve socio-economic success. It is a concept similar to the Human Development Index (HDI) but my concept of life chances would complement the HDI’s factors of living conditions, health, and education, by adding in Pierre Bourdieu’s notions of cultural, and social capital. When I described my first encounter with Phurbu (the Tibetan man with pink shirt and bow-tie), my colleagues in the Anthropology department immediately mentioned Arjun
Appadurai’s theory of ‘global scapes,’ and Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of cultural capital. In Anthropology, we generally broaden the term capital from its financial or economic meaning to include also social, symbolic, and cultural resources. We understand that people can acquire transnational cultural knowledge (from watching foreign movies, learning foreign language), which can be transferred into making foreign friends (social capital) that constitute what we call transnational networks. However, for people unfamiliar with the work of Appadurai or Bourdieu, it is hard to measure individual success using the language of Human Development Index (HDI) alone. Hence, it was often difficult to define what I meant by ‘life chances’ to my research participants.

When I told my Tibetan participants that I thought they had better life chances than Gaddis and the local Indian population, they disagreed and said, “but we live with the Gaddis and eat the same dal-bhat [Indian staple food of lentil soup and rice] that they do.” This is definitely true in that Tibetans and Gaddis have almost similar HDI conditions, i.e., living standards, health, and education, which are the reasons why I needed more than standard HDI measures and now use Bourdieu’s expanded concept of capital to better capture the realities of Tibetan exile lives. The concept of “life chances” helped me add to those HDI-neglected factors, such as Tibetan foreign cultural knowledge, language skills, and similar interest and ethical values to foreign tourists, that help them make foreign friends and maintain those friendships across nation-state boundaries. The same Tibetan transnational social network again enriches their social and cultural capital, and gives them access to a valuable cosmopolitan life – a life different from Indians in Dharamsala. It is this network that helps many later migrate and assimilate more easily to Western countries.

However, it should be noted that the flexible liminality of Tibetan exiles does not distribute uniform success to all Tibetans. I met several Tibetans in Dharamsala who had effective English language skills, a wide range of foreign social contacts, and considerable cultural knowledge of cosmopolitan life, but they had not found a way to make their legal lives
better. All Tibetan exiles must engage in tremendous bureaucratic work to annually renew their RCs and ICs, and newly arrived Tibetan exiles that do not have RCs and ICs are often treated poorly businesses (including banks and renters) that do not trust their identity. I will explain this in more detail in the chapters to come.

There are various factors contributing to flexible liminality, from macro events to micro events to individual personal intentions. By describing ethnographic accounts of the various journeys of Tibetan refugees, I will be able to unravel different aspects of flexible liminality at each stage. From the beginning of a Tibetan refugee’s exiled life, some aspects of flexible liminality begin to take shape. The logic of “flexible liminality” is not just a theoretical effect; it is very much a de-facto, grounded reality for the Tibetan refugee community. While the Tibetan exile’s liminality can be used as a tool for socio-political success, not everybody has or wants access to this opportunity. Unfortunately, the path to success is messy, chaotic, and not universally available. Moreover, flexible liminality attracts attention from Western countries, the global liberal media, and other sources of social support. This aspect of their lives has also caused sometimes unwanted research attention to be focused on Tibetans in Dharamsala, even though Tibetans know that their Tibetan-ness is on display, and that they need to offer and maintain a certain image of Tibetan-ness for the world to see. Tibetans in Western countries feel the need to prove their Tibetan-ness by helping family and friends in South Asia, taking part in Tibetan political activities, and striving to maintain Tibetan culture in the West. Some young Tibetan-Americans disclosed that it was too hard to keep pace with the expectations of their community and the Tibetan exile government while already struggling to fit in with their American peers.

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5 Registration Certificate and Identification Certificates are legal documents solely created for the Tibetan exile that are provided by the host country in South Asia (India, Nepal and Bhutan) denoting the temporary residency allowance of Tibetan exiles in the host country.
Theoretical Inspirations

I must give complete credit to Victor Turner (1969) and Aihwa Ong (1999) for inspiring the theoretical idea of “flexible liminality.” However, I would like to highlight four studies (from among many others) that have helped shape my ideas on the Tibetan exile community. I read “Prisoners of Shangri-la” (1998) by Donald Lopez Jr. for a graduate seminar course. This is the first book that educated me about Western imaginaries regarding oriental others, and it depicted how oriental subjects can become voiceless when colonial rule has stated a fixed image that goes unchallenged throughout the years. The Tibetan myth of lamaism, shangri-la, and esoteric monks still influence the way non-Tibetans perceive Tibetans in exile. The most pertinent example I found in my research is the large number of admirers of Tibetan Buddhism in the West who have helped change the religion into something having a more Western individualistic favor, and to such an extent that scholars today call the result, “Western Buddhism” (Dapsance 2017; Goldstein 2007; Franklin 2008; Coleman 1999). In later chapters I will argue against Lopez (1998) stating that the Tibetan exiles are tactically using the reconstructed image of Tibetan Buddhism in the West to assimilate themselves in the Western communities, therefore, actively using the Western imaginaries as a tool rather than letting it sway the image of the Tibetan community.

Another book important to this study is one by Ann Frechette, “Tibetans in Nepal” (2002), as this also significantly influenced my thinking about the Tibetan exile community. This book describes how humanitarian aid for the Tibetan exiles has occurred as a linear progression, a point I will come back to a little later in this chapter. Beyond this, Frechette’s ethnographic description of Tibetan exiles in Nepal shows that the foreign sponsorship still influences the behaviors of Tibetan exiles in such a way so as to make them attractive to foreign sponsors. This book gave me the initial evidence of a flexible tendency in the Tibetan exile community Frechette was studying, which, I argue, has, over time, simply been adapted as a cultural practice for the Tibetan exiles as a whole. I read the next book, “Echoes from Dharamsala” (2002) by Keila Diehl
after my first fieldwork experience in Dharamsala to see if my observations from the field were at all valid. I found Diehl’s ethnographic encounters with jazz and rock musicians, and her argument for renewed debate on Tibetan-ness that is a cultural hybrid form of ‘foreign’ rock music played with Tibetan musicians used to convey real refugee experience of Tibetans living in Dharamsala. I follow Diehl’s theoretical path of navigating the realities of cultural hybridity, and her examination of transnational resources as a form of capital, which I later argue can shape a Tibetan individual’s life chances.

A Tibetan colleague recommended the book, “Immigrant Ambassador” (2009) by Julia Hess. I had already decided to shift my field site to the U.S. when I started reading this book, and I was further inspired by Hess’ explanation of the need for multi-sited research for her research on Tibetan nationalist identity. Hess’s ethnographic description of how the first 1990s wave of Tibetan migrants in New Mexico experienced a second exile, and her nuanced perspective on the citizenship and loyalty of the Tibetan diaspora living in India and New Mexico, enlightened my own approach to the multi-sited project. While Hess presented a nuanced portrait of the Tibetan diaspora’s approach to citizenship and loyalty in multiple states by using the theoretical tool of Aihwa Ong’s transnational flexible citizenship, I use the same tool to further the discussion of the Tibetan diasporic effort to belong to multiple nation-states. There has not been a Tibetan-focused migration bill passed by the U.S. government since the first one in 1990 but Tibetan exiles have steadily made their way into the country and have found a way to assimilate in the American community. According to the 2009 Tibetan exile government survey, there are about 10,000 people in the U.S. who claim to have Tibetan heritage (CTA 2009). My own theoretical tool of flexible liminality speaks to the cultural practice crafted by the Tibetan exiles for use in adapting to any peoples, events, or things; plus, it also opens a conversation about the pros/cons for Tibetan exiles of being legally recognized as refugees. Finally, I will add to this discussion of flexible citizen discussion by asking, “is there such a thing as being ‘too flexible?’”
Refugee Studies: ‘Refugeeness’

“Refugeeness” is a term used to define the conditions of being a refugee (Lee and Brotman 2011; Szczepaikova 2010; Hyunh 2010; Schrijvers 1999). It is a notion that attempts to capture the experience of a refugee’s life but avoids the strict legal definitions of the term ‘refugee’ offered by international laws, human rights laws, and refugee laws. While the modern state’s definitions of and laws for refugees are one of the key aspects of Refugeeness, at the same time, ‘refugee’, as a global socio-political category, was only created after World War II for the better control of residents in the interest of maintaining nation-state sovereignty (Puscas 2009; Keely 1996; Malkki 1995; Tölölyan 1991; Gallagher 1989). Yet the condition of being a stateless person forced by circumstances to seek refuge in another country existed before World War Two despite their being no specific international legal term to attach to this state of affairs; and, of course, this dire form of life continues to exist for many people after World War Two who, for one reason or another, fail to meet the legal criteria used to determine who is and is not a ‘refugee’. That is, you can experience refugeeness even outside the legal status of being a refugee. In the case of Tibetan exiles, those who are not legally defined as refugees for complex geopolitical reasons, for example, refugeeness can better describe their exile experience than recourse to more torturous neologisms. Thus, refugeeness is more often recognized within Refugee studies in Anthropology as a better avenue to understand the holistic experiences of refugees.

My dissertation will contribute to the literature on the strategies used in Refugeeness when refugee conditions are shaped by geopolitical powers. For a long time, refugee studies have argued that refugees are a geopolitical product of the nation-states’ persistent efforts to gain more control of their resident populations through the inclusion and exclusion of individuals within them (Novak 2013; Puscas 2009; Agier 2002; Chimni 2000; Gallagher 1996; Keely 1996; Malkki 1995). Scholars of Refugee studies have revealed the geopolitical complexities of the experience of Refugeeness through case studies of nation-state’s politicized refugee-related legal provisions
(Chaturvedi 2005; Robinson 2012; Chimni 1998; Steedly 1999), and through forced refugee assimilation and resettlement programs (Marfleet 2007; Cernea 2000; Mortland 1987; Chambers 1986), and international law granting dominion to nation-states than support refugees (Turner 2010; Szczepaikova 2010; Skran and Daughtry 2007; Feldman 2007; Chimni 2000; Gallaher 1998; Malkki 1995; Harrell-Bond 1992). Other scholars have shifted their focus towards the refugee’s own outlook on belonging, since in most cases, refugees feel like they belong to places other than their current residence (Brun 2001; Gamlen 2008; Anderson 1983).

**Humanitarian Aid & Western Liberal Humanism**

Historical records reveal that there have been at least three distinct periods of Tibetan refugees orientated organized humanitarian aid funding. I agree with Frechette, here, that these funding organizations promote the Tibetan cause and an activist political culture, which has transformed the way Tibetan exiles define themselves, and discuss their political cause (Frechette 2004). In any case, the first phase of funding for Tibetan refugees was generated for the first wave of Tibetan refugees in the 1950s and 1960s. The organizers of this fund-raising were travelers, explorers, and imperial officials who had, at various times, either lived in Tibet or among exiled Tibetans. This group of fund-raising leaders initiated assistance relationships with Tibetan exiles and their cause in the West (Frechette 2004). The second phase of promotion occurred in 1960s and 1970s in the West. These funders were involved due to their interest in Western Buddhism. Frechette characterizes this group as “…members of the hippie, free love, and new age countercultures who helped support Tibetan Buddhism, along with Zen Buddhism” (Frechette 2004: 100).

This group of fund-raising leaders changed the way Westerners viewed Tibetan Buddhism. The religion was no longer about being born for enlightenment, or the veneration of the teaching, the Buddhist Monastic tradition, and the Buddha; rather, it shifted towards what Western practitioners thought would enrich themselves as individuals. For many Westerners,
Tibetan Buddhism became a ‘DIY’ do-it-yourself religion rather than a matter of supporting monks and nuns to achieve their merits (*karma*). I would agree with Obeyesekere and Gombrich argument that the Buddha’s teaching in the West was reinterpreted along individualistic, humanist, egalitarian and rationalist lines, all of which appealed to a Western audience (Obeyesekere and Gombrich 1990). Seen this way, Buddhism is an appealing religious philosophy to Westerners because of its similarity to Christianity. Buddhism offered a missionary form of salvation for the self and this was appealing to orientalist Westerners seeking ancient mystic wisdom from Asian religions (Obeyesekere and Gombrich 1990; Lopez 2001).

The third phase of humanitarian funding started in the early 1980s when the Tibetan government in exile and the office of Dalai Lama were able to organize and attract funding on their own. The Tibetan exile leaders self-consciously associated themselves with Tibetan Buddhism with a liberal humanist worldview to appeal to the West and generate humanitarian sponsorships (Frechette 2004; Huber 1995). The intellectuals and the leaders of the Tibetan exile community have intentionally re-constructed their Tibetan identity to suit the global popularity of Western liberal values (Huber 1995; Pederson 1995). Since then, Tibetan scholars, leaders, and elites have frequently claimed that Tibetan culture (complete with its Buddhist values) has always been an environmental consensus. This new Tibetan image was spread widely via magazines, conference participation, media speech, and even World Wildlife Federation (WWF)-endorsed research on Buddhist philosophy about ecological conservation (Huber 1995). Huber calls this new generation of environmentally conscious Tibetan diaspora “Green Tibetans” for linking ecological conservation with their Tibetan cultural identity. At the same time, around the late 1980s, the Tibetan Women’s Association (TWA, the largest Tibetan women’s movement in exile) were seeking recognition and endorsement from the global media⁶ and they followed the same path as the Tibetan environmental movement.

⁶ Before the CCP’s colonization, women did not have much voice in public Tibetan society. But in exile a political organization was deemed necessary for women and children who were
I agree with Huber that this was an important strategy applied by Tibetans: to present themselves as members of a "unique culture" that, out of natural cultural sympathy, advocated for environmentalism, animal rights, women’s rights, and human rights. This was part of a larger political strategy by Tibetans to portray themselves to the world as wiser and better governors of Tibet than the Chinese. Thus supported by Western-friendly attributes, the Tibetan exile community’s claim that Tibetans were and could be the better governors of Tibet looked an even more reasonable argument. It should be noted, however, that the Tibetan exile community is not only making these claims, but it is also practicing a new identity by operating as advocates of Western-style, liberal-human rights. This is a general initiative taken up by the Tibetan exile community as a whole to assert cultural creativity in a new global context (McConnell 2011; McGranahan 2010; Schaik 2010; Frechette 2004; Bleiker 2001; Huber 1995). Moreover, this recreation of Tibetan identity also becomes largely advantageous for the survival of Tibetan refugees in the globalized world. This effort of Tibetans to present Tibetan culture as aligned with Western liberal values makes them likeable and less threatening in the West. For example, Canada and Switzerland were the first to take in Tibetan refugees starting in the 1960s, and thereafter, the U.S. and Europe started taking in Tibetan asylees starting in the 1990s (Buchser 2010, Phayul 2009; Howe 1991, Tibetan Review 2016). Eventually, many Western nation-states were willing to accept Tibetan ‘refugees’, regardless of their own nation-state’s relations with the China, or whether the Tibetan refugees they accepted were ‘refugees’ in any legal sense.  

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7 The Dalai Lama was invited to the White house to visit President Obama. The Chinese response to this meeting came via China’s Vice-Foreign Minister Zahng Yesui who summoned U.S. charge d’affaires Daniel Kritenbrink and publically announced that ‘The Tibetan issue is the domestic affair of China, and the United States bears no right to interfere. Such a move will gravely sabotage China-US cooperation and relations, and will definitely undermine its own interests’. The U.S. National Security Council spokeswoman responded to mitigate this tension with China stating, ‘Mr Obama met the Dalai Lama in his capacity as an internationally respected religious and cultural leader. We do not support Tibetan independence’ (BBC 2011).
The major Anthropological critiques of development work come from two theoretical schools of thoughts: Marxist, and Foucauldian. The Marxist neoliberal critique relates to political economy, where the grievance is with the way development aid covertly erodes the social welfare state and encourages the privatization of public services and goods. The Foucauldian neoliberal critique focuses on how development inspired governmentality produces subjects who have been refashioned to align with values of individualism, entrepreneurialism, and market competition. The new wave of postmodernist scholarship highly criticized the competitive, economic, market oriented, business-like models of NGOs (Escobar 1991; Arnould 1989; Arellano-Lopez and Petras 1994; Maternowska 2006). In South Asia, NGOs and Non-Profits started as self-help groups and Community Development (CD) programs whose objective was to get individuals to actively participate in the country’s progress. (Fernandez 2001). The newly independent India had already adapted the CD model for NGOs and Non-Profits, which allowed the Tibetan exile community to build their exile government and hundreds of other Tibetan non-profits on the same CD-model in India. Hence, the rather more positive use the Tibetan community has been able to make of NGOs.

Indeed, the way the Tibetan exile community has strategically used the CD development model to run their exile governance, as well as, to leverage the spread-out diaspora into a united Tibetan community via participation in various Non-Profits and NGOs could change the way we look at development work. After all, development organizations only began initially to fulfill the public needs not met by government services; the Tibetan model of development uses the Non-Profit and NGO model to give power back to the (exile) government for better public services, as well as to the other NGOs to democratically represent the spread of the Tibetan diaspora. Since Tibetan exiles have received most of their socio-economic-political support from the Western nation-states, Tibetan exiles overtime have adapted to Western liberal humanist values. I describe Western liberal humanism as the basic social notion of human rights, combined with the values of Western Buddhism that draws on ideals of compassion, mindfulness and multiculturalism that
have been larded with notions of individualism. The practice of flexible liminality has enabled Tibetans to enjoy closer relationships with foreign tourist supporters, which consequently, also places them in the likely position to gain transnational resources\(^8\) from this wider social circle. Tracing the use and application of western liberal humanist values in Tibetan diasporic practice will be central to my dissertation since it is evidence of the kind of new-identity-making in exile that has placed Tibetans in closer position to transnational resources and increased their likelihood of successful life chances.

**Dissertation Research Field Sites**

This project has two field-sites, Dharamsala, Himachal Pradesh (India), and Louisville, KY (U.S.) because I wanted to show the journey of resettlement that Tibetan exiles take to find better life chances in their exile hood. I carried out my ethnographic research via traditional fieldwork and digital ethnomethods between May 2014 and August 2018. In Dharamsala, I had many meaningful conversations over glasses of chai (sweet milk tea) and momos (Tibetan dumplings) at cafes overlooking the Dhauladhar Range; and catching up with Tibetan friends in dimly lighted private homes used as office space during daytime. Even after I had left India, I was in contact with Tibetan, Western, and Indian friends via social media and conducted interviews with them online. Similarly, in the U.S., I conducted several interviews via phone and social media since many Tibetans are spread all around the country. But I also had lively conversations with Tibetan friends over Tibetan karaoke singing in community centers, and talking about Tibetan politics while babysitting a five-year old who mumbled sentences constructed from both Tibetan and English words. Additionally, I followed Tibetan organizations’ social activities via their social media accounts, attended online meetings, and observed online communal events. My motive in having multiple field-sites was to better understand the cultural practice of flexible

\(^8\) Transnational resources are items that transcend the nation-state that Tibetans reside in. I use the concept formed by Arjun Appadurai, “scapes” (1990), to understand the use of transnational resources use by Tibetans in Dharamsala.
liminality of the Tibetan diaspora. If flexible liminality as a cultural practice exists, I reasoned, then I should be able to find it among Tibetan diaspora living elsewhere. Thus, I decided to follow where most of the Tibetan exiles from India were going or aspiring to go: to the United States.

After visiting Dharamsala in 2014 and 2016, I found that the main conversation among Tibetan youths was about how to go abroad. I was surprised that almost everyone I talked to had family and/or friends living in (or getting ready to leave for) Western countries. In 2016, I arrived in Dharamsala during Tibetan New Years, Lhosar. I was able to stay at a guesthouse of a Tibetan family for a few days and witness the large number of Tibetan friends and family visiting from abroad. There also was a sense of pride among the Tibetans living in Dharamsala to state that they have friends and/or family abroad. Additionally, I observed many people speaking with pride about how much of their sponsorship-leadership support for Tibetan organizations in India come from Tibetans living elsewhere abroad.

I had two larger goals in staging my field-sites in India and the U.S. First, I could clearly see that flexible liminality was a cultural practice among the Tibetans living in Dharamsala, and the important role that Tibetans settled in Western countries played in supporting this cultural practice. Second, in following Tibetan exiles to the Western countries they aspired to, I could better understand the characteristics of Tibetan cultural practice of flexible liminality and how it influenced Tibetans resettling to a new country.

**Dissertation Organization**

This dissertation is structured in chronological order to elaborate on the theoretical concept of “flexible liminality.” The second chapter will describe the “flexible liminality” of Tibetan exiles; the third chapter will apply the concept of “flexible liminality” to different ethnic groups in Dharamsala to show why the practice favors Tibetan exiles; the fourth and fifth chapters will give two different examples of Tibetan exiles’ “flexible liminality” to show how
flexible liminality functions on ground; the sixth and seventh chapters show how the “flexible liminality” of Tibetan exiles influences the Tibetan diaspora living in the U.S.

This dissertation is also divided into two major themes: pre-arrival and post-arrival. This reflects the terms commonly used by refugee resettlement agencies when talking about the linear progress of refugees’ legal and social identity from before to after resettlement within in a host country. However, there is no such clear distinction of before and after resettlement to host country for Tibetan exiles because even after their resettlement in the West, they still aspire to go back to India, and Tibet to visit their ‘home’ despite being American (or other resettled western country’s) citizens; in fact, I found that one of the main motivations for Tibetan exiles to acquire stable citizenship in the U.S. was so that they could travel to India, Nepal, Bhutan, and Tibet (Protected Chinese Territory) easily with a U.S. passport. My purpose of using pre-post resettlement ideology is to ironically show that the Tibetan exile’s journey continues even after resettlement, unlike the presupposed idea that a migrant’s final destination is the country that grants them stable citizenship.

The second, third, and fourth chapters are ethnographic accounts of Tibetans in Dharamsala, India. The fifth chapter is a place of transition, where I purposely speak about Tibetan diaspora in both India, and the U.S. Thereafter, the sixth and seventh chapters are ethnographic accounts of Tibetans living in the U.S., with specific focus on Louisville, Kentucky.

In the second chapter, “No Parking”- Multiple Exclusions of Tibetan Exiles, I will explain the concept of “flexible liminality” in more detail. I will discuss the different geo-political exclusions faced by Tibetan refugees and the strategic response devised by the Tibetan refugees to better their lives. I will explain how I see “flexible liminality” working within the Dharamsala Tibetan community. In the third chapter, Dharamsala- The Place and Its People is about the town of Dharamsala. In this chapter, I will provide an ethnographic description of the town, Dharamsala, to show the unique historical events of the place that has allowed for a politically marginalized population of Tibetan exiles to thrive and better their life chances. My goal in this
chapter is to show how the unique socio-historical condition of the town has allowed for the “flexible liminality” to thrive within Tibetan community while not work the same way for other ethnic communities in Dharamsala.

The fourth chapter, *Flexibility in the Infrastructure of Hanging-Out* returns the focus to the nature of “flexible liminality” for Tibetan exiles in Dharamsala. This chapter reflects on the close relationship of the Tibetan community with the foreign tourists and its estranged relationship with the Indian host community to show the result of the “flexible liminality” on Tibetan exile’s relationships with non-Tibetans. The fifth chapter is *Flexibility of the ‘Free Tibet’ Campaign*. Here I explain how the Tibetan cultural practice of flexibility has been infused in their political campaign of “Free Tibet”. I use the symbolic and political social theory to show the way the political campaigns can appear to be homogenous and unified despite the conflicting points of view within. I use this example of the “Free Tibet” campaign to show a real-world example of how “flexible liminality” works for Tibetan exiles.

The sixth chapter, “*Tibetanness:* Tibetan Exile’s Journey to the West”, will initiate the second part of the dissertation, “Post-Arrival in the U.S.” In this chapter, using data collected during fieldwork in the U.S at a refugee resettlement NGO, I will talk about the ways Tibetans migrate to the U.S. and compare their experience to that of legally recognized refugees resettled in the U.S. I will be describing the refugee resettlement process and compare it to resettlement process for Tibetan exiles. I will argue, again, that exiled Tibetan’s multiple geo-political exclusions keep them from receiving services available to legally recognized refugees but also, paradoxically, are partly responsible for the flexibility of their liminality. At the same time, I will show that these, multiple geo-political exclusions also play a big role in Tibetan-American’s lives and in the way Tibetan-Americans create their transnational identity in the U.S.

In the seventh chapter, *The U.S. Anti-Immigrant Strom: Tibetan Diaspora’s Story*, I will focus on the assimilation process for immigrants in the U.S. by giving an ethnographic account of the city of Louisville, Kentucky. I will compare the acceptance and assimilation process of
Tibetan diaspora there to other foreign immigrant communities. I will argue that Tibetan diaspora are better accepted within the city of Louisville because of the popular status of the Dalai Lama, and due to the way the Tibetan monastic community continually invites local Americans to learn about Tibet and Tibetan Buddhism.
Chapter 2: “No Parking”- Multiple Exclusions of Tibetan Exiles

On February 13th, 2016, Students for a Free Tibet in Dharamsala, India organized a Tibetan Independence Day Concert. Inside the auditorium of a monastery, I had to search to find seating but there were no empty seats. I had to squeeze my way through the crowd to find the midway part of the seating where I could slide on the concrete floor to watch the announcers introduce the event. After a couple of traditional Tibetan performances, the announcers introduced a dance group called “No Parking.” The crowd went wild even before the announcers were finished with the introduction. The announcers had to pause and let the crowd finish cheering. They said the dance members were the youngest performers at the event, and continued,

“These young Tibetans from Dharamsala have felt neglected and displaced, and do not feel like they belong anywhere. Even at such a young age, they have found a way to express their exclusion through dance. Please welcome ‘No Parking’!”

A shy group of teenaged boys and girls, dressed in white t-shirts, jeans, and sneakers, came out to loud cheers from the audience and started to perform their choreographed dance to the American pop song “Hotline Bling” by Drake. The song repeated, “She used to be call me on my cellphone/Late night when you need my love/ Call me on my cellphone/Late night when you need my love/ And I know when that hotline bling.” This scenario took me aback because the hip-hop dance choreography had no direct connection to the Tibetan political cause. What could this possibly mean?

Introduction

Why the name “No Parking” for a teenage dance group? And what does the marginalized position of Tibetan exiles have to do with this Tibetan teenager’s dance group? This entertainment event was reminiscent of the 2008 worldwide Tibetan independence movement. I will describe the Students for a Free Tibet (SFT) organization and the entertainment event mentioned above in more detail in a later chapter. However, for this chapter, I solely will focus on the name of the Tibetan dance group, “No Parking” and unpack the term “exclusion” that is
frequently used for Tibetans in India. The name of the dance group itself is important for this chapter because it conveys the key problem for the Tibetan diaspora, which is that the group does not have a place of belonging. Thus, the name “No Parking” signifies the situational essence of the Tibetan exile community’s experience of placelessness, or not belonging anywhere, as mentioned above by the announcers at the SFT concert. The play on the traffic phrase “No Parking” signifies to the audience that the dance group is speaking about not being allowed to stay or settle in certain places. The traffic metaphor also speaks to the police or government’s power to confine an individual’s existence in a certain place. “No Parking” is showing the connection between the traffic police’s control over which vehicles can be in certain areas just as a non-Tibetan nation-state’s government controls where Tibetans are allowed. The dance group is speaking, thus, of the nation-states of China and India, but this metaphor could also be extended towards Western countries since many Tibetans aim to gain permanent citizenship somewhere in the West. This metaphor of “No Parking” expressed rhetorically by the dance group is the actual empirical condition of exclusion all diaspora Tibetans find themselves in.

Thus, in this chapter, I will identify the multiple exclusions faced by Tibetans from China, India, and the West to explicate the Tibetan diaspora’s plight and their role within the geopolitics of the global stage on which they act. More specifically, I will explain the territorial exclusion faced by Tibetans from China and, ethnographically, describe the response of Tibetan exiles to this Chinese exclusion; then, I will explain the legal and social exclusions faced by Tibetans from India and the West, followed by the adjustments Tibetan exiles have made to these legal and social exclusions. Next, I will use the fact of these multiple exclusions as a foundation for a theoretical description of my notion of flexible liminality. Lastly, I will show how flexible liminality plays an important role in the lives of the Tibetan exile community in Dharamsala by ethnographically describing three instances where I saw flexible liminality at work; instances that revealed its inner workings.
Multiple Exclusions- China

Since the Chinese Communist Party’s (CCP) occupation of Tibet in the 1950s, Tibetans have been legally part of China (Schaik 2010; Childs 2003; Goldstein 1991). The Chinese government insists on erasing the unique politico-history of Tibet based on the claim that since Tibet was run by plutocrats, as a feudal state its ‘uniqueness’ was not worth preserving (Schaik 2010; Childs 2003; Goldstein 1991). This is why the Chinese government also claims to have freed Tibet from suppressive rulers (White Paper 1992). Since the occupation of Tibet, Tibetans living in Tibet have been treated as a minority ethnic group within China, and Tibetans are said to be part of the larger Chinese motherland (White Paper 1992). The CCP’s occupation of Tibet included the aggressive elimination of the Tibetan religion, language, and culture by punishing any participating Tibetans, and destroying elements, like Tibetan language, religious institutions, educational institutions etc., related to Tibetan traditions (Mishra 2014; Brauen 2011; Schaik 2010; Goldstein 2007; Vahali 2009; Childs 1963). The exclusion of Tibetans from China has been specifically designed to strip them of their unique Tibetan culture. Tibetans have been forced to become a minority ethnic group in China, and Tibetans have been forced to learn the Chinese language, Chinese cultural values, and live within a Chinese governmental structure. Hence, though Tibetans in Tibet, legally speaking, live within China, many Tibetans feel Chinese policy has effectively excluded them from doing so as Tibetans (Mishra 2014; Brauen 2011; Schaik 2010; Goldstein 2007; Vahali 2009; Childs 1963; TJC 2011; Shakya 1991). This exclusion is, of course, also doubly the case for those Tibetans who have followed the example of the Dalai Lama and fled. On numerous occasions my participants told me that while they could find a good life in India or Nepal, they would not risk going back to Tibet because they Chinese authorities would punish them for initially leaving the country without government permission.

While the Chinese government often proclaims that all Tibetans (including the exiles) are part of China, Tibetans in exile have actively rejected the government’s assimilation project. Many Tibetans since the Chinese occupation have risked their lives by illegally leaving Tibet and
seeking refuge in India and Nepal (Schaik 2010; Goldstein 2007; TJC 2011; Indian Census 2012). Nearly all of the Tibetans that I spoke with in Dharamsala, both children and adults, told me sad stories of leaving Tibet to seek refuge in neighboring countries. Since the exile of Tibetans began in 1957, there has been a constant stream of Tibetans escaping Tibet. A recent census count of Tibetans in exile roughly estimated their number as over 150,000 (CTA 2009).

During my fieldwork, I found that Tibetans in exile were actively rejecting the Chinese government’s narrative assertion that Tibet is part of a larger China, and that Tibetans are thus a minority ethnic group under Chinese governance. The Tibetan exile community, in response, is diligently trying to preserve Tibetan culture and recreate a different Tibetan identity in exile, especially one that is different from Chinese identity. I would even argue that Tibetans are not just passively reproducing Tibetan identity from Tibet; rather, they are actively re-creating Tibetan identity, and re-defining who will be part of the Tibetan community and who will be outside.

Tibetan Identity in Norbulingka

An encounter during my fieldwork visit to the Norbulingka institute in Dharamsala seamlessly captured how Tibetans there engage in the reconstruction of Tibetan identity. During my fieldwork in Dharamsala, I went to Norbulingka, a Tibetan cultural institute. It is in a village an hour’s bus-ride from the main market area of Dharamsala. After the bus dropped me off, I had to walk 20 minutes through residential village streets to get to the Norbulingka institute. The villages were like any other South Asian Himalayan valley villages I had seen in Nepal and India; small, one-story houses connected by small alleys and surrounded by large fields containing randomly roaming domestic animals. I came upon the large compound of a Tibetan nunnery (a residence for female Tibetan Buddhist monks) standing, with awesome majesty, in the midst of agricultural fields. Signs on the compound’s large brick walls identified it as the Norbulingka institute. Following guidance from several local vendors, I walked in front of the beautiful
entrance to Norbulingka. I crossed a small bridge that went over a man-made spring and approached a traditional Tibetan entrance that was decorated with beautiful climbing plants.

When I entered the gate, I was told to purchase a ticket according to my nationality. The cashier explained that they charge the most to Western tourists (Rs.100), less for a South Asian tourists (Rs.50), even less for Indians (Rs.40), and none for Tibetans. I was intrigued by this system and asked the cashier if their system was according to legal citizenship or national identity. He seemed confused so I reiterated, “What I should pay since I have Indian heritage but I am a Nepali citizen?”

The cashier then asked, “Are you Nepali?” After I said yes, he said, “You can just pay Rs.40. If you need a tour guide just wait here,” and gave me my entrance ticket. I understood this as a system of national identity rather than a legal citizenship system, since I was taken as a Gorkhali (a Nepali ethnic group in Dharamsala) rather than as a Nepali citizen. I informed the cashier that I would walk by myself but, if I had questions, I would come back here. He nodded and let me in, and then went back to chatting with another cashier sitting with him.

After visiting several traditional art classes, I came across a Thangka painting class and decided to walk in and watch the painters do their work. Here I met two painters to whom I asked, “Where are you from?” Both men said Manali in Himachal Pradesh. I asked again, “No, no, I mean in Tibet, where in Tibet are you from?”

One of the men said, “We are not Tibetans, we are Himali boys,” and after I asked further questions, both the men kept proudly repeating, “I already told you, we are not Tibetans, we are Himali boys.”

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9 Norbulingka Institute is a Tibetan cultural and arts institute that preserves and teaches new generation of Tibetans about Tibetan historical arts and artifacts.

10 A Thangka is a Tibetan scroll-banner painting, which is hung in a monastery or a family altar and carried by lamas in ceremonial processions. Thangka is a unique art form that belongs to Tibetan culture. In Tibetan, the word ‘than’ means Flat and the suffix ‘ka’ stands for Painting (Rawat and Kapoor 2016)
They were indicating, in this way, their ethnic identity’s connection to Himachal Pradesh where they are a Tibetan-looking ethnic group, but Indian citizens, who trace their ancestry to northern parts of the state, close by Chinese border, like Ladakh, Manali etc. At the thangka class, I dropped this topic, sensing a defensive tone, and asked instead about the painting itself. But this interaction had confused me, so, later, I asked a tour guide why Himali people were being accepted to Norbulingka, when they were not Tibetans but legally considered Indian citizens. He smiled slowly and said,

“That is because they are [of] Tibetan descent.” He shook his head at my confused face and kept explaining, “In [the] 12th Century, the Tibetan kingdom covered today’s North India but later lost the kingdom. However, there are still populations who follow Tibetan Buddhism and very few who speak the Tibetan language, so all those who follow Tibetan Buddhism fall under the category of Tibetan for the Norbulingka institute.”

Then, he asked, “You look Tibetan. Where are you from?”

“Nepal,” I answered.

He then nodded and explained that if my ancestors were from northern Nepal, which used to be part of the Tibetan kingdom, and if I follow Tibetan Buddhism or can speak the Tibetan language, then I too could be part of the Tibetan exile community, and could apply to Norbulingka. After some other small talk, I left Norbulingka, still very surprised at the tour guide’s explanation. I had never thought of myself as Tibetan, but was told that I could potentially be part of the Tibetan exile community and gain access to their traditional art and cultural knowledge.

This event entirely captured the on-going identity negotiations between the Tibetan exile community and other ethnic groups in India and South Asia. I argue that this is one of the ways that Tibetans in exile are defying the China’s narrative that Tibetan state never existed; that is, by striving to create a larger and distinct Tibetan identity in exile. By making the requirements for membership in the Tibetan diaspora more flexible, the Tibetan exile community is actively

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11 The Tibetan empire existed from roughly 6th-11th Century; it covered most of today’s China, north India, and North Nepal (Richardson 1965; Beckwith 1987; Huber 2008; Schaik 2010)
negotiating who may be part of the Tibetan diaspora community in a way advantageous to them. Beyond this, the community has marked the boundaries of its Tibetan identity via arguments about ancestral blood lineage, the geographical borders of 6th-11th century Tibet, fluency in the Tibetan language, a devotion to Tibetan Buddhism, and overall cultural compatibility. I argue that these, too, were ways that Tibetans in exile were making their claim to a unique Tibetan identity, in an attempt to differentiate themselves from the Chinese. It would be naïve to assume that the Tibetan exile community, here, was merely reproducing a pre-colonial Tibetan identity where everybody had a fixed hometown in the geographical territory of the Tibetan region. Instead, as seen in the ethnographic details above, the Tibetan community is actively negotiating their Tibetan exile identity, and they are constantly making decisions on who gets to be on the inside and who will be outsider. I am making a similar argument to Fredrick Barth in his book, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* (1969), where he argues that ethnic identities are constantly changing and manifested out of the social process of exclusion and incorporation (Barth 1969:9). Similar to Barth, I also argue the Tibetan community in exile is trying to establish a new identity that is different from the, for them, impossible identity defined by the Chinese government. Thus, the Tibetan identity in exile is changing but the change is occurring with the conscious effort to differentiate themselves from having Chinese identity.

**Multiple Exclusions: India**

The second exclusion faced by Tibetans in exile is from the Indian government. Despite the Tibetan community’s long stay in India, Tibetans in India have to maintain their exile status by initially creating, and annually renewing, a Registration Certificate. Moreover, India is not a signed member of the UNHCR 1951 Convention or the 1967 Protocol. Therefore, India perceives all Tibetan exiles as foreigners and administers exiles under the Foreigners Act of 1946.

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12 The Convention is the key legal document defining ‘exiles,’ their rights, and the legal obligations of states; and the Protocol is an additional agreement for states to remove geographical and temporal restrictions conveyed by the Convention (UNHCR).
and the Citizenship Act of 1955 (HRLN 2007). As foreigners, exiles are not allowed to participate in any type of group protest, vote in government elections, buy assets, or easily enter the country without legal paperwork. Moreover, India stopped providing humanitarian aid and identification certificates to Tibetan exiles after 1979 (TJC 2011). Then, in 1988, Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi created a Joint Working Group committee with China to form a better commercial relationship (Jain 1989). As the Indo-Sino relationship has improved, India’s willingness to provide humanitarian services to Tibetan exiles has decreased (TJC 2011). Hence, current Tibetan exiles are allowed to stay in their Indian settlement areas only as prolonged guests (or foreigners) and do not receive any aid or military support from India for any kind of endeavor in behalf of the exiles (TJC 2011; McConnell 2009).

Were Tibetan exiles to become Indian citizens, their bureaucratic burden to India and their own legal insecurity would be immediately lessoned; but this only rarely happens 13. Indeed, Tibetans in Dharamsala informed me that there have only been a handful of Tibetans who have become Indian citizens. At the same time, I also noticed that the Tibetan exile community informally discourages each other from taking up Indian citizenship. I had several encounter with Tibetans in Dharamsala who criticized the entire idea of getting Indian citizenship as traitor to the Tibetan exile community. The Tibetan exile members themselves also ask other Tibetans to refuse Indian citizenship (Tibetan Journal 2017).

Given this constraint, many Tibetan exiles in India have embraced their marginalized position to further Tibetan nationalism and Tibetan cultural-religious practices. I observed that the marginalized condition of Tibetans in India, while disadvantageous to legal security, was advantageous to the popularity of the Tibetan nationalist cause. That is, when Tibetans refuse Indian citizenship, it tends to encourage them to stay more dedicated to the Tibetan nationalist

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13 Since the mid 2000s, the Indian government has only allowed Tibetan individuals who entered India before 1967 to apply to become Indian citizens. But only a handful of Tibetans have become Indian citizens because of the bureaucratic and monetary burdens that come with going through the process of becoming Indian citizens.
cause. This is evident in the stories of two Tibetans I will tell below: Pemba, who refused Indian citizenship because he is satisfied with the government-like services provided by the Tibetan government in exile, and Lhakpa, who is passionate enough about the Tibetan nationalist cause to want to remain marginalized in India.

**Indian Citizenship vs. Tibetan Nationalism**

I arrived at a restaurant recommended to me by a local Tibetan man. The inside of the restaurant was sparsely furnished with four picnic tables and benches in a small room, so I decided to sit out on the balcony that had one outdoor table and four chairs. The owner of the restaurant came over and introduced himself as Pemba. He seemed like a friendly middle-aged man who looked athletically fit and tall for a Tibetan person. His spoken English was very good, so we started making small talk. His wife was running the kitchen and brought out more rounds of tea for all. He started reminiscing about his times in the Tibetan army. He explained that he was on duty for four years and for part of that time, he was stationed in Kashmir (located in North India bordering with China and Pakistan). Pemba explained that the Indian army has often hired soldiers suited for the high altitude of the Kashmir area, so a lot of Gorkha (a Nepali ethnic group) regiments and Tibetan regiments get sent there.

I realized that he was willing to share all these personal details because I had shared that my father’s family were all in the Gorkha army. Pemba said that he had formed very close bonds with the other men in the Gorkha army and he was curious to know the regiments and ranks of my uncles, and granduncles. I asked him (since he had served the Indian government through the Tibetan army) if he could not apply to be an Indian citizen? He answered,

“"I have good benefits from the Tibetan [exile] government, I don’t need to become an Indian citizen. The Tibetan [exile] government paid for my education, sent me to [the] army when I couldn’t do college, they take care of us. I don't have to become Indian… Also, I am very proud to have served my [Tibetan exile] government through army service; I want to stay Tibetan [laughs]. This way I can also take part in [the] Tibetan [exile] government election. [Pointing to a wall poster] this is my school-friend who is running for McLeod Ganj Mayor’s election. He has become a big man now, he had
nothing before but now he does honest work for [the Tibetan] people, he never lets anyone down. He may even come here for tea today. I want to help him become mayor. If I become [an] Indian citizen, I cannot participate like now, so I choose to stay as Tibetan.”

For Pemba, taking up Indian citizenship would be a matter of giving up membership in the Tibetan exile community and exile government participation. During his time in the army, he recognized that he was fighting for the Indian government, but he was proud to have been classified as a member of Tibetan army. Moreover, he was very satisfied with his situation in India, and did not seem to have any problem being a ‘foreigner’ exile or non-citizen of India. In fact, he would rather be part of the Tibet exile community and participate in the exile government than acquire legal stability in India. From what Pemba said, it is clear that he had great trust in the Tibetan exile government to take care of himself and other Tibetan exiles in India. The Tibetan exile government had taken care of him in the past and he trusted that it would do so for future generations as well. Therefore, given his trust in the Tibetan exile government and its ability to take care of social security for Tibetans (and his own desire to continue being part of the Tibetan community), Pemba had determined to not take up Indian citizenship.

At another time, I met with a female youth activist who said she did not want Indian citizenship for a different reason. I met Lhakpa at a cafe in the main market of McLeod Ganj. Her spoken English was excellent, so I asked her for an interview and she agreed to help me out. Lhakpa was in her mid 20s, from Ladakh, and visiting a friend in town. She said she liked being active in Tibetan politics as much as she could because she believed she had a duty to fulfill. I asked her if she ever thought of getting Indian citizenship for legal issues. Lhakpa said, “it is difficult to get Indian citizenship for us…but it would also mean that we have given up hope for Tibet’s independence.”

“What about the Tibetans who are getting citizenship in the U.S. or France and Australia?” I asked. Lhakpa replied,

“If they [Tibetans] want to get their citizenship individually that is no problem, but here
[in India], it is a group citizenship [a large number of Tibetans who arrived by a certain year attaining Indian citizenship] that we would be getting. And that is terrible for Tibetan independence; I would never take up Indian citizenship because it is the matter of moral obligation.”

I asked her what she thought of Tibetan leaders who were actively telling Tibetans not to take up Indian citizenship as well. Lhakpa said,

“India is the hub for [the] freedom movement so if Tibetan government did not tell people anything [i.e. prevent Tibetans from getting Indian citizenship], it would be the Indian government’s organized trick for citizenship [in order to get political advantage with China].”

For Lhakpa, India was important geo-political ground for the Tibetan political cause. India was not just a place for refuge, but also a place where they could carry out Tibetan political activities and display Tibetan nationalism. Even though Tibetans living in other Western countries also carry out Tibetan activism, they don’t feel they must display Tibetan nationalism as much as do Tibetans living in India. The Tibetan diaspora has made India, as Lhakpa puts it, into a ‘hub’ of Tibetan independence. In order to demand Tibetan independence from China, the Tibetan exile government also wants to display its acts of good governance of the Tibetan diaspora, and in return, the Tibetan exile community shows their commitment to Tibetan freedom through protest and activism. Interestingly though, the Tibetan exile community can also show their patriotism and nationalist emotions by not taking up Indian citizenship. According to Lhakpa’s explanation, any other country’s citizenship would not hinder their patriotic display, but Indian citizenship would devalue the Tibetan’s contribution towards the Tibetan nationalist agenda.

During my fieldwork, I heard several casual conversations around the town between Tibetans warning each other not to take up Indian citizenship because of the need to assert their difference from Indians. It should be noted, on the other hand, that I never heard any Tibetans complain when Tibetans took up citizenship in Western countries. In fact, many Tibetans did aspire to gain permanent residency and legal security in Western countries. At first glance, it may seem like Western countries are seen as a desirable places and South Asian countries (especially
India) are seen as undesirable places. But I would argue that this is not the case. Rather, the Tibetan exile community has decided to create India as the staging ground for their political cause because of the social and legal leeway Tibetans gain in India.

In other words, Tibetan exiles in India are marginalized, but have some advantageous conditions there in that they are able to form their own Tibetan governance, political leadership, community participation, and public interest for the Tibetan political cause. Thus, the tactic of rejecting Indian citizenship and maintaining marginalized status works for the Tibetan political cause. Tibetans in exile are told that, as an exile population, they have a nationalist responsibility to forward the Tibetan political cause, take part in political activism, gain attention from the global media, and promote Tibetan nationalism. In the end, Tibetans in India feel discouraged from taking up Indian citizenship for two key reasons: first, the Tibetan leadership provides enough services to their own community that the Tibetan individuals do not feel the need for Indian government services in day-to-day life; and, second, they fear Indian citizenship will take away their ability to participate politically in the Tibetan exile community. But more than this, they recognize that by staying marginalized the Tibetan nationalist cause is better able to gain extra attention from the global media. Hence, I argue that the reason Tibetans are actively rejecting Indian citizenship begins with the type of exclusion they face from the Indian government.

**Multiple Exclusions: The West**

On the other hand, Western countries are seen as desirable places for Tibetans to acquire citizenship. Since exiled Tibetans are a politically marginalized group caught between the increasingly competitive geo-political concerns of China and India, their position has attracted foreign sympathy from powerful Western countries like the U.S.A, France, Spain, Australia, Switzerland, Norway, and Denmark (McGranahan 2010; Schaik 2010; Frechette 2004; Bleiker 2001; Shakya 2000). From my interactions with Tibetan exiles, I found that these are also
countries sought after by Tibetans for political freedom, economic success and legal stability. I argue that this distinction between Western citizenship and Indian citizenship is because of the different type of exclusion the Tibetan exile community faces in Western countries. However, first it is important to understand why various Western countries become interested in Tibet and Tibetans in exile.

In the early 1900s, Tibetan political sovereignty was not very active (Goldstein 1991; Schaik 2010; Huber 2007). Tibetan leadership under the Dalai Lama had very little interest or effect on international relations, and, at the same time, little direct internal control over all the regions of the Tibetan state (Goldstein 1991; 1987, 2007; Schaik 2010; Huber 2007). However, I would argue that it would be untrue to say Tibetan leaders did not have any interest in their own state’s affairs. The 13th Dalai Lama, the current Dalai Lama’s predecessor, had a plan to modernize Tibet and establish a centralized hold on its territory (Goldstein 1991; 1987, 2007; Schaik 2010; Huber 2007). From 1900 to 1930, the 13th Dalai Lama spent his time, first, fighting off the British Empire and Tibetan politicians who supported foreign allies, and, then, Chinese troops who were constantly trying to occupy the Tibetan state (Schaik 2010). Tibet’s first direct alliance with a Western country was established during the 1950s, when the United States’ CIA helped train the Tibetan army to fight the Chinese communist occupation (McGranahan 2010, Schaik 2010, Goldstein 2007). It would be 20 years after the U.S.’s CIA training before Tibet again received any attention from the U.S. government. The next time Tibet and the U.S. showed their alliance together was in September 1987 when the 14th Dalai Lama travelled to Washington D.C. to speak about Tibet and the Chinese occupation at a human rights caucus (Schaik 2010). Soon after, he gave multiple speeches around U.S. and Europe about global human rights issues, finally bringing the international media’s attention to Tibetan cause. In 1989, the 14th Dalai Lama was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, establishing both his own and that of the Tibetan political cause in the world media.
Besides geo-political allies, there have been various individual Western supporters and sympathizers who have come to help the Tibetan exiles. Since 1993, the Indian government has been slowly withdrawing its humanitarian aid and complete legal protection from the Tibetan exiles in India. Thus, Tibetans have increasingly had to rely on foreign support through formal institutions such as NGOs, non-profit organizations, and informal personal connections (De Voe 1981; Frechette 2004; Prost 2006; TJC 2011). With respect to the latter, due to the increasing popularity of Buddhist ideals in the West, the Tibetan political cause was first able to reach many Western people through their interest in Buddhism and liberal humanism\(^{14}\) (Frechette 2004).

Given the success of the Dalai Lama’s speeches on human rights issues, starting in the early 1970s, I was told the Dalai Lama’s administration has encouraged the Tibetan diaspora and its administrative officers to take advantage of the global human rights and environmental activism movements (also, coincidentally, aligned with liberal humanism) to promote the Tibetan cause to free the Tibetan state from Chinese governance (Frechette 2004). Thus, the Western organizations and individuals assisting Tibetan exiles are mostly working from similar principles such as universal human rights, liberal humanism, and so on. Lastly, Tibetan Buddhism has been frequently been popularly misunderstood by Westerners as a solely mystical and magical religion, which has to do with orientalist misconception about Tibet that were wide-spread during the early 20\(^{th}\) century and distributed through early new-age cult enthusiasts who were seeking spiritual enlightenment through eastern religions (Lopez 1999, Shakya 1991, Frechette 2004, Prost 2006). These orientalist misconceptions have led some Westerners seeking personal enlightenment towards the Tibetan exile community. I will speak more about how Orientalism ironically made it easier for Westerns to approach Tibetans – via the Shangri-La affect, Lamaism, and Western Buddhism – in future chapters (See Chap 7).

\(^{14}\) Ann Frechette in her book, Tibetans in Nepal (2002) defines liberal humanism as “set of beliefs that emphasizes the individual as the most basic social unit, with the right to live a life of his or her own choosing”
Western supporters of the Tibetan exile community come from an array of different philosophical ideals and political intentions. I argue that despite the abundance of Western interest in Tibet, Tibetan exiles are not seen as the same as other Western individuals. There is an oriental lens being used in viewing Tibetans – whether by Western political allies, global human rights supporters, or Tibetan Buddhism followers – that causes Tibetans to be viewed, however favorably, as the “orientalist other.”

I argue that Tibetan exiles are excluded from the West because even their Western supporters have a certain picture of Tibet that portrays them as completely different from Westerners. As a result of this stereotypical vision, Westerners are unable to see the true Tibet, which includes Tibetan Buddhism and the Tibetan identity.

Interestingly, the Tibetan exile community has responded tactfully to the stereotypical, and sometimes bizarre, Western image of themselves as wise-saints, mystical beings, or exotic people from Shangri-La (magical land) since these are, at least, favorable forms of misrecognition (Anand 2007, Lopez 1999, Shakya 1991). Despite the peculiar initial interests of Western audiences in Tibetan exiles, I argue that the Tibetan diaspora has found it more beneficial to be sympathized with by the West than understood, and thus, has been able to grow close ties to many Western individuals. Legally, Tibetan exiles are not considered refugees under the UNHCR definition. But despite their lack of “refugee” status, they have managed to resettle themselves in Western countries due to the sympathetic views of the Western audience. This can be seen from the Tibetan exile community’s effort in creating space in the West via a selective number of visas for displaced people, refugees, and asylum-seekers, special scholarships for Tibetan exiles, and sponsorships from established Buddhist institutes in the West. It should be noted that UNHCR-defined refugees (like the Congolese, the Bhutanese, Syrian refugees, etc.) do not go through the same type of “special” entry visas and sponsorships for displaced people that Tibetans do for resettlement in the West (See Chapter 6).

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Moreover, the Tibetan exile community has slowly changed their own values in exile to align with liberal humanist values.\textsuperscript{16} Since Tibetan exiles are receiving most of their socio-economic-political support from the Western nation-states, they have, over time, adapted to Western liberal humanist values. By liberal humanism I mean the conventional Western belief in universal human rights combined with a set of notions, also found in Westernized Buddhism, that draws in the ideals of compassion, mindfulness and multiculturalism. The practice of flexible liminality has enabled Tibetans to enjoy closer relationships with foreign tourist supporters, which consequently, also place them in a more likely position to gain transnational resources\textsuperscript{17} from their widened social circle. Western liberal humanist values will be a guiding light in my dissertation since it is the activity of new-identity-making in exile, done with a weather eye toward just those values, that has placed so many Tibetans closer to transnational resources and that has increased the likelihood of them having successful life chances.

I argue that there has been a cultural shift in the Tibetan diaspora that allows Tibetans to more easily befriend Western individuals and adopt Western cultural notions and liberal values. This change therefore makes it easier for Tibetans to have close ties with Western people. Since settling in the West has proven beneficial for the individual socio-economic success of Tibetans, gaining citizenship in the West is considered an admirable action among Tibetans. I met several Tibetans in Dharamsala who wanted to go abroad to Western countries rather than stay in India. One of these interviews captured the popular thoughts passed among young Tibetans in Dharamsala.

\textsuperscript{16} This trend toward adopting liberal humanist values started with a new type of humanitarian funding proposal by the Tibetan government in exile and the office of Dalai Lama. The Tibetan exile leader self-consciously associated Tibetan Buddhism with a liberal humanist worldview to appeal to the West and generate humanitarian sponsorships (Frechette 2004; Huber 1995). The intellectuals and the leaders of the Tibetan exile community have intentionally re-constructed their Tibetan identity to suit the global popularity of Western liberal values like environmental activism, animal rights, gender equality etc. (Huber 1995; Pederson 1995).

\textsuperscript{17} Transnational resources are items that stretch beyond the nation-states that Tibetans reside in. As I said earlier, I use the concept formed by Arjun Appadurai, “scapes” (1990), to understand the use of transnational resources use by Tibetans in Dharamsala.
**A dream to go abroad**

During my fieldwork in India, I was partnered up with a middle-aged monk from South India for daily Tibetan-English language lessons in Dharamsala. We would meet at a café every day where I would teach the monk English and he would teach me the Tibetan. At our last meeting, I asked him to describe his dream in English because by then he was able to speak slowly but fluently in English. The monk started to describe,

“My dream is to go start a Sera Buddhist school branch abroad. Ah… maybe Chicago, maybe, Australia. [Pause] In Chicago, I have two followers who want to invite me to teach them Buddhism – maybe I will go there and start a school. Otherwise, I will go to Australia – [smiling] my family is there, my sister and her children. I will live with them and slowly…slowly start a Buddhist school.”

I was very proud of him for making such good sentences, but I was also surprised that my language partner had such good connections in the Western countries. I asked him how he came to have such friends in Chicago and Australia? He said,

“Oh, the followers from Chicago came to my monastery in South India that is how… ah… and my sister’s husband got some visa for Australia. [Laughing] they are lucky… I am also lucky.”

A few weeks after, I met two men in their late 20s at a coffee shop. I had observed a group of them playing soccer at an open parking lot, and had asked the players sitting on the bench if they would be willing to do an interview. Only two people agreed to meet me later. We started out the interview talking about their hometowns in Tibet and how they left Tibet. They both mentioned that they missed their families back in Tibet because life is hard being on their own. So, I asked them, “Why did you leave Tibet?” One of the men said,

“In Tibet, I would have no problem getting agriculture type work but that is not what I want to do… So, I left home for [a] better life. [Pause] um… Just saying frankly, I am not very educated, I did not like school, but in both Nepal and India I don't find good jobs with no degree. Here I am nothing, I am doing nothing, this small job that small job, I want a good job [he laughed] maybe just a job that earns good. So my hope is to go to the U.S. and live with my cousin and earn money like he is doing.”
These stories of the monk and young men from the Tibetan community shed a light on the type of lives Tibetan exiles are facing in the globalized world. All of my interlocutors, including the monk and the young men, told me how they had risked their lives escaping from Tibet to India in search of better lives and careers. In their own ways, they were realizing that they would not be able to live a “full” life (have complete citizenship rights) and, thus, have good careers in India. Rather, these Tibetans were hoping to make a better life elsewhere in the Western world. Over time, they had developed meaningful relationships with Western people via values shared with their Tibetan family traditions, Buddhism, or political activism. Despite the Tibetan community’s legal ability to work in India, the increasing job competition in India was a sad reality, and unemployment for Tibetans with high education was a sore topic in the Dharamsala community. So many Tibetans aspired to achieve their dreams of finding better lives in Western countries with thoughts of better career opportunities and the rights of citizenship.

Moreover, these stories also convey that there is an economically and geographically limited situation for Tibetans in India. This is not just the story for these young Tibetans but for a lot of other Tibetans as well. Tibetans who are finding access to political refuge in India are still lacking economic and social-legal stability. This is why many in the Tibetan diaspora opt to go to Western countries where they might be accepted as immigrants or displaced people (apply for asylum/refugee status) and eventually, citizens. Moreover, citizenship in the West is a powerful vehicle that allows Tibetans to travel around the world without fear of being persecuted. This is an important factor for Tibetan exiles that are usually landlocked in India (Nepal and Bhutan) and have to continually renew their residency permits in these countries. On the other hand, if a Tibetan exile can receive a special entry visa to Western countries, they can apply for asylum/refugee status and potentially receive a chance for citizenship, and even have an opportunity to make a good career.

18 My Tibetan interlocutors told me that Tibetans usually have a large extended family. Even a distant cousin falls under the extended family circle. Usually, the same family obligation of social and financial assistance extends to all family members.
Multiple Exclusions- Analysis

So the Tibetan diaspora faces different types of exclusion from different nation-states but have found ways to make use of these multiple exclusions in ways that benefit themselves. First, the Tibetan diaspora faces exclusion from China because the Chinese government wants to force Tibetans to abandon their identity and into becoming part of the Chinese nation-state. Tibetans have responded to what they regard as oppression and occupation of Tibet by escaping their homeland and securing their Tibetan identity in exile. In addition, their Tibetan identity is constantly being re-examined and reproduced in exile by the Tibetan community. Second, Tibetan exiles face exclusion from India because while the Indian government sympathizes with the Tibetan exile population, India has not allowed most Tibetan exiles to acquire the same legal rights as other Indian citizens. Rather, over time, India has removed its humanitarian support towards Tibetans. In response, the Tibetan exiles have accepted this exclusion, and, in turn, have made India into an organizing ground for Tibetan nationalist activities. Despite a small opportunity for Tibetans to gain Indian citizenship, Tibetans are actively rejecting the Indian citizenship to present a patriotic image of the Tibetan exile community.

Lastly, the Tibetan diaspora faces exclusion from the West because of orientalist preconceptions about Tibetans that distorts the reality of Tibetans, and perceptions colored by the mystic and Shangri-La view of Tibetans. I contend that the Western audience has long been fascinated with Tibet, and, since the occupation of the Tibetan state, we can see the proof of this in the generous humanitarian aid flowing from the West to Tibetan exiles and the creation of special visas for the resettlement of Tibetans in Western countries (Hess 2009; Frechette 2004). This, in turn, has motivated the Tibetan exile community to align their values with liberal humanist ideals, which, in a feedback loop, has helped them gain even better support from the international media and Western countries. Tibetans in exile are nurtured in cultural values that place them closer to Western liberal ones, which is why I observed many Tibetans in India easily befriending Western foreigners and tourists.
Theoretical Analysis – Flexible Liminality

The multiple exclusions of Tibetan exiles from China, India, and the West, mentioned above provide a foundation for understanding the different geo-political forces influencing the Tibetan exile community. This is the message that “No Parking,” the Tibetan teenage dance group, was trying to send to their audience. Their sense of not belonging, of being told “No Parking,” says to their audience that we, as Tibetans, feel the restrictions and regulations of the multiple nations that we are all actively involved with.

At the same time, the Tibetan exile community has also found ways to adjust their cultural practice to best suit external influences. This is the very foundation of my theory of flexible liminality. The flexible liminality of the Tibetan diaspora can be characterized as their ability to adjust to any situation, people, or geo-politics. Thus, I define the flexible liminality of the Tibetan diaspora as a practice that consists of two variants — one, the external geo-political influence, and two, the internal socio-cultural practices of the group to adjust to the external influences. It should be noted that my theory of flexible liminality is simply a practice that can be applied to any ethnic group and is based on that particular ethnic group. Any ethnic group, that an ethnic group can engage in flexible liminality, but how they do that will vary from circumstance to circumstance resulting in high or low degree of flexible liminality. My key argument for this dissertation is that the Tibetan diaspora has a highly flexible liminality.

I have used two different lineages of social theory to assemble my theory of flexible liminality. First, I have used Victor Turner’s notion of ‘liminality’ that Turner explains as a phase in the life of individuals who are pushed beyond the boundaries of their social system. These marginalized beings are not completely out of the social system, but they are also not inside standard society (Turner 1969). The notion of liminality comes out of the Durkheimian and British Social Anthropological schools of thought. These schools were fascinated by the idea of marginalization, which for them was a fixed place outside of the stable social structure. Thus, liminality is a systematic state, or social status, that people can get in and out of. In terms of
liminality with regards to nation-state citizenship, this would mean exclusion from socially stable legal-political boundaries. This points towards Giorgio Agamben’s definition of ‘bare-life,’ which he uses to describe prisoners in concentration camps during World War II. ‘Bare life’ is the reduction of human beings into bio-political beings, where they are outside the boundaries of humanity, moral values, agency, citizenship, and judicial laws (Agamben 1995).

Second, I have borrowed the term ‘flexible’ from Aihwa Ong’s theoretical model of ‘flexible citizenship.’ Ong’s notion of ‘flexible citizenship’ arose out of her ethnographic description of how Hong Kong elites strategically use their multiple citizenships and the image of Chinese humanistic capitalist to thrive in a global neoliberal environment (Ong 1999). Aihwa Ong comes from a post-modern school of thought and presents a nuanced point of view of citizenship in the globalized world. Ong challenges the fixed and stable notion of citizenship by contending that when there are multiple nation-state structures surrounding an individual, it undermines the value of one nation-state’s citizenship. My use of ‘flexible liminality’ denotes a similar but opposite strategy used in the case of Tibetan exiles that derives from being specifically excluded from multiple geo-political nation-states. In this dissertation, I will be using the theory of ‘flexible liminality’ to bring nuance to the stable idea of ‘liminality’ and further extend Ong’s theory of globalization and the effect of multiple social structures to describe the condition of Tibetan exiles.

Flexible liminality arises when the Tibetan exile community strategically uses their liminality to advance their own socio-economic position. A marginalized group like the Tibetan exile community is able to do so because of the multiple nation-states excluding their marginalized community in different ways. Therefore, Tibetan exiles are not fixed in one state of liminality but experience a variety of liminalities from different nation-states, which allows them to play one form of liminality off against the other. Flexible Liminality is an active practice that is taking place within the Tibetan diaspora with actual consequences and repercussion that affect the lives of Tibetans in exile. From my observations, the on-ground process of flexible liminality on
Tibetans in Dharamsala can be seen in three ways, which for now I will call proofs of flexible liminality in exile.

*Flexible Liminality: Dhasa of Tibetan exiles*

The first expression of flexible liminality I noticed in Dharamsala was the ability of Tibetan exiles to maintain and reinvent their Tibetan nationalist identity in India. This showed me that India is, indeed, the staging ground where the Tibetan exile community has been able to carry out their political agenda. In Dharamsala the Tibetan exile community has been able to saturate the town into with a remarkable concentration of Tibetan socio-politico activities. Indeed, its residents commonly know the town as ‘Dhasa,’ thus equating Dharamsala’s with the capital city of Tibet, Lhasa.

This became apparent when I first met my field assistant, Phurbu (same Tibetan man I discussed in Chapter 1) in Dharamsala. I told him about my interest in learning more about Tibetan non-profit organizations and how they function in the community. Phurbu casually looked at me and said, “there are over 300 Tibetan non-profits in Dharamsala… [Pointing nearby] you can just go to anyone and start your research.” I was so surprised by this information I asked him if what he said was true. “Yes,” he said, “there are many non-profits [and] NGOs, some might be closed down but there are so many. I will give you some important ones that you can start from.” Then, off the top of his head, he listed six nationalist NGOs that produced Tibetan political propaganda, and various other interest groups such as women’s organizations, youth organizations, environmental service groups, educational groups etc.

Similarly, in Dharamsala, there were always several Tibetan politico-cultural events taking place on a daily basis. The events differed depending on which organization was holding them, obviously, for they were catered to their members and audiences. For example, there was a public talk held by the Tibetan Youth Congress with a panel of scholars, activists, and Tibetan government while I was doing fieldwork in Dharamsala. The Tibetan Youth Congress is a well-
known radical, political activist group, and their audience, consequently, was mostly Tibetans in 20s and a few foreigners invested in the Tibetan cause. Another kind of event, a traditional Tibetan instrument concert held to benefit a nunnery, was organized by the Tibetan women’s association, a group known to hold events to support Tibetan women. The audiences for this event were entirely different: mostly adult Tibetan women and a few men and women foreigners. Yet another non-profit would hold free language classes, where they would provide a classroom for foreign volunteers to teach English to Tibetan students, and where, in return, Tibetans would teach the foreigners Tibetan. Here, most of the Tibetans attending were young teenagers, older monks, and young adults. In a way, there are events and activities relevant to almost all Tibetan agendas in Dharamsala. I will describe the town of Dharamsala, and how the use of it by Tibetan exiles there confronts the differing agendas of the town’s various Indian communities, in future chapters in more detail.

As I have mentioned above, Tibetan exiles have been using Indian as a hub for Tibetan nationalist activities. This is an important example of their flexible liminality showing how Tibetans, though a marginalized and ‘foreign’ community in India, have been able to propagate nonetheless their political activities in a systemic form. I contend that the Tibetan exile community in India would not have been successful in organizing a systematic political activities were it not for their geo-political understanding of their position in India, and their ability to strategically accept their marginalized position while also taking advantage of its accidental benefits. Tibetan exiles are already aware that the Indian government will not easily allow them to access citizenship in India; hence, Tibetans know they have to live as exiles who must annually renew their Registration Certificates in order to stay in India.

However, Tibetans represent important geo-political and ideological aims for the Indian government, as they pursue their own international relations strategy with China, and seek to acquire humanitarian service fame from Western sympathizers of Tibetan exile community. As a result, India has granted Tibetans better legal benefits than other exile/refugee community in
India, including freedom of employment, education, travel etc. Tibetan exiles, for their part, have used this mix of marginality and liberty to organize a Tibetan nationalist political hub in India. From my observations in Dharamsala, thus, I could see how Tibetan exile’s flexible liminality has actualized the massive concentration of Tibetan political organization in Dharamsala, and situated conversations about citizenship with India and the West.

**Flexible Liminality: Socio-economic success of Tibetan exiles**

The second place where I observed flexible liminality was in the relatively high socio-economic standing of the Tibetan exile community in India. Given that Tibetan exiles are commonly referred to as ‘refugees’ in India, I was taken aback by the difference in observable socio-economic status between Tibetans and the other Indian communities in Dharamsala. With their more urban and westernized style of address and associations, Tibetans make themselves visibly separate from the local Indian hosts. How is this so? It is because the transnational resources and Western networks available to Tibetans in India have socially and economically marked them as being on a different level from local Indians.

For example, despite living in the same town, there was a stark difference between the Gaddis (an Indian ethnic group in Dharamsala) and Tibetan exiles in a number of attributes: in educational attainment, in ability to travel abroad, in sartorial fashion, and in ability to achieve close personal relationships with foreigners. One day, while I was speaking with my host mother, a Gaddi woman, outside my apartment in Dharamsala, she told me that her oldest son got a phone call from Chandigardh University in Punjab asking to apply for their engineering program. She had caught me as I was leaving for the market that morning and asked if this was a good sign for his getting in the college program. I could tell she was very excited about this news, and I confirmed to her that this was a very good sign for her son to get into their program. Then, she said,
“Many people from our village don't go for higher education, it [the Gaddi community] is still backwards in that sense. Many years ago, there was one man who became a high-class officer in the foz [Indian army] and everybody came out to greet this man. We just have not seen many successful people, and there are barely any [paused] I can’t think of anybody, who have are college pass [graduates], at least not from outside university. Did you say this was a big university? Have you heard of it? Chandigardh, yes, I know it is a big city, but I don't know anything about the college there.”

I answered that Chandigardh University is a good university and she should be very happy that she had such a hardworking son who was talented enough to be recognized by an out-of-state university. She was very happy to hear this and we chatted more about how she and her husband had received this phone call. By contrast I had met a number of Tibetans during my time in Dharamsala who had friends or family members in Universities in Western countries and other Indian states. I knew from an interview with a member of the staff at the Education Department in the Tibetan exile government that each high school graduate in the Tibetan school is granted a scholarship for college or enrolled in a vocational program for job skills. Moreover, Tibetan students also have many opportunities for affordable education in Western countries via private and organizational sponsorship. Although I could get any detailed information from the Tibetan organizations in India about sponsorship, I was casually informed that about half of the funding for Tibetan schools in India was supported by private or organizational sponsorship (including, donations, charity, grants etc.)

I argue that the Tibetans have built a nurturing system for their younger generation that grants members of that generation easy access to Western cultural knowledge, and opportunities to travel to the West. As I mentioned above, since the early 1980s, the Tibetan diaspora have received humanitarian resources from a sympathetic West. Several individuals and organizations from the West have sponsored Tibetans through programs like the Tibetan Scholarship Program (TSP), and the Tibetan U.S. Resettlement Program (TUSRP), providing opportunities for Tibetans to travel to Western countries. At the same time, the humanitarian resources given to Tibetans from India and Nepal have changed from economic-financial ones to legal benefits that allow them easy access to residency as foreigners in South Asia. As a result, all young diapora
Tibetans in India have been nurtured in schools and the community via Western sponsorships, which, in turn, have provided them with valuable cultural knowledge of the West.

Additionally, the Tibetan community’s economic success was visible through the foreign material goods Tibetans wore or carried. Tibetan youths could be seen on the street frequently outfitted in Western fashion style boat shoes, bow ties, college emblem, and carrying iPads, and Beats headphones. Such Western transnational resources like foreign university scholarships, English language skills, and personal contact with people residing in the West were only available to such an extent to the Tibetan community. The same resources were not available to people in the Indian host community because they go to different schools (Indian private or government schools) and don’t have access to the transnational resources from the West. I argue that this differential access is due to the flexible liminality of Tibetan exiles. That is, I think Tibetans enjoy this greater access to international resources because their flexible liminality has put them in a position to acquire cultural and social capital unavailable to the other residents of the Dharamsala area. I will come back to this point below. For now it is enough to say that because many individual Tibetans have been able to benefit from aid obtained from the West, that benefit, in turn, has been able to spread throughout the Tibetan diaspora.

Flexible Liminality: Too much attention

The third aspect of flexible liminality I noticed in Dharamsala was the large amount of global attention paid to the Tibetan exile community. Dharamsala is the unofficial capital for Tibetan exiles and India is the hub of Tibetan nationalism; this has attracted much attention from curious scholars, journalists, travelers, and foreigners. The resulting large influx of tourists has been useful to promoting the Tibetan political agenda, but it has also placed a burden of responsibility on every Tibetan in Dharamsala to keep up the image of Tibetans in the eyes of the rest of the world. Many Tibetans I spoke with had at least one curious foreigner asking them for an interview, or even asking their opinion of the political agenda of the Tibetan exile government.
From my observation, I have noticed that individual Tibetans are well aware of this responsibility; consequently, Tibetans try to either do their best in interacting with foreigners or stay away from them completely. Hence, many times, during attempts to approach Tibetans for interviews, I was immediately shunned and denied even the most basic small talk. In two Tibetan non-profits that I visited, I saw a printed sign on the wall written in English stating, “No researchers allowed without prior appointment,” and “Need one-week advance notice for interviews.”

Tibetans who were willing to be interviewed, of the other hand, admitted that this wasn’t their first time speaking with researchers or journalists. I was taken aback when Phurbu once recited popular research topics about Tibetan exiles that he had heard about from the too numerous Ph.D. students he had met. Phurbu said, “I have done so many interviews on identity [grunting showing displeasure]. Then about religion, government, gender, but please no questions about identity. I am so tired of it.” I was eventually able to convince him to talk with me only because my research topic was different from the ones he had heard of before. Another time, I heard high school girls at an English practice class that I regularly attended shyly but adamantly say to new foreign volunteers, “Please, no questions about politics.”

Thus, I would argue that the downside of the flexible liminality of Tibetan exiles’ lives is the large amount of attention they must endure from non-Tibetans because of it, as well as the deep sense of responsibility felt by many Tibetans in diaspora feel to speak to those same, annoying foreigners about their community and cause in order to keep up that global image. That is, while the Tibetan exile community has succeeded in achieving the global attention they need for their political aims, this has also attracted too much intrusive foreign attention towards Tibetans in Dharamsala. Hence, I frequently observed that Tibetans in Dharamsala felt obligated to attend to curious foreigners even as they also complained about too much foreign attention solely focused on Tibetan exile politics and identity.
Most Tibetans in Dharamsala had experiences with curious researchers, journalists, and tourists – so everyone from middle-aged men to even high-school girls had learned to warn foreigners not to ask them about political matters. Ultimately, while the Tibetan exile community has garnered a sterling reputation for being champions of human rights, peaceful living, religious tolerance, etc. – all to their benefit with respect to gaining access to Western knowledge and influence – this very reputation has put them uncomfortably at the center of a stage where the Tibetan community in Dharamsala are also unwilling stars.

**Conclusion**

I started this chapter by describing a popular Tibetan teenage dance group strangely named “No Parking.” While their dance performances do not depict anything political, their dance group’s name certainly does by highlighting Tibetan’s perpetually marginalized existence. In this chapter, hence, I have argued that the Tibetan exile community is excluded from China, India, and the West, but in different ways. This is the exact message of not belonging that the dance group “No Parking” is trying to convey to their audience. But Tibetan exiles understand their various geo-political exclusions and have, I would argue, tactfully responded to their different exclusions in ways that better their exile community. China is aggressively set on keeping the Tibetan geographical region and determined to show that Tibet never existed independently at all. The Tibetan diaspora has been rejecting China’s assimilation project by making an even stronger Tibetan identity construction project in exile.

At the same time, by rejecting Indian citizenship, Tibetan exiles are using their marginalized status in India to promote Tibetan nationalism and to create an even stronger Tibetan nationalist population that is, simultaneously, appealing to the international political and cultural concerns of Western governments people. Hence, many Western countries have provided a special space for Tibetan exiles to occupy in diaspora despite their lack of UNHCR refugee
status. For this reason Tibetan exiles are using the Western countries as a ground for Tibetan individual legal stability and economic success.

Applying the theory of flexible liminality, which describes how a group can manipulate influences vectoring in from multiple geo-political entities through carefully aimed cultural adjustments, it can be seen that Tibetan exiles exhibit a high degree of flexible liminality. In Dharamsala, I saw three aspects of the flexible liminality of Tibetan exiles – in the transformation of the town of Dharamsala into a Tibetan nationalist ground, in the socio-economic success of Tibetan exiles compared to the Indian host community, and in the large amount of attention from foreigners towards Tibetans.
Chapter 3: Dharamsala – The Place and Its People

The Tibetan exile community’s socio-political success is rooted in the valleys of Dharamsala, India – but what is it about the town that has created such fertile ground for the Tibetan exile community’s success? In this chapter, I will ethnographically describe Dharamsala, the place and the people who reside there; in order to unravel the unspoken support Tibetan exiles have received from the town and their host communities. My goal in this chapter is to show that the Tibetan exile community in Dharamsala has thrived in carrying out their cultural practice of flexible liminality (practice that already shows high degree of flexibility within their liminal conditions) because of the two factors in Dharamsala, the town and its people. In this chapter, I have intentionally avoided speaking too much about the Tibetan community in order to highlight the historical events and social niche of the Indian Dharamsala community that surrounds the Tibetan community.

First, I will ethnographically describe the town of Dharamsala – its geographical and historical details. Thereafter, I will introduce the majority populations within the Indian host community – namely, the Gaddi and Gorkhali groups that are both marginalized populations in different ways. I will ethnographically describe each ethnic group by elaborating on their ancestral history, kinship, religion, livelihood, political interest and living conditions. In doing so, I aim to show that the historical value of Dharamsala and the marginalized position of these Indian host communities provided a fertile ground for the Tibetan community’s flexible liminality. Lastly, I will apply my theory of flexible liminality (measure the condition of liminality that would test for high or low degree of flexibility) to both the Gaddi and Gorkhali communities to show why these communities could not achieve the same high degree of flexible liminality as Tibetan exiles in spite of sharing the same social environment and, to a certain extent, marginalization. I will argue that the reason for Tibetan exile community’s socio-economic success compared to that of their host community is due to their higher flexible liminality.
**A Journey to Dharamsala**

After the first Tibetan exile group followed the 14th Dalai Lama to India in 1959, the main priority for Tibetan leaders was to keep the Tibetan community together and maintain Tibetan traditions (The Office of HH Dalai Lama 2018). At the request of the Dalai Lama, the Tibetan community was settled in the cool area of the Himalayan range, and the Indian government allowed the Tibetan community to resettle 10 km away from an old British colonial hill town, McLeod Ganj (Deihl 2002, Vahali 2009). After a major earthquake in 1905, Dharamsala was abandoned by British troops and most trade-businesses were halted after many properties were destroyed (Wagner 2013; Goldstein 2007; Deihl 2002; Vahali 2009). So when the Indian government decided to allot the McLeod Ganj area to Tibetans, it was with the hope that the impoverished Tibetans could take up some unskilled employment such as road and building construction (Deihl 2002; Vahali 2009; Brauen 2011). The first generation of Tibetan exiles had to live in makeshift tents and could only rely on hard-labor construction jobs for income.19

McLeod Ganj is one of the most popular suburbs of Dharamsala for tourists and is still the main settlement area for the Tibetan community. Unlike in the first generation, most of the Tibetan exile community’s economic activities in Dharamsala now are in the realms of arts and crafts, retail trade, and the hospitality business (CTA 2009). Today, Dharamsala is a thriving tourist hill station with the Dalai Lama Temple and HPC Cricket Stadium being the major attractions (HP Tourism 2018). Tibetan exiles have spread throughout the world but several interlocutors have told me that Dharamsala is still considered the capital of Tibetan exiles and the main political source of Tibetan exile governance. Thus, it is important to learn how Tibetan exiles first gained access to form such a strong socio-culture and political governance. I argue that it is the town of Dharamsala and its people that provides fertile ground for the Tibetan exile

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19 For more information about the living conditions of first-generation Tibetan exiles, see Honey Vahali (2009); Mallica Mishra (2014); Yangzom Brauen (2011)
community’s success because both the place and people in Dharamsala have accepted the Tibetans in Dharamsala and allowed them to expand their economic-cultural-social activities.

Dharamsala is a hill town station spread over 11.39 square miles situated in the Kangra district within the state of Himachal Pradesh in North India. The Kangra district lies in the Siwalik Himalayan zone and its topography is well defined by a series of almost parallel Dhauladhar mountain ranges that rise in height towards the northeast. According to the Indian census of 2001, the total population of the Kangra district was 14,00,000 of which 12,89,399 reported their mother tongue as Hindi, 23,738 as Punjabi, 8,767 as Tibetan, and 8108 as Nepali. This shows the distribution of the population of ethnic groups in Kangra, where local Himachali communities largely speak Hindi, and are the majority population, followed by groups that have migrated from the state of Punjab, Tibetan refugees, and lastly, the Gorkhali Nepali community.

While in Delhi, I called my Nepali relatives in Dharamsala on the phone to ask them where I should settle to learn about the Tibetan refugee community. For now, my uncle simply said to get off at the McLeod Ganj bus station and he would come pick me up. So, after an all-night bus ride on winding roads, I arrived in McLeod Ganj. This was the last stop for all buses travelling to the area. The bus station seemed like an open-air underground parking lot built on the slope of a hill that faced out towards the valley. We passengers had to gather our belongings and climb two flights of stairs to get to the main road. McLeod Ganj was located in a town atop a sloping hill surrounded by mountains. It exuded a sense of peace and I gave a sigh of relief at

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20 The locally regarded geographical area of metropolitan Dharamsala has eleven suburbs. The suburbs on the upper Dharamsala are McLeod Ganj, Bhagsunath, Dharamkot, and Naddi. The suburbs on the lower Dharamsala are Forsyth Ganj, Kotwali Bazzar, Kaccheri Adda, Dari, Ramnagar, Sidhpur, and Sidhbari.

21 The three recognized Himachali tribes of Kangra districts are Gaddis, Gujjars, and Bhot or Bot, but there may be other minor tribes that are not mentioned in the census. The majority of the tribal populations in Dharamsala are Gaddis, then Gujjar, and lastly other tribes. About 84,565 people (61.9% percent) of Dharamsala population identified as part of a local Himachali tribe in the 2011 Indian census.
having escaped from the noise of Delhi’s many motorists. I sat by the taxi stand, where there were rows of metal benches. From there I could see the valley and the bus station below where my bus from Delhi was parked. There were at least 10 teashops starting to open in front of the taxi stands so I got some *chái* (spiced-sweet milk tea) and waited for my uncle to pick me up.

![Map of McLeod Ganj](image)

**Figure 3.1**: Map of McLeod Ganj © Dharamsala International Film Festival, 2017

I noted that I was standing in the middle of the main market of McLeod Ganj (as seen on the smaller map on the left-side above). The market had a large, circular, and empty road space for traffic; this was called the *chowk* (a Hindi word used to describe the middle of market area or traffic roundabout). From the *chowk* there were roads branching out to surrounding suburbs. To the north were the road to Dal Lake, and a few other small roads that lead to the upper residences – the *basti*, of McLeod. On the west were Dharamkot road, and Bhagsu road (Bhagsu road also led to a Gaddi village). To the east were roads to Lower Dharamsala, Jogiwara, and the Dalai Lama Temple. The heart of McLeod was the Jogiwara road and the Dalai Lama Temple road. This is where all the Tibetan restaurants, coffee shops, NGOs, and other trade businesses are located. There were a few other Tibetan businesses scattered around along other roads but most of their businesses could be found on these two roads.
While one could easily find their way around the small cluster of shops in the market area, a non-resident would have a harder time finding the private spaces of local residents. I learned after living in McLeod Ganj that people’s actual homes were located behind these busy roads. One would have to take a smaller road off of the main roads to get to the cluster of neighborhoods (see map above). The same style of neighborhood was common for all the upper Dharamsala suburbs (Dal, Bhagsu, Gaddi village), each branching off of the McLeod Ganj chowk. Each neighborhood in upper Dharamsala had a unique style of clustering, so a new person could not easily go for a walk around these places without getting absolutely confused and lost.

I argue that it is within the private spaces of these neighborhoods that we can see the Tibetan community living congruously with various Indian host communities. I observed that the ground for success of the Tibetan exile community lay within the neighborly activities, and friendly gestures, they shared with the Indian host communities who have tolerated them and allowed them, for the most part, to freely carry on their own social-economic-cultural activities. It is the unique, all-accommodating, town of Dharamsala, and the social communities that have adjusted to the Tibetans residing among them in the their hometown, that have helped Tibetan exiles thrive politically and socio-economically. I am making a similar argument to Laura Ring (2006) where Ring argues from the ethnographic account from people living in Karachi apartment building that people of multiple, normally hostile, ethnicities have been living peacefully together because of the little reciprocities they share as neighbors. In addition to Ring’s argument, in case of Dharamsala community, I would argue that the town and the people of Dharamsala were prepared to tolerate and make a space for foreign communities because of the history of constant change and foreign political control of the area.
**Historic Background of the Kangra District**

Since the early 17th century, many different groups of people have migrated to occupy the leadership positions in the scenic hill town of Dharamsala and to reside in the politically powerful Kangra fort (James 1997). One can still see reminders of the many groups who have come, attracted to the scenic beauty and political power of Kangra. From St. John’s Church, lost in the wilderness (a relic left over from the British colonial era), to the Gorkhalis (a Nepali ethnic group) employed by the British military, to the Katoch Dynasty, this area holds the history of different political powers attempting to control and occupy Kangra. The constant changes in political power and the migrations of foreign populations into Kangra have made the area accommodating to yet another foreign settler community – that of the Tibetan exiles.

My Nepali relatives in Dharamsala were offspring of the military population employed by the British colonials to conduct high altitude military training (something I will speak more about in my coverage of Gorkhali history later in the chapter). I asked my Nepali relatives to show me the main sites in Dharamsala so that I could become familiar with the place. Early one morning, I met up with my aunt at the same taxi stand in McLeod Ganj here my uncle picked me up. We rode a bus from McLeod Ganj to the lower main market in Dharamsala, and then a second bus from lower Dharamsala to the old Kangra city. During the bus ride to lower Dharamsala, we passed an old Christian cemetery next to an equally old Catholic Church. Aunty tapped my shoulder and pointed at the Church saying, “old Church from British times. Some Christian people still use it I think.” The St. John’s Church was a beautiful brick building built in 1852, soon after the British colonials 22 annexed the Kangra district from the Sikh Empire 23 in 1848. On this day, it looked like an abandoned area surrounded by large pine trees with weeds overgrowing

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22 The British first entered India as a trading company called the East India Trade Company in early 1750s, and slowly encroached on India as a colonizing empire in by 1850s. India finally received complete independence from the British colonization in 1947. See, (James 1997).
23 Sikh empire was a monarchy reign in late 18th century that ruled over the northwest part of India (including today’s Punjab and Haryana state) formed under the leadership of Ranjit Singh.
the building and cemetery area. One could still recognize the magnificent European architecture of the Church despite the years of neglect.

During the British Raj\textsuperscript{24} many British elites moved their residences from capital cities such as Delhi, Calcutta, and Mumbai to hill stations in order to escape the summer heat (Hunter 1903). After annexing the Kangra district, the British used the area mainly to station military troops, and this area was also used as a military garrison where the first generation of British Gorkha regiments was trained (Hunter 1903). In 1860, the first British Gorkha regiment called the 1st Gorkha Rifles or the 66th Gorkha Light Infantry was stationed to the Bakloh military cantonment (Parker 2005). The British favored Dharamsala because of its picturesque beauty – it being located between the foothills of the Mt. Dhauladhar range with a rich fertile valley irrigated by Beas River and Ravi River (Hunter 1903). Initially, Dharamsala was going to be the summer capital of the British raj; however, after the large destruction of infrastructure by an earthquake in 1905, the British decided to move their summer capital to Shimla, another Himachal city about 200km southeast of Dharamsala (Hunter 1903). Regardless, the reign of British raj in Dharamsala is still visible today in the form of abandoned architecture and the military community it formed.

Aunty and I reached the old capital of the district where the Kangra fort was located. We could see the towering castle structure far away from where we were standing. The large majestic fort stood on the hilltop surrounded by hollow valleys. The fort was surrounded by approximately four kilometers of a long and large stonewall. We bought entrance tickets for the fort and were handed an audio tour guide. The voice on the audio tour guide belonged to Tikaraj Aishwarya Katoch, a descendent of the Katoch dynasty. He shared his knowledge of his family’s involvement with the fort\textsuperscript{25}, passed down by his forefathers, for the price of an entrance ticket.

\textsuperscript{24} The British Raj is a term used by historian to describe the British colonial reign in India. For more information see “Raj” (1997) by Lawrence James

\textsuperscript{25} Tikaraj Aishwarya Katoch had a lot to say about the entrances and gates because his forefathers had always warned them about the dangers of entering the fort. He shared tales from his grandfather about the potential danger of losing one’s head if they entered headfirst through any of the gates.
There are eleven entrance gates and twenty-three bastions. Only one is used as the main entrance today but there are several layers of entrances one would have to go through when the fort was in use; first the Ranjit Singh gate over the bridge, then the gate called the Andheri Darwaza (dark gate), which used to be the first defense gate. Next, one can choose either the palace gate or temple gate. The temple gate would lead to courtyard adorned with several stone temples of Hindu gods and goddesses. The palace gate would lead to the courtyard intended for guests and residence of the palace. The highest point of the fort was used as the main royal residence.

Figure 3.2: The Kangra Fort. By, Manabi Katoch

There was a popular saying written on the tour guide information on a plaque at the Kangra Fort: “He who holds the Kangra fort, holds the hills.” From the historical records of Mughal Empire, it is understood that there were *janapada* (independent political rulers), and the further sub-rule of hill chiefs, for each village and town. There were three major *janapadas* on the hills – Trigarta, Chamba, and Jammu (Kaushal 1965). The most powerful rulers of the Kangra fort allowed the *janapadas* to rule amongst themselves independently, although the *janapadas* owed tribute as a symbol of their allegiance to the larger state. Just as the *janapadas* had to constantly adjust themselves to foreign rule from the Kangra fort, people also learned to adjust to the foreign population in their area because of the change in the reign. This can be seen from the
way Indian tribes like the Gaddi and the Gujjar adjusted so well to the introduction of the Gorkhali to the Kangra district.

In Dharamsala, I observed that Gorkhali and Gaddis often intermarry, celebrate holidays together, and worship the same deities. I argue that this history of constant change in foreign political rule over the Kangra district has paved the way for Tibetan exiles to be accommodated in the Kangra area. Unlike most refugee-host conflicts which are based on resource competition, there has been a minimal amount of friction between the Indian host community and the Tibetan exiles over economic resources such as agricultural land, employment, housing, food and water, etc. (Turner 2010, Chambers 1986, Whitaker 1999). However, Tibetan community does have ethnic rivalry with their host community, which I will explain in detail in the next chapter, but that is different from the type of refugee-host conflict that has been talked about in the refugee studies scholarships.

For the most part, the Indian host community has adjusted well to the introduction of Tibetan exiles. It should be noted that the lack of friction from resource competition also has to do with the Tibetan exile’s ability to create self-sustaining economic activity using the tourism industry, I will explain more in detail later in chapter. However, I contend that the history of constant changes in foreign rulers in the Kangra district has also created an accommodating environment for Tibetan exiles. In other words, the political history of Kangra, which introduced so many foreign powers and migrant groups to the area, has prepared the Kangra region to handle the addition of yet another foreign population into the area. In the next chapter, I will present the kinds of social-racial friction that remains between Tibetans exiles and the Indian host community. Nevertheless, it still holds true that Tibetan exiles have had minimal friction with their Indian host community regarding resource competition; in fact, their neighborly relationships are notable.

While both Tibetans and Indian communities have made an incredible effort to achieve this level of cordial relationship, the history of foreign powers changing hands over the Kangra
region has especially prepared the Indian community to accommodate another foreign Tibetan population in the area. I contend that the Tibetan exile community has been living relative harmoniously with their Indian host community. The gracious accommodations made by the Gaddi, Gorkhali, and the surrounding governance has provided the Tibetan exiles with a peaceful space to organize their exile government, political activism, cultural preservation, and educational institutions for young Tibetans. Since the first generation of Tibetan exiles arrived to Dharamsala, the Tibetan community has worked rapidly to create better life chances for the Tibetan diaspora as a whole, not just in Dharamsala, but also for Tibetan exile community living elsewhere in South Asia (India, Nepal, and Bhutan).

In the previous chapter, I have argued that Tibetan exile community in Dharamsala achieved better lives by adjusting their cultural practices to appeal to (and manipulate) the multiple geo-political entities influencing them. But the seed of progress for Tibetan exiles, though, is rooted in the town of Dharamsala; and it is the town and the people who live there who have helped provide the fertile ground for the Tibetan exile community’s success. The Gaddi and Gorkhali communities, of course, are also marginalized communities within India, so why have they not used their own marginalized conditions vis-à-vis the Indian state as Tibetans have to achieve better lives? In trying to understand why flexible liminality is possible for one ethnic community and not possible for another in Dharamsala, I aim to unpack other characteristics of Tibetan flexible liminality. I will apply flexible liminality theory to the two majority Indian host communities, the Gaddi and the Gorkhali, to test if these communities could or could not have flexible liminality. But first, I let me briefly introduce each of these communities and their communal lives in Dharamsala, and describe their socio-political standing in India.

**Gaddis**

The Gaddis are the majority ethnic group-tribe in the Chamba and Kangra districts (Verma 1996; Axelby 2007). Gaddis are also the majority of the population in Dharamsala and
thus are an important component in the social lives of Tibetan exiles. Gaddis have their own rural and tribal political-social status in Indian society that marks them as a marginalized group, schedule caste, and other backward caste which is a ‘depressed caste’ category first created by the British colonials in India to provide special opportunities to social outcasts in India (Lawrence 1997; Wagner 2013; Axelby 2007). I will argue that the marginalized status of Gaddis allows them to view Tibetan exiles with sympathy and become accommodating to the Tibetan population. I will briefly introduce the Gaddi’s social-religious-political lives in Kangra, and use this information to apply the theoretical framework of flexible liminality.

The Gaddi’s estimated population today is over half million, spread between Kangra and Chamba (Census of India 2009). Today, most Gaddis live alongside other Pahari tribes like the Gujjars and Kolis. Gaddis claim that the land between the foothills of the Dhauladhar range and the Kangra belt is their land, also named Gadaren (Sheep country) (Verma 1996; Axelby 2007). The Gaddi are a transhumant pastoralist group who changed their homesteads seasonally for grazing grassland better suited for their cattle (Wagner 2013). Historically, my interlocutors have told me that the Gaddis used the Kangra district as their winter ground and the Chamba district (lying north of Kangra) as their summer residence. Regardless, today, people with Gaddi heritage claim that their ancestral homeland is the Bharmaur town of Chamba (Wagner 2013, Parry 1979, Verma 1996). Most Gaddis are Hindus and are known to be endogamous with other Hindu Pahari groups as well; however, their are preferences for marrying from the same, or higher, caste level than oneself whether in intra or interethnic group marriage (Wagner 2013, Parry 1979, Verma 1996). Gaddis differentiate themselves from other Pahari groups by citing their ancestral homeland, pastoralist group occupation, and language (H.P. government, 2017). Today, however, I have been told the rules for marriages between castes and tribes have fewer restrictions but are still considered an important aspect of marriage.
Sociologists studying Gaddis say that the social component of Gaddis is best described as a blend of caste and tribe\(^26\) (Newell 1961, Verma 1996). Early sociologists found that Gaddis acted like a tribe because Gaddis had hill chiefs in their towns, mostly had a semi-nomadic mode of livelihood, identified with a common ancestral hometown, and seemed to have a unified identity as Gadheran (Newell 1961, Verma 1996). At the same time, Gaddis also created a caste hierarchy among themselves, where there are high and low castes within the Gaddi community. Gaddi’s high castes consist of Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and the lower castes consist of Sudras and untouchables\(^27\) (Newell 1961). The mid-level castes, those that have the last names (indicating sub-caste) of Rajputs, Thakurs, Rana, Khatri, and Dhangar are all seen to be of equal caste. In fact, Newell argues that the middle-level castes have formed a dominant allied caste group, where members of the caste inter-marry between each other, and, in some places, are commonly called ‘Gaddis.’ This is a point of confusion that arises when using the term ‘Gaddi’ – the question is whether to use it as a caste group name or use it to designate the whole tribe. I agree with sociologist V. Verma (1996) who says to think of the Gaddis in a continuum of caste and tribe, where from some angle it may seem closer to caste, and from other angles it may seem closer to tribe. For the purpose of this dissertation, I will use the term Gaddi to describe the whole tribe while also keeping in mind that the Gaddis follow caste hierarchy.

I have noticed that caste and jati today still play a large role in Gaddi’s social and political lives. The larger umbrella of caste does prescribe an individual’s social standing, but, in

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\(^{26}\) There is a distinct school of thought within the South Asian studies that describes tribes in India as identified based on the remoteness of their habitat, their cultural tradition, and the distinctiveness of their lifestyles. The categories of race, color, and economic life are not as important, to this school, in considering a group to be a tribe (Verma 1996). For more information see Nicholas Dirk (2001), *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and Making of Modern India.*

\(^{27}\) Newell (1961) does note that higher castes do not have any caste specific employment role, but the lower castes do. For example, the Riaras are silversmiths and musicians, Sipis are blacksmiths, the Halis are laborers, and other castes are brass workers, basket makers, and shoe repairers.
order to uphold their social standings, an individual bears different types of social responsibility.\footnote{28} The larger category of high, mid, and low ranks are understood as ‘castes’ but the local term for these castes (visible from a person’s last name) is ‘jati.’ (Verma 1996). Furthermore, jatis can be broken down into smaller categories sub-castes, which are further sub-categorized into patrilineal clans called, gotra, which are yet further sub-categorized into al (Newell 1961). The purpose of gotra in each Gaddi community is to mark a household’s familial responsibility towards other households within their gotra; this is called the kwer responsibility (Newell 1961).

Let me explain this from my ethnographic example, when a Rajput family from the Ayodhya gotra is building a house for their extended family, the Rana family within the Ayodhya gotra will have to send a family member to help build the Rajput house. During my fieldwork in Dharamsala, I had the opportunity to observe kwer responsibility take place between families of the same gotra. A neighbor of my Gaddi host family was on another floor of their family’s house, so the father of the Gaddi family went to help with the first few days of their building a house, and the next few days his son went with him to continue helping with the building. The family had professional builders who were doing the work but the kwer responsibility meant that the other gotra families also had to come and help at least to the extent of lifting building materials.

The second purpose of gotra is to keep track of marital eligibility between families. While the family members of the same gotras are endogamous, the Gaddi community follows the little gotra, also called al, to keep track of marital eligibility. The al indicates the villages of origin, which are thought to be like large patrilineal extended families (Newell 1961). Therefore, Gaddis families within the same gotra can marry each other if they do not belong to the same al, or the same patrilineal extended family (Newell 1961).

\footnote{28} According to V. Verma, Gaddis have three ranks of castes – Brahmins, Dominant Allied castes, and the Low castes, which are also called jatis. This does not mean that Gaddi communities do not acknowledge the regular Vedic varnas. It simply means the four varnas are somewhere within these larger Gaddi categories of Brahmins, Dominant Allied castes, and Low castes.
Indian Governance of the Caste System

It is probably due to the blend of tribe and caste within the larger Gaddi group that today’s Indian government has categorized the higher caste of Gaddis as a marginalized group by listing them as a ‘Scheduled Tribe’ while lower caste Gaddis are simply placed in the same category as other marginalized, untouchables, non-Gaddis jatis by terming them a ‘Scheduled Caste’ (H.P. government, 2017). Scheduled tribes (STs), scheduled castes (SCs), and other backward class (OBC) are categories in Indian laws that attempt to regulate the political representation for all the diverse groups in India (H.P. government, 2017). People who are recognized by the Indian government to be part of these marginalized groups are given special seats in government offices, political representations, and public education institutes (National Planning Commission, India 2015). The categories of STs, SCs, and OBCs were first formed in the 1870s by the British colonial government in India during a countrywide census (Dirks 2001; James 1997). During this census, the British colonial government tried to officially collect information on the Indian population’s caste system based on geographical and cultural relevance – the groups of people who were socially and economically underprivileged in caste ranking were categorized as “Depressed Classes” (Cohn 1987). The British colonial government’s classification system took on a legal reality after the Morley-Minto 1909 reform where Muslims were separated from the local caste system, and ‘untouchables,’ or the low ranked castes, were marked as a ‘Depressed Class’ (Cohn 1987).

In retrospect, Indian historians have criticized the Morley-Minto 1909 reform stating it did damage to local Indian affair because although Hindu-Muslim sectarian violence always existed, it was usually limited to localized events, and with the Morley-Minto reform, the

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29 The new caste specialized law came to exist because the British Indian Secretary of the State, John Morley, wanted to allow the entrance of elite Indians into the government and maintain limited democracy in India. Morley also thought it was necessary to first politically equalize the religious-, racial-, and caste- fragmented Indian society because he did not trust the elite Indians to be able to make uncorrupt and unbiased policy-making decisions that would not just favor their own class.
separation of Hindus and Muslims took an institutionalized form (Cohn 1987, James 1997, Dirks 2001). Regardless, the independent Indian state decided to keep the inherited policy of the 1909 reform with a change in the name from “Depressed Class” to Scheduled Caste and Tribes: a full list of categorized Scheduled caste and tribes in India were recorded with the SC Order 1950 and ST Order 1950 (Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, India 2018). According to these orders, individuals belonging to the listed ‘caste’ or ‘tribe’ could apply for certificate that proved their identity as a part of that group.³⁰

At the same time, the Indian government has been burdened with the British colonial government’s superficial definition of the “Caste System” that categorized every Hindu individual into one of the four varna rankings (Cohn 1987). The British-provisioned 1857 caste-related census created the “Depressed Class” in the first place. The British misunderstood the caste system as a creation of the Hindu religion’s rather than as a regional social hierarchy system that is locally called jat or jati (James 1997) Therefore, the Indian Constitution still perceives the STs and SCs as people who only belong to the Hindu, Sikh, or Buddhist religions; in fact, it has been noted that anyone who is not part of these religions has to forge certificates in order to be included under the ST/SC Indian Reservation Policy (The Hindu News 2018; EconomicTimes 2017). For a long time Social Scientists have criticized British colonials in India for misunderstanding the caste system while still being prudent enough to institutionalize it, which has created a chaotic, on-the-ground reality for anybody involved in the caste system even today (Cohn 1987, James 1997, Dirks 2001). As a result, the Indian government still has not been able to remove inherited prejudices that can be traced from British colonial rule to the current political and legal representation of caste in Indian governance (EconomicTimes 2017).

³⁰ Every new generation that wishes to be recognized, as part of the government’s category of ST or SC has to fill out an application and show proof of their parent’s SC/ST certificate. In the absence of the previous generation’s certificate, they have to acquire recognition from the town officiate, or tribe’s head officer, of their community’s recognition as part of the particular caste or tribe.
Anthropologically, the idea of caste and *jati* has been deeply investigated since the British raj in India and South Asia in general. In short, caste can be defined on the surface as a category of people ranked based on their physical and moral substance (Marriott and Inden 1985); *jati* is the local regional interpretation of caste ranking (Roberts 2007). However, the interpretation of *jati* varies for each region and even within one locality (Marriott and Inden 1985). Caste scholars have tried to understand caste and *jati* by defining the socio-politico- and economic characteristics of caste. Scholars have showed that caste groups can move up in rank by adopting the mannerisms of Brahmins, a process called Sanskritization (Srinivas 1959); however, the *jatis* can only improve their position once they have acquired the political and economic power to force other groups to accept their Sanskritizing actions (Srinivas 1959; Subedi 2013; Natarajan 2005). Some have argued it is simply a way to rank people in terms of purity and impurity but without a fixed hierarchy (Dumont 1980). Others have argued that it was the British census, which tried to bring all Hindus under one religious umbrella, that broke the Hindu-Muslim *jati* system, created a strict socio-economic ranking of local logics, and excluded the untouchables from the *jati* system (Dirks 2001). And still other critics have urged the need to focus on the bottom ranked within the caste hierarchy who are economically underprivileged and socially ostracized (Berreman 1971). Thus, anthropologically, I contend that one can only learn about one form of *jati* organization from a particular social community because different social groups have different forms of *jatis*. In fact, I have found that *jatis* can look very different for different ethnic groups even though *jatis* live in the same regional area. I will elaborate on this further by looking into the *jatis* in Gaddi and *jat* in Gorkha community.

**Gorkhali**

My Nepali relatives in Dal had invited me over for lunch in a Gorkhali neighborhood that was about a 20-minute taxi ride from McLeod Ganj. After lunch, my uncle’s family took me for a walk around the neighborhood and introduced me to my other relatives. On the way downhill, he
pointed to the valley in between the hills and said that is was the Gorkha army battalion
cantonment. It was a large area with rows of one-story white and green colored houses, each
surrounded by a brick wall topped with barbed wire. Even from this far away, I could see the
various guard stations on each corner of the army barrack. However, it did not look intimidating,
and with no uniformed men walking around and the outside posts, it could easily be mistaken for
a large village school. Because this elderly gentleman was an army retiree, I asked him where the
Gorkha army did their training. He chuckled and said,

“You see all the hills and the forest?” pointing towards the hills across from ours with
thick forest, surrounding the Northeast of the barrack, “that is all army property. Most of
the training happens in the secrecy in the forest [Guerilla warfare]. That is the unique
skill of Gorkha paltan [battalion]. In those buildings are dormitories and cafeterias for
army men and even their families can come once a month to pick up army food ration for
their family.”

Another female relative chimed in, “oh yeah, their food rations are so inexpensive and
good quality. It is the best.” The army retiree added that the first battalion was located in Bakloh,
a city Northwest of Dharamsala within the Chamba district. It was only later the 4GR was moved
to Dharamsala. In the 1850s the British colonial government moved their Gorkha battalion to
Dharamsala when the government was considering making Dharamsala their summer capital
(Hunter 1903).

In the beginning of the 19th century, the Nepali army was expanding the borders of the
Gorkha Kingdom’s to the Indian territories of the Northwest and Southwest regions (Shrestha
2005; Hunter 1903). The British officers and the East India Trade Company were in a continuous
fight with the Gorkha army who were defending the Indian Territory that they had conquered
(Parker 2005). Finally, a large-scale Anglo-Nepali war broke out in 1814, wherein the British
Army fought to take control over the Gorkha Kingdom. At the end of the war, the Treaty of
Sugauli (officially signed in 1816) stated that Nepal would lose its surrounding territories but
would receive independence from British colonization, and that the British army could recruit
Gorkha soldiers (Parker 2005; Shrestha 2005). During the Anglo-Nepali war, the British officers
were impressed with the fighting spirit of the men in the Gorkha army, which led to the British wanting to end the war and have the Gorkha men fight for the British Empire (Parker 2005; Hunter 1903). The British government agreed to pay the Gorkha Empire a set amount as tribute for every Gorkha soldier recruited in the British army (Parker 2005; Hunter 1903). It have heard from my family members in Gorkha army that it was always a matter of pride for the Gorkha army to serve others because the soldiers were bringing fame and fortune to their own country. Even today, like my family members, men want to join the Gorkha army to serve under foreign countries because it is considered a point of national pride to represent Nepal abroad.

The Gorkha army recruited for the 4 GR regiment in Dharamsala were mostly selected based on their so-called ‘martial’ race characteristics (James 1997). The British colonial government created this term during the recruitment of Gorkha soldiers where they divided their local or ‘native’ army population into ‘martial’ and ‘non-martial’ races, a classification based on the Hindu Vedic Varna/ Caste system (Roberts 2008). The British assumed that those with the a Kshatriya varnic classification would have warrior-like personalities, while people in the other higher caste categories would have men built for a more sedentary lifestyle (Roberts 2008; MacMunn 1932). Additionally, the British wanted men from the ethnic group that they had stereotypically misconstrued to be to be fiercely loyal, yet, intellectually, lacking; people, that is, who would not revolt against the British Army later (Roberts 2008; MacMunn 1932). For the regiment in North Himachal Pradesh, martial races from Magar and Gurung jats were recruited (Interview 2017). These jats were recruited based on the British stereotype that people from hilly regions in Nepal would be fit when adapting to the hilly regions of India as well. As a result, martial races from Rai and Limbu jats were recruited on the Eastern part of Himachal Pradesh, (Interview 2017).

I observed that the two jats recruited for Kangra (North Himachal Pradesh) have become a permanent part of the community in Dharamsala. These Magar and Gurung jats in Dharamsala were clustered in ways different from the four varnas. In the 19th century, Magar and Gurung jats
were mainly agriculturalists that had been socio-religiously influenced by Hinduism, and Bon Buddhism\textsuperscript{31}. Similar to the Gaddis, I have been informed that Gorkhali social division was based on a patrilineal clan system, which could be further divided into sub-clans, then, gotra. The Magars originate from both the West and East of Kali Gandakai River in Northwest Nepal, and within these two regional groups there are seven main clans, and more than 1100 sub-clans who could intermarry with one another based on their family’s social standing (Hitchcock 1965; Bista 1967). The Gurungs originate from Northwest and some from Northeast Nepal but their social lineages had mixtures of two different types of clan (Bista 1967). In 1974, it was noted that there were 1076 Gurung sub-clans, part of char jat clan (four caste clan) and 210 sub-tribe, part of Sorah jat clan (sixteen caste clan) (Ragsdale 1990). The Sorah jat clan is an inclusive counting of all Gurungs, and may even include the non-Gurung lineage, including Magar clans, who are of endogamous status to Gurungs (Ragsdale 1990). The various clans of Magar and Gurungs may even be followers of different religions; some are closer to Bon religious rituals that practice shamanism, and some are closer to Hindu practices (Bista 1967).

The Gorkhali community formed in Dharamsala was a British-made settlement (Parker 2005). As a result, the Magar and Gurung jats were stripped away from their ancestral homeland, and their traditional form of hierarchy. So, I found that in a smaller form of jats, these dislocated social groups had to cluster as one social unit and even redefine their caste from the newly provided occupational standing. My Gorkhali relative once told me that essentially the entire Gorkhali community claim they are Kshatriya varna since they are involved with the Gorkha Army, hence a part of a military caste. When I asked about the caste hierarchy, another Dharamsala Gorkhali resident said:

“\text{There are few Purohit and Pandit (priest/ educated in Vedas) in Army but they are from our jati (Magar, Gurung) because not many bahuns (Brahmin caste) join army. And there are everybody else, we are all of same jati, same caste...No, there are no really low caste.}"

\textsuperscript{31} Bon Dharma or Bonpo is one of the religious schools of Tibetan Buddhism categorized as ideologies influenced by Mahayana Buddhism and indigenous religious tradition of shamanistic and animistic practices performed by a priest called gschen. (Schaik 2010; Powers 1995)
Our Gorkhali community doesn’t have pore-chami [low caste jat names employed for garbage collectors, sweepers etc].”

I found that the Magar and Gurung jats in Dharamsala have adapted to the unique Gorkha army community, different from other Nepali jats living in Nepal. The Gorkhali communities follows the Shivait sect of Hinduism\(^2\), are socio-culturally have similar to neighboring Punjabi and Gaddi groups, and are endogamous within their Gorkhali community. The Gorkha community’s head God is the Warrior Goddess, Durga, and all of her different forms. The main temple for the Gorkhali community is located 20 minutes North from McLeodGanj in Bhagsu. This is the Bhagsu Nag Shiva Temple where they also have Shiva’s ardhangi [body’s other half] Durga Devi’s shrine. Once a year, my family members explained that during the Hindu festival of Dashain, the Gorkha community sacrifice cattle in the temple to appease the Goddess Durga.

For the Gorkhali community, I observed that their marriage and religious lives did not need much alteration since the Gurungs and Magars were already endogamous, and Hinduism was the more prevalent religion practiced among these groups. My male relatives, who regularly interacted with Hindu priests, told me that the importance of the clan system had to be thinned out because beyond the sub-caste category, no laymen kept track of their gotra, al etc. But I also learned that people could follow the sub-clan system because of their last name, and follow the entailed responsibilities accordingly. When asked about gotra, a Gorkhali interlocutor said, “we don’t really think of it too much, it is in everybody’s birth chart. So for marriage, we just take it to the purohit (astrologer/ priest) and he will tell the families if a couple can marry or what obstacles there are.” I was also informed that Gorkhali community has become very lenient on who their children want to marry in term of ethnic groups and caste. For Gorkhali men, I was told that parents tend to limit their marrying Nepali ethnic women because it is the daughter-in-law

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\(^2\) Shavist sect is one the largest subset of the Hindu religion that focuses on devotion to God Shiva and gods/goddesses surrounding God Shiva, including Goddess Parvati and her other manifestations, e.g. Devi Durga.
would look after the aging parents. However, my interlocutors told me that if a Gorkhali woman wants to marry outside of Gorkha community, she is allowed to do so if the son-in-law is seen to be in an economically sound condition.

Today, I observed that the Gorkhali community has assimilated well into the Indian population. I argue this is visible from the mixture of Indian and Nepali words in their speech, wearing of traditional Indian style clothing, their Indian food preferences, and their living conditions. The Gorkhali community has arrived at a blend of Nepali and Indian customs while retaining a deep identification with their history of military service. I found that many Gorkhali families still have at least one male member in the Indian Gorkha army. Despite their service in the Indian army and legal Indian citizenship, however, the Gorkhali still are not well represented in Indian politics, and other government institutions. I observed that many Gorkhali family members are stuck in the periphery in their army barracks, confined to rural areas of India. Similar to the Gaddis, the Gorkhali too are different from the majority of urban Indians. The Dharamsala Gorkhali, including several other Gorkhali communities in India, have been struggling for years to become part of the category “Other Backward Castes” (OBC). The Gorkhali hope that by becoming OBC they can at least get some political recognition as a marginalized group in India. Becoming OBC would give them a voice in the Indian government, and reserved seats at schools, colleges, hospitals and so on (NOIG 2017, Indian Gorkhas 2016, FirstPost 2016). It should be noted that but up till now no legal provisions have been passed to grant Gorkhali the “Other Backward Caste” category.

**Urban Indian Tourists in Dharamsala**

The unconventionality and marginality of Dharamsala’s local population comes alive when the population comes face to face with the Indians from large cities and other states. I noticed that most Indian tourists visiting Dharamsala were upper middle class, professional, urbanites from the way they spoke English and Hindi language together, urban style clothing, and
mannerism in general. When Indians from the other states come into Dharamsala, they tend to act as patriarchs who are of a higher rank than Dharamsala’s residents. I observed some of this disrespectful attitude being expressed through small acts like loud car honking right next to street vendors at the market, parking cars in inconvenient locations for others, building extravagant hotels that take a long time for construction, being inconsiderate by taking a disproportionate supply of already low, local water resource. Moreover, I have heard local Dharamsala residents complain that Indian tourists coming in from other states carry on in ways that they would never do in their own hometowns. I asked a Tibetan man why Indian tourists were disliked in Dharamsala? He said,

“They think they can do anything when they are away from their home. They come and tease our girls, here they see tourists and think they have achieved something, you know they act like they have never seen [an] other human.”

I observed that Dharamsala’s local residents did not like or welcome Indian tourists who came from urban areas. I spoke with several Gorkhali and Gaddi members who had been renting out their houses and asked if they ever rented to Indian tourists? The overwhelming answer was, “No.” The reasoning differed for each person but it was always along the lines of widespread stereotypical views of Indian tourists, like, “they are dirty,” “they are loud,” “they drink too much [alcohol],” “they use too much water.” The usual places Indian tourists stayed at were right on the market’s chowk where the hotels had amenities (an attached bathroom, hot water, comfortable beddings) like the ones found in India’s big cities. Whereas, rooms in Dharamsala’s suburbs, where I stayed, had frugal amenities (a common outhouse for a bathroom and only sometimes an attached bathroom, limited hot water, thin mattresses, cotton blankets) and felt like I was living as a guest at somebody’s house rather than at a hotel.

I met with a Delhi college student, Rakhi, studying Buddhism at a nunnery in Dharamsala. Rakhi had spent 3 months in Dharamsala already and was friends with Indian tourists as well as local residents of Dharamsala so I thought she could give me some ideas about local people’s disdain for Indian tourists. Rakhi was probably in her early 20s, petite with a high-
pitched voice, and was agreeable to giving me an interview. I asked her why Indians from other states were so disliked in Dharamsala. She explained that this was the case for all Indians from bigger and more represented politically cities of India. She said,

“I am from Mysore and when I first came to Delhi, people told me ‘Now you are in real India’. So see, Indians don’t really think of other smaller towns as your real India. What you see is a classic case of [classist] discrimination. The Indians who come for vacation on weekends here are new middle class who have just earned their step-up in class, so all they care about is self-pampering, they do not care about others who are lower than them. They are still very new in this middle class that they are afraid to lose their status by mingling with low class, so what do they do, they discriminate others like they have been discriminated in the past. My father is the same way. He grew up without even owning a pair of sandals. He is now a very successful businessman but he will never do any charity work or donate because he doesn’t want to come in contact with lower class. Even when he has to donate during Diwali and all [Hindu religious holidays], he only gives money to priest and the priest does the donating work for him. Now that he has made it to middle class, he only cares providing better luxury for himself and his family.”

I understood from speaking to Rakhi that Indians from urban areas considered Gaddis and Gorkhalis to be of a lower social status than themselves. According to Rakhi newly rich middle class Indians want to distinguish themselves from what they saw as the low-standing social class of Indians living in Dharamsala. This could be seen as well from the way Indian tourists treated Dharamsala residents so poorly, which is why, in turn, Dharamsala residents did not have good impressions of Indian tourists. Moreover, there is some truth to Rakhi’s deduction about the reason Indian tourists distance themselves from Dharamsala’s residents. After all, I know from my own experience that Indian tourists did indeed treat Dharamsala residents poorly and usually avoided mingling with them; however, I also know more research needs to be done to understand the social discrepancy between the two groups. From my own research, I found that there definitely is a social class difference between the urban Indians and Dharamsala’s Indian residents (possibly induced by the need for tourists to enact their newly established class identities), and that this class differentiation was further reinforced by the old system of caste division, wherein even the Indian government categorized Dharamsala’s local Indian populations as marginalized groups.
An Analysis of the Indian Host Community – the Gaddi and the Gorkhali

Gaddis are the largest ethnic population in the town of Dharamsala (Census of India 2009). I observed that the Gaddis are different from the more politically well represented, urban-dwelling Indian population. I also found that the urban Indians generally exclude Gaddis from public acknowledgement. For the Indian population, Gaddis as a minority ethnic group are an uncertain blend of caste and tribe. As mentioned above, Gaddis trace their ancestral homeland to Chamba, and have historically been a transhumant population. Today they are still living in Kangra and Chamba. Gaddis are also politically marginalized due to their lack of representation in the Indian government both because of their rurality and their official status as a scheduled tribe and scheduled caste. I argue that one reason for the smoothness with which Tibetan exile community in Dharamsala has been accommodated is because the largest Indian host communities, the Gaddi, are also a marginalized community. The Gaddis are themselves struggling to be represented by the Indian government and can only participate in politics as a marginalized group. Thus, I contend that the reason the Gaddis are accommodating to Tibetan exiles is because Gaddis can sympathize with the Tibetan’s marginalized condition.

Gorkhali are the second largest Indian host community in Dharamsala. Similar to the Gaddi, I argue that the Gorkhali are also a marginalized community, equally excluded by urban Indians. The Gorkhali are stretched between their loyalty to their home country of Nepal and their military-social duties to India. Since the first Gorkha community left Nepal to serve the British Empire in India in 1857, the Gorkha community has been a minority ethnic group in military servitude in foreign countries while yet upholding the pride of Nepali state. The Gorkhali community live as Indian citizens but still have minimal representation in Indian political or government institutions, which is why the Gorkhali community has requested they be included in the formally marginal category “Other Backward Caste” in hopes of better opportunities and representation within India under the reservation system. The Gorkhali community also lives
harmoniously alongside the Tibetan exile community. I argue that since the Gorkhali community is also a marginalized community, this community too can sympathize with the Tibetan exile community.

**Applying Flexible Liminality to the Gaddi and the Gorkhali**

There are two factors that contribute to determining the quality of a group’s flexible liminality — external geo-political influences, and internal socio-cultural practices of the group that help them adjust to such external influences. Summarizing the information mentioned above about the Gaddis: they are a marginalized group within Northeast India; the Gaddis are only influenced by the Indian politics regarding marginalized tribes and castes; in terms of internal socio-cultural practices, Gaddis are fairly flexible in terms of acting as either a tribe or a caste in order to acquire the benefits of being either a schedule caste or a schedule tribe, or both; the Gaddis have also been adaptive with respect to their livelihood in being able to come up with other ways of surviving, other than their traditional transhumant pastoralism. However, the Gaddis are not as flexible in terms of religious practices, and marital and kinship boundaries; they still consider their hometown as Bharmour in the Chamba district and go to worship at the temples there. There is still little evidence of Gaddi intermarriage with other ethnic groups outside of surrounding tribes. Moreover, having only been under one nation-state’s influence, India, the Gaddi have not felt the need to change too many of their socio-cultural practices. Thus, under only one nation-state’s concern, the Gaddi have a relatively small amount of flexibility in their socio-cultural practices. Compared to the Tibetan exile community, the Gaddis are not as marginalized, and hence, require a lower amount of flexible liminality.

The Dharamsala Gorkha community, in addition to their past experience with British colonialism, has experienced a large amount influence from two geo-political entities, Nepal and India. Summarizing information about Gorkhali from above – Dharamsala’s Gorkha community has been of a peculiar concern to both Nepal and India: for Nepal, the Gorkha army represents the
pride of their military strength, and for India, the Gorkha army are part of the embedded history of the Himchali community, who nevertheless serve as a useful economic-military community. Internally, the Gorkha community seems open to changes and adopting a new identity in order gain better social and political representation. This is why the Gorkha community has attempted to become part of the OBC, despite their military occupation and higher caste status, in order to attain more opportunities from the Indian government. Socially, as well, the Gorkha community is flexible with regards to their kinship and marital boundaries. Religiously, the Gorkha community does seem to hold on to their traditional form of Hinduism, but that does not place them in direct conflict with either Nepali or the Indian state values since both countries have majority Hindu populations. Thus, the Gorkha community in Dharamsala does have a relatively highly flexible liminality compared to the Gaddi. However, Gorkhalis still have a less flexible liminality compared to the Tibetan exile community because Gorkhalis only have two geo-political entities, Nepal and India, concerned with their community, and these two states are political allies so have very little international relations competition. In comparison, the Tibetan exile community has multiple competing geo-polities concerned with their group. Therefore, the Gorkha community simply lacks the crosscutting external influences and subsequent leeway to take advantage of their liminality in a flexible manner. Again, following my theoretical argument about flexible liminality, lots of groups are liminal to a greater or lesser degree. But only some groups, for reasons already given, have some flexibility within their liminality, which is why the theory of flexible liminality is useful for understanding the quality or characteristic form of a group’s liminality.

**Conclusion**

The town of Dharamsala is the capital for the Tibetan exile community – it hosts the seat of Tibetan exile government and numerous leading Tibetan nationalist organizations. The success of the Tibetan exile community starts from the fertile ground of the town of Dharamsala. In this
chapter, I argue that the reason for the successful beginning and continued socio-economic progress of the Tibetan community lies in the town and the people of Dharamsala. The Kangra district that Dharamsala resides in has historically been held by a succession of foreign powers. Since the 17th century, the Kangra fort has had a rich history of being consecutively ruled by Mughals, Rajputs, Sikhs, the British, and, finally, the independent Indian government (Kaushal 1965). The landscape of Kangra was accustomed to being ruled by foreign powers and to having foreign migrations into the area. So, the addition of the Tibetan exiles in Dharamsala was easily accepted local leadership and people as yet another in a long line of foreign migrations into the area. Together, the local host community and Tibetan exiles have lived relatively harmoniously next to each other since 1959 with little friction involving competition for resources, and it should be noted it is the leading source of friction for any refugee-host community (Turner 2010, Chambers 1986, 2000, Whitaker 1999; Malkki 1995; Marfleet 2007; Cernea 2000; Mortland 1987; Chambers 1986).

The people of Dharamsala, consisting of the Gaddi and the Gorkhali, are also uniquely marginalized communities of India in their own ways. The Indian communities of Dharamsala do not get along with urban Indians, which can be seen from the interactions between them. I contend that the core reason for the unease among the local residents of Dharamsala and the Indian tourists is because of the class, caste, and citizenship hierarchies. Thus, given that the Indian communities of Dharamsala are also marginalized within India. I would argue that Dharamsala host community has, for the most part, graciously accommodated the Tibetan exile community because all of Dharamsala’s communities understand each other’s marginalized positions. Thus, Dharamsala is a unique town because of the social clustering of various marginalized or underrepresented groups who have adjusted to each other’s differences. Lastly, the Gaddi and the Gorkhali are also marginalized communities with at least one geo-political entity impacting their community. However, I argue that both the Gaddi and the Gorkhali are unable to achieve the same degree of flexible liminality as Tibetans do because the Gaddi and the
Gorkhali both are not at the center of multiple, conflicting, geo-political entities like the Tibetan community is; and, hence, despite their own efforts to be culturally adaptive, they do not have the same resources available to them as the Tibetan community does to enable as much flexibility.
Chapter 4: Flexibility and the Infrastructure of “Hanging-Out”

Introduction

What can we learn about the flexibility of Dharamsala’s Tibetan exile community from even the relatively small amount of refugee-host conflict that can be seen there? In the previous chapter, I have argued that the Tibetan exile community and their Indian host community have tolerant and relatively harmonious relationship as neighbors. In this chapter, I will be introducing the few ethnic disputes that have occurred between the Tibetan exile community and their Indian host community. As noted in previous chapter, most of the refugee-host conflict recorded has been related resource competition but that is not the case in Dharamsala. The few notable disputes in Dharamsala between Tibetan exile community and Indian host communities have occurred out of ethnic or social discrepancies. This is the reason I argue that refugee-host conflict in Dharamsala is a symptom of a disjointed communal relationship caused by a selective socializing cultural practice carried out by the Dharamsala’s Tibetan refugee community. I argue that this selective socializing cultural practice is part of the Tibetan community’s flexible liminality.

As mentioned in the previous chapters, the flexible liminality of the Tibetan diaspora can be characterized as the diaspora’s ability to adjust to any situation, people, and geo-political context. There are two factors contributing to the degree of Tibetan diaspora’s flexible liminality — external geo-political influences, and internal socio-cultural practices of the group that allow it to adjust to those external influences. However, the flexible culture practices of Tibetans have not been so flexible or adaptable to the local Indian communities of Gaddis and Gorkhalis. The inflexibility, or selective flexible cultural practices, of the Tibetan community is what I argue

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33 Tibetan exile community is considered a foreign refugee group in Dharamsala, even though they are not legally refugees as recognized by the international legal designation “refugee”. The Tibetan diaspora and Indian ethnic groups in Dharamsala speak of, and treat, Tibetans as refugees so I will be treating them as refugees as well. However, I will use the term “exiles” for the Tibetans in Dharamsala to denote their lack of legal “refugee” status.
adds to the prolonged, conflicted, relationship between Tibetans and the local Indian community in Dharamsala. In this chapter, I will demonstrate the ways that the Tibetan community has adopted flexible cultural practices to socialize with different ethnic groups in Dharamsala.

Moreover, I will argue that the Tibetan community in Dharamsala has a closer relationship with foreign tourists, which, as a result, places Tibetans in a likely position to gain transnational resources\(^35\) from their social circle. I argue that bonding between Tibetans and foreign tourists is made possible with the help of the creative infrastructure that Tibetans have laid out in town. I will, later in this chapter, introduce those institutional and spatial arrangements as an “infrastructure of hanging-out” to describe the way Tibetans have designed it to provide a socializing space for foreign tourists and Tibetans.

During my fieldwork, I noticed that the Tibetan community and the local Indian community in Dharamsala usually have a tolerable neighborly relationship but sometimes-expressed aversion of each other that sometimes borders on communal violence. This is evident from the numerous violent rows and discriminatory incidents that I will elaborate below. At first, I too was surprised to learn about the communal violence because I had only seen Tibetans and Indians act friendly and respectfully to each other. I contend that the reason for the tolerable relationship but sometimes-erratic conflict between the Tibetans and local Indians is because Tibetans do not have to try to appease, or be flexible with, local Indians transnational resources (social, cultural or financial capital). I argue that because Indian host community are not a source for transnational resources to Tibetans, the Tibetans don’t have to use their flexible practices with local Indians because they and are of no concern for the Tibetans to try to appease to. Whereas, since the Tibetan community has come to rely on Western foreign support (personal, institutional, and governmental) for their legal, political, financial, and social stability, Tibetans must try to appease and be flexible with foreign tourists. This is why the Tibetan flexible cultural practice of

\(^{35}\) Transnational resources are items that transcend the nation-state that Tibetans reside in. Here I use Arjun Appadurai’s concept of “scapes” (1990) to understand the transnational resources used by Tibetans in Dharamsala.
making themselves appealing to foreign tourists has led them to create a large infrastructure of hanging-out that keeps foreign tourists diverted and interested while in Dharamsala. I argue that the institutions, like Tibetan non-profit organizations, cultural exchange education programs, cafes, other tourist businesses, that evolved to support this infrastructure of hanging-out allows foreign tourists to socialize with Tibetans while, at the same time, keeping local Indians from participating.

Refugee-Host Conflict in Dharamsala

31st May 1994, Dharamsala, H.P. India Today published a news report from Dharamsala titled, “Anti-Tibetan feeling may force Dalai Lama to leave Dharamsala” (India Today, 1994). The news report stated:

![Figure 4.1: Destroyed house of Tibetans in 1994 Dharamsala Riot](image)

It was a sorry homecoming for the Dalai Lama. After being lionised in the US, he returned last fortnight to the sight of massive police security…Perturbed over the simmering resentment against the Tibetans, the Dalai Lama says he has decided to shift his headquarters from Dharamsala…The origins of such a serious development lay in a stabbing incident on April 22 in which a Gaddi youth was killed by a Tibetan. In the backlash a rampaging mob of locals, mostly Gaddis, attacked Mcleod Ganj, setting some Tibetan houses on fire. The attack was fuelled by old resentments. The Tibetans' comparative affluence was grudged by some local people. They are also peeved at the increasing pressure on civic amenities. Allegations of encroachment and acquisition of prime land by the Tibetans through benami deals have also stoked the flames. Chief Minister Virbhadra Singh has set up a panel to look into the grouses of the irate local people. But says Kishan Kapoor, the local BJP MLA: "Nothing less than the ouster of the Tibetans will suffice." The party, however, is trying to rein in its
local leaders. A former Congress (I) MP too supports the expulsion demand…
The state too will lose out on many of the foreign tourists who come to Himachal Pradesh every year to see the Dalai Lama...

The 1994 event was the first large-scale local communal riot between Tibetans and Gaddis in Dharamsala (TibetTelegraph 2014, AniNews 2015). The riot was sparked when a Tibetan youth killed a Gaddi youth in a dispute over either a taxi fare or an India-Pakistan cricket match. Different witnesses told different stories\textsuperscript{36} to describe the initial aggression between Gaddi and Tibetan youths (Diehl 2002; Penny-Dimri 1994). The Tibetan youth at fault for the crime was taken away by the Indian police and was later convicted by the Indian high court of first-degree murder (Diehl 2002; Penny-Dimri 1994). In Dharamsala, one aftermath of the death of the Gaddi youth was that a mob rampaged walking around the marketplace to destroy the Tibetan businesses, schools, and houses in Dharamsala. It was reported that during the rampage, most Tibetan residents of Dharamsala stayed inside their homes and waited for the mob to calm down (Diehl 2002). Local Indian politicians were involved in provoking the angry mob. As mentioned in the above news article, the local BJP (Bharatiya Janta Party- a national political party of India) and congressmen were demanding the ouster of the Tibetan refugee community from India. A witness to the riot described Tibetan properties being damaged everywhere, and shops looted and gutted. (Sodhi 1994) According to this witness, there was also an attack on the Tibetan school in lower Dharamsala (where Tibetan children were housed) from all directions (Sodhi 1994). The school’s main water supply was cut, and the mob tried to set the school on fire. Furthermore, according to this witness, Tibetans were then kept from purchasing basic food -- e.g. Rice, Milk, and Bread -- from Indian stores (Sodhi 1994).

Ironically, at the same time as the riot, the 14\textsuperscript{th} Dalai Lama was giving a lecture at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor about peace and the practice of non-violence at the

\textsuperscript{36} TGiE’s information secretary said, it was because the Tibetan youth cheered for Pakistan during Indian-Pakistan cricket match. Others told me the Tibetan and Gaddi youth fought over taxi fare.
Wallenberg Medal induction ceremony (Wallenberg Committee 1994). On 21\textsuperscript{st} April 1994, the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor honored the 14\textsuperscript{th} Dalai Lama with the Wallenberg Medal for his outstanding humanitarian work and as a proponent of non-violence (Wallenberg Committee 1994). After coming home to Dharamsala, the Dalai Lama publicly requested that the Indian government to move his exile residence to some other part of India to avoid more violence (Diehl 2002; Penny-Dimri 1994). Soon after, several politicians and local businessmen\textsuperscript{37} from Dharamsala met with him to request that he stay in Dharamsala (Diehl 2002; Penny-Dimri 1994). After that the riot ended with a public display of apology and humility by Indian and Tibetan leader, and the communal dispute was swept under the proverbial rug. However, people haven’t forgotten the event entirely. During interviews, people would recall the 1994 riot with sadness. One Tibetan man said to me, “remember the big conflict from the 90s, where the Indians were trying to kick all Tibetans out? The Dalai Lama almost moved out of Dharamsala for that, but then Indians came and begged him to stay.” Since the 1994 riot, the intensity of local tension has simmered down but the distasteful feeling between Tibetans and Gaddis in Dharamsala, as well as between Tibetans and Indian hosts in general, has lingered.\textsuperscript{38}

After reviewing the information, I reason that the Indian government has had a difficult part to play in relation to the communal violence between Tibetans and local Indians. On the one hand, the Indian government felt the need to support its citizens and understand their discomfort about sharing natural resources, housing, and space in general with a ‘foreign’ refugee population. The nationalist sentiment to take care of ‘your own’ before taking care of others seemed righteous to many in the rural local Indian population, who were themselves a marginalized population within India (See Chapter 3). Therefore, I contend, in the 1994 violence

\textsuperscript{37} One of the oldest business owners, Mr. Norwoji, from McleodGanj, mentioned that he went to meet with the Dalai Lama after the 1994 riots and apologized on behalf of the Indian mob, and then requested for him to stay in Dharamsala.

case mentioned above, the added support of local politicians fueled nationalist sentiment and motivated many local Indians to participate in the riot.

On the other hand, I contend that the Tibetan refugee community, headed by their globally celebrated leader, His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama, had contributed much to the local tourism economy. Tourism in the state of Himachal Pradesh has increased steadily since their introduction to Himachal Pradesh in 1969, and therefore, expelling the Tibetan community would have been devastating to the local tourism economy in Dharamsala.\(^{39}\) This is why I reason that the 1994 riot ended as soon as the Dalai Lama suggested moving the Tibetan refugee community out of the state of Himachal Pradesh. As a result, the Indian businesses have worked to keep a peaceful balance in the relationship between their local citizens of Dharamsala and the Tibetan population, as seen by the apologetic attitude of the Indian Dharamsala businessmen.

Nevertheless, antagonisms between Indians and Tibetans surface time after time in various violent events, but usually settle down through the efforts of the two community’s leaderships, as neither community wants the trouble of migrating to hurt the local tourism industry.

The on-the-ground reality I observed for local Indian hosts and the Tibetan community is that it contained contentions as well as amiability. I was told by both Tibetan and Indian participants that their seesawing relationship of contention and amiability persists when they live together as neighbors. And neither Tibetans nor Indians wanted to hide their feelings for each other. In spite of efforts by Tibetan leaders and organizations to soothe communal differences by making peaceful public remarks that make it seem as if all Tibetan and Indian communal issues are resolved. A Tibetan participant sitting and drinking tea with me said, “Indians are just not trustworthy, they only care about money not the relationship.”

\(^{39}\) The top destinations in travel guides (India.com, WikiTravel, Trip Advisor, Make my Trip) for Dharamsala notes Tibetan arts and cultural institutes, including the Tibetan museum, Dalai Lama Temple, Norbulingka Institute
Another Tibetan man in the same group added, “all Indians just look at us weird [frowning and looking suspiciously sideways], like this, like this, and how do we make friends with them?”

On the other hand, at another time, an elderly Gaddi man conveyed his thoughts on this metaphorically, “when there are a lot of utensils in the kitchen, they will bang against each other and make noise. But we need all those utensils to make food.” Meaning, when lot of people live together there is going to be conflict but they all still need to make peace in order for all to live comfortably.

Another time, a middle-aged Tibetan man commented, “Gaddis are simple people, we grew up together, our lives have taken us elsewhere [speaking of resettlement in the west] and their lives are here [Dharamsala], so we don't keep in touch but I have soft heart for them.”

Recently, on an online Tibetan diaspora organized blog called, *Tibet Telegraph*, a Tibetan woman, Mila Rangzen, described the socially fragile life endured by Tibetans in Dharamsala due to the oppressive attitude of local Indians. In a personal blog entitled, “Is Dharamsala safe for Tibetans?” (2014), the author called out for the Tibetan exile government and leadership to speak up against the discrimination and disgraceful actions of the local Indians. Among others, the author listed several local small-scale discriminatory events that she witnessed, experienced, or heard of. She mentioned a 2013 case where a local Gaddi threw a Tibetan man off the top of a third floor building after a drunken altercation between the groups. She also claimed that the reason Tibetan woman in Dharamsala were told to use only taxis instead of public transportation, was because of the severe sexual assault of a Tibetan woman who used a local bus to commute at night. The author said that she herself was attacked by a mob of Gaddis and thrashed after she defended a 12-year-old Tibetan kid who refused to give up his bus seat to a Gaddi man.

While the description from the author above seems to dispute my argument in the previous chapter that Tibetans and Indian hosts do have harmonious relationships, it is the reality of Dharamsala residents. I too was initially confused with the mixed existence of harmonious
neighborly behaviors between Tibetans and Indians in Dharamsala, like sharing morning tea, while, at the same time, hearing gossip about bar fights between Tibetans and Indians. The on-ground reality of the relationship between Tibetan and their Indian host is complicated – one that cannot be described as either completely harmonious or completely distant. However, from my observations, most of the efforts from official leadership from both communities were making an effort to build peace and friendship between two communities. Which is why, I call their relationship relatively harmonious with mixed clouds of violence.

Analyzing the 1994 Dharamsala Riot

According to the news and media reports, and following the 1994 Dharamsala riot story, the publicly acclaimed factor behind the conflict between Tibetans and Indians in Dharamsala was, and remains, the fear of Tibetans taking over Indian land and property (IndiaToday 1994). The Himachal Pradesh state passed a Tenancy and Land Reform Act (1972) to only allow each agriculturalist to hold 5 acres of agricultural land so that the government could distribute the rest to landless and poor peasants (HP Govt. 1972). It was found that Tibetans were leasing and in some cases purchasing land through what are called the benami transactions (HillPost 2012, Times of India 2011, 2012). Benami (‘Be’=without, ‘nami’=name) is a legal term used to describe property with no names, which are purchased by stakeholders under somebody else’s name (HillPost 2012, Times of India 2011, 2012). In other words, Benami are properties that are not owned by a single, named landlord because stakeholders for an unnamed buyer purchase them anonymously. Benami land transactions are purchases carried out in the state of Himachal Pradesh by people who are not allowed to by land because they have reached their ceiling bracket or are not in the agriculturist industry (HillPost 2012, Times of India 2011, 2012).

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40 One can see the efforts for friendship between Tibetan and Indian communities from the existence of organizations like Indo-Tibetan Friendship Association, Friends of Tibet-India, Tibetan Center for Conflict Resolution.
In 2006, a land tenure investigation in the state of Himachal Pradesh reported finding 1,897 cases of *benami* transfers and 81 cases in which Tibetans were involved (HillPost 2012). Prior to that investigation, the local Indians had criticized Tibetans for attaining property deals through illegal *benami* transactions (HillPost 2012, Times of India 2011, 2012). However, after several court hearings about *benami* transactions, in 2006 the state government decided to compromise by declaring that all *benami* land in future was to be leased by the user (initial buyer) for a one-time fee of 10% of the market value and a subsequent charge of 1 rupee (Indian currency) per year as a token lease (HillPost 2012). The state government’s is ruling on *benami* transaction disappointed several Gaddi agriculturalists because then Tibetans would not be punished for attempting to own Indian property (HillPost 2012, Times of India 2011, 2012). Furthermore, this ruling allowed Tibetans to legally lease the same property that few years ago had criminal record on.

Also contributing to the 1994 riot is a socio-cultural factor, which promotes the conflict relationship. As the *India Today* new article above states, the riot was fuelled by old resentments derived from the local Indian community’s jealousy of and negative stereotypes about Tibetans. The Tibetan community’s comparative affluence relative to the Gaddis, a product of help from external foreign sources, has been one issue highlighted by several academics (De Voe 1981; Prost 2006; Deihl 2002; Penny-Dimri 1994; Goldstein 1978). A closer look at the Tibetan sponsorship and welfare aid shows that their external funding situation is complex but has become one of their main sources for bettering their livelihoods, and this success has promoted the diasporic cultural practice of attracting sponsorship based on pleasing foreign funders by highlighting attractive aspects of Tibetan ethnicity, religion, etc (Frechette 2004; Prost 2006; De Voe 1981). This practice of seeking international funding has also created an immense resource competition within the Tibetan community that M. Goldstein describes as “ethnogenesis” (1978: 395).
Nonetheless, the Tibetan refugee community in Dharamsala is still stigmatized by the local Indian community as “Westernized” (i.e., materialist, spending too much money, immoral, drug usage etc.) and “lazy” (i.e., for too easily getting money from abroad without working). Other scholars have noticed as well that stereotypically perceived cultural differences between Tibetans and Gaddis, with the former cast by local Indians as people with lose moral values, inapt gender relations, improper hygiene, etc., is a leading cause for conflict between the two communities (Deihl 2002; Penny-Dimri 1994). During my fieldwork in Dharamsala, I too noted that frequently used local descriptors denoting the difference between the two communities were “spenders” and “savers” – with Tibetans noted as “spenders” who want to dress-up nicely to overcome their barbaric refugee image; and with Indians noted as “savers” who put aside every penny to give better life chances, outside of rural India, for their offspring.

Flexible Liminality Fostering Refugee-Host Conflict

As mentioned in the beginning, the refugee-host conflict is a common topic of study within refugee studies. Other scholars have already researched the topic of conflict between the Tibetan refugee population and the Indian host community (DeVoe1981; Prost 2006; Deihl 2002; Penny-Dimri 1994; Goldstein 1978). Thus, my goal is not to comment further on the topic of conflict between these refugee-host populations but to investigate the cultural practices of the Tibetan refugee population that contributes to the antagonistic relationship between Tibetans and the local Indians. In other words, my goal is to investigate whether the long-term conflict between Tibetans and the local Indian population (its tendency to edge towards violence) is a symptom of a larger entrenched cultural practice that keeps the two populations from having a lasting amiable

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41 Business Standard captured these conflicting sentiments in a 2013 news article with the title of “Unease in Dharamsala” which noted that the Tibetan community is negatively perceived by Indians for their material attainments. The Tibetan community defend themselves from this by highlighting their struggles to gain employment, while, at the same time, having to endure verbal and legal abuse by the local Indians.
relationship. I argue that the flexible liminality of the Tibetans is the larger cultural practice that keeps the Tibetan refugee population distant from the local Indian host community.

In addition to the resource competition and jealousy that refugee-host conflict studies show, I contend that the reason for a prolonged antagonistic relationship between Tibetans and local Indians arises from Tibetan flexible liminality practices. Flexible liminality drives Tibetans to push their own ideals closer to Western liberal values, which makes them appealing to the foreign tourists, and as a result improves the likelihood of their acquiring transnational resources from foreigners. The Tibetan community does not acquire any forms of capital (social, cultural, symbolic, financial) from the local Indian community; that is, from the Gaddi and the Gorkhali, which is why there are no Tibetan cultural practices in place to promote refugee-host population togetherness. The local Indian population themselves are a marginalized group, as well as rural and poor (See Chapter 3), so the Indian population does not have much local resource support available for the Tibetan refugee community. Indeed, the Indian population must find it bizarre to see so many tourists come to visit the Tibetan refugee community in Dharamsala year after year to support them socially and financially. I posit that the Tibetan community in Dharamsala has not made much of an effort to create or highlight ideals or values it might hold in common with the local Indian population because the local Indians cannot provide help with the Tibetan political cause, human rights plight, legal security and so on. It should be noted that the Tibetan community does have good affiliations with Indian organizations and individuals who are active in supporting the Tibetan political cause and human rights plight, and in voicing their support for Tibetan refugees in general.  

I find that the composite reason for prolonged erratic conflict and mutual disdain (and mutual friendliness and respect) between the Tibetan and local Indian population in Dharamsala is that Tibetans cannot find supportive resources from the local Indians, and hence, cannot build

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42 India Friends of Tibet, Indo Tibetan Friendship Chapter, Union of Indo Tibet Friends, and many more
common ideals with the local Indians. On the other side, the local Indians in Dharamsala find it
demoralizing to have a refugee-like population that steadily becomes more socio-economically
affluent than the citizens. In other words, the Tibetan community has been able to shape itself to
become flexible with various foreign Western nation-states, and grow closer to western liberal-
humanist values, while the Tibetan community has failed to build any such flexibility with the
local Indian community.

_Tibetan friend’s Flag dream_

At a café, I saw a Tibetan friend, Phurbu (the same friend I have described in Chapter 1),
hunched over his computer concentrating on the screen. I greeted him, happy to see a familiar
face, and asked what he was working on? He said he was working on a new project that would
put Tibet in the news again. Phurbu explained, “I want to make the Guinness Book [of the World]
Records. I recently learned that somebody made the largest flag; I want to beat his record and
create the largest flag of Tibet.” He was researching ideas on how large he would have to design
the Tibetan flag. I asked him about the financial burden of this project.

“Money is no problem”, Phurbu answered. “I am actually typing email to my friends in
the U.S., France, Korea, and so on. If everybody even chips in a little bit, I can make it possible.
So, I am not worried about money.”

I helped him start his email and edited his grammar. Unfortunately, we were taken aback
after learning about the actual size of the flag needed to be to beat the previous record. For the
flag, we learned, would have to be larger than the size of an American football size stadium. After
thinking about it a bit more, Phurbu decided to give up on the flag project.

When I asked Phurbu if he had had any awkward situations arise when asking for
donations like this, he explained to me, “No of course not. These are people I have worked with, I
have spent time with, and I consider friends. When you set up relationship like this, you are
setting up trust, like a ground for friendship. It is not just buying things like you do in the market out there.”

I understood what Phurbu was talking about. I had experienced that after volunteering at the English speaking class, where all the Tibetan students and foreign teachers gathered around and chatted for a while, and even got together for dinner parties. Dharamsala has become an attractive tourist destination because of the celebrated status of the 14th Dalai Lama, and for being hometown to largest concentration of Tibetan exiles in India⁴³, as well as the capital of the Tibetan diaspora. It was not uncommon to find tourists from a variety of Western and Asian countries roaming the streets of Dharamsala.

Additionally, the town also receives numerous dignitaries visiting the 14th Dalai Lama and the Tibetan government in exile. These same considerations also attract journalists, researchers, and spectators to the town. Since 2003, the lower Dharamsala cricket stadium, HPCAS, has attracted numerous Indian cricket fans from other Indian states for cricket matches – The Kangra district had the highest recorded number of tourists in 2010 within the state of Himchal Pradesh (H.P. State Tourism Dept, 2010). Domestic tourism in the Kangra district has increased from 959,530 in 1997 to 1,035,894 in 2003 when the cricket stadium first opened, to 2,396,970 in 2016⁴⁴. Foreign tourism in the Kangra district has increased from 13,469 in 1997, to 32,163 in 2003, to 112,843 in 2016 (Gangotia 2016). Although Himachal Pradesh is ranked 14th in 2015 in the number of tourist visits per state in India, the Himachal Pradesh state has gained a steady increase in its tourism industry and has plans for improved tourism policies to make it one of the top destinations in India by 2020 (Ministry of Tourism, HP state 2015).

Tibetan non-profits have found ways to keep the tourists in town by tactically creating the ‘infrastructure of hanging-out’, like English Classes, internships at non-profits, meditation centers, Buddhist Studies schools, volunteer opportunities at Tibetan community centers,

⁴³ According to the TGiE 2009 Census, out of 150,000 Tibetan refugees in India, around 70,000 live in and around Dharamsala.
education abroad programs and so on. Currently, there are currently (number frequently fluctuates) 30 recognized Tibet related non-profit organizations, around 10 politically active Tibetan organizations, around 15 Tibetan monastery & nunnery, and around 10 environmental & animal rights orientated service organizations. Many other Indian tourism and recreational businesses have come to Dharamsala to sustain the demand from tourism. For example, there are over 50 registered yoga centers, 25 dance-martial arts-cooking-massage institutes, 8 renowned meditation centers, over 15 arts-cultural institutes, and over 500 hotels (number frequently fluctuates) in the township of Dharamsala.45

Theories – Capitals and Cosmopolitanism

I find Pierre Bourdieu’s theories of non-monetary capital, in the article, *The Forms of Capital* (1986), most helpful in thinking about the condition of the Tibetan exile community and their relationship with foreign tourists. For the Tibetan exile community, the acquisition of social, cultural, and symbolic capital are as useful as acquiring economic capital. In fact, the social, cultural, and symbolic capital could even be converted into economic capital.

“Social capital is the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition…” (Bourdieu, 1986: 248)

According to Bourdieu, social capital is a person’s relationship network that could be transferred into symbolic or economic capital. These relationship networks could be formed from personal relationships based on social reciprocity, or, acquaintances formed from common institutions like family, school etc (Bourdieu 1986). For the Tibetan exile community in Dharamsala, gaining foreign tourists as close friends is one way of building social capital. However, Tibetan exiles are also responsible for maintaining the relationships and building

45 I found most of my information from travel websites, business websites, and blogs about Dharamsala, India.
stronger bonds with Western tourists based on common interests, like human rights, social movements, etc., to form a relationship network capable of transferring social ties into useful economic capital.

Cultural capital is a collection of all non-economic forms of capital like education, social class, family background etc. (Bourdieu 1986). Bourdieu distinguishes between three forms of cultural capital—an embodied state, wherein what a person knows is integrated into their habitus; an objectified state, wherein a person’s capital is represented in material objects like paintings, books etc.; and, an institutionalized state, wherein a person’s cultural competence is represented in credentials or academic achievements (Bourdieu 1986). I find the concept of cultural capital as an embodied state most useful for describing the Tibetan exile community because they have to actively learn a Western-influenced habitus that can help them become a cosmopolitan being.46

One of the most widely popular events in Dharamsala for Tibetan and tourists was English-practice classes where the foreigner (native English speaker) would teach the Tibetans (English language students) how to speak fluently and express themselves in English. Therefore, when the Tibetan exile community acquires the leverage to gain close relationships with the foreign tourist in Dharamsala, it helps build towards their cultural capital, in Bourdieu’s notion.

Aihwa Ong in her book, Flexible Citizenship (1999), has added to embodied state theory, stating that, for individuals from less privileged sites, embodied states can be learned from other mediums like English-medium schools, and language classes, rather than by just being inherited from the individual’s family and class background. I agree with Ong that migrants seeking recognition in transnational space actively learn the essential cultural signs and habitus necessary to interact with others with “metropolitan status and glamour” (Ong 1999: 89). Similarly, Tibetan exiles do not inherit their cosmopolitan-style of living from their parents or family, like Bourdieu

46 Cosmopolitanism is described as openness to difference, everybody’s belongingness to one world, and trans-history (Kuper 1994, Werbner 2002). However, scholars have argued for a need to critically think about a diasporic cosmopolitanism that pushes for diverse nation-state making and ‘symbolic ethnicity’ (Gellner 1992, Anderson 1994, Parry 2008, Schiller 2014).
mentions, but these exiles are actively learning from their transnational social network, as well as foreign entertainment media.\textsuperscript{47} Therefore, the learned cultural capital, in Bourdieu’s notion, from the Tibetan exile community’s transnational network is their embodied state of cultural capital.

Consequently, the Western, and sometimes non-Western social, cultural, and symbolic capitals help build the desired Tibetan diasporic cosmopolitan identity. The Tibetan cosmopolitan identity is best described by Atreyee Sen, in the book chapter, \textit{It’s Cool to be Cosmo} (2014), as ‘crude cosmopolitan’. Sen describes the Tibetan exile community’s cosmopolitanism as “cosmopolitan competence, a state of readiness to make their way through other cultures, whether Western or non-Western, through listening, looking, intuiting, acting and reflecting on their lives and lives of others” (Sen 2014: 100). Speaking about Hong Kong business elites, Ong says, “Hong Kong emigrants seek the kinds of symbolic capital that have international recognition and value, not only in the country of origin but also in the country of destination and especially in the transnational spaces…” (Ong 199: 89). Similarly, Tibetan exiles have better chances of gaining transnational resources, like financial sponsorships or citizenship in the West, if they can adjust to internationally recognized values and adopt transnational cultural habits that have currency there.

Using a similar concept to Ong, I agree with both Ong and Sen that Tibetan exiles are seeking to acquire the symbolic capital of cosmopolitanism to help them achieve better social lives in western countries.

Sen also says that Tibetan cosmopolitan leans more towards ‘cosmopolitan sociability,’ which Sen describes as an elastic sense of affinity that moves back and forth between global, national and neighborhood alliances (Sen 2014: 98). I agree with Sen that Tibetan exiles have a ‘crude cosmopolitan’ with the characteristics of cosmopolitan sociability. From my observations, I have found that Tibetan exiles aspire to create a new homogenous cosmopolitan persona that involves promoting Tibetan nationality as well as a global humanist image that does not discriminate between nation-states, or religions, but promotes the oneness of humanity. Hence,

\textsuperscript{47} Lau (2010); Sen (2014); Diehl (2002) among others.
Tibetan cosmopolitanism is not a move towards Westernization but to become elastic and flexible between the global and the local. This does not mean that Tibetans are not loyal to their nationalist ideals or to a global humanist philosophy; rather, that this elasticity is the very intricate substance that feeds the flexible liminality of the Tibetan diaspora. Tibetan exiles can achieve better life chances when they are able to be flexible to external nation-state conditions and push forward a united global humanist image of the Tibetan diaspora. The Tibetan diaspora needs to have multiple nation-states investing interest in them in order to achieve flexibility in a liminal status that may come in the form of refuge, exile, migration, or claiming Asylee status in diaspora. Thus, Sen correctly describes Tibetan’s cosmopolitan sense as ‘rough and ready’, or elastic, and thus ready to move back-forth between global, national, and neighborhood alliances (Sen 2014).

The Infrastructure of “Hanging-Out”

I observed that in Dharamsala market-based and non-profit services for tourists act like bridges between foreign tourists, the Tibetan community, and other Tibetan supporters. I argue that the availability of humanitarian work and the social acceptance of foreign tourists have encouraged foreign visitors to make Dharamsala their second home. As mentioned above, long and short-term tourists are found ubiquitously in Dharamsala, and many keep coming back to Dharamsala for various reason. One of the chief attractions for foreign tourists is the availability of humanitarian work and cross-cultural experiences with the Tibetan community as well as with, Indian society in general. As mentioned above, there are non-profits working on refugee-welfare, animal services, environmental management, and so on. Most of the tourists that I spoke with had volunteered with at least one Tibetan non-profit in Dharamsala. English language teaching was one of the easiest ways to volunteer, and the place where this happened was a casual joint where anybody with good English could stop by for an hour to teach English. One could also find other internships and volunteer positions at non-profits that required more commitment to work hours
and preparedness for work. As one of the tourist interlocutors mentioned, “there was always something to do.” If nothing else, I found from my experience that one could go to a café and make new friends from various places, and, more than likely, one would find that the other people at the café were also trying to make new friends. In a way, the town of Dharamsala provides a fertile ground for its residents to carryout meaningful work and form deep relationships. The best way to describe this condition in Dharamsala is via ethnographic description.

*University group from the U.S.*

I went to offer my volunteer services to another non-profit offering an evening English speaking class. My offer were declined, however, because a large group of U.S. students had arrived who were volunteering at this non-profit that month. This non-profit was in the main market and had large signboards directing people to the second story of an old, small, building. The main entrance of this building was a narrow framed door set so low and small that a tall person would have to bend their head forward to avoid hitting their head on the doorframe. The staircase was a couple of steps towards the right, and upstairs were rows of rooms off a narrow hallway. I met part of the U.S. student group in front of the non-profit building while waiting for the English classes to start. I introduced myself and started conversing with them. I asked them why they were doing this program.

One of the student said, “we are all part of our university’s summer abroad program. One, we get course credit and we get to travel and learn about other cultures. Plus, we can do a lot of meaningful work towards Tibetan refugees here. It’s all for a good cause.”

Another student chimed in, “I also want to help some Indian people, you see them begging and mending shoes, they could use help too.” Then I asked if they had made friends with Tibetan people?

They all nodded silently, the first student said, “Well, we have school work so we mostly stay together [pointing towards their school group] but we are meeting new people everyday. We
were recently invited to a movie trip with some Tibetan guys… it’s with this organization
[pointing to the non-profit office building] but they will have momos and drinks but I think there
is a donations-type thing for entrance fee. You should come too.”

_Café Ray_

On my third visit to Café Ray (a pseudonym) in Dharamsala, I see many familiar faces seated at the café with their drinks. I nod and smile at the familiar faces, and they do the same. I order my regular Americano and sit down outside to share a table with other foreign tourists, like I have done in the past. It is small café and it only has eight tables – four indoor and four outdoors, so all the regular customers have learned to share the table. Most of the customers are Western foreigners and a few are Tibetans. Even the street dogs have learned to take a nap close by the outdoor tables, knowing they will receive table scraps from the regular customers here. There are currently five dogs that have made this café into their territory. I have seen them take a nap on the warm couch during the idle time in the café. Most of the regular customers come in the morning and stay there until afternoon, and sometimes they even come back to spend the evening at the café. Today, a pair of new Indian tourists walked in and ordered coffee. Usually, when new customers come in, the dogs are shooed away by the baristas. By now, all the foreigners and Tibetans have come to understand that Indians do not like having dogs close to them. The dogs were shooed away and I watched as two regular Tibetan customers politely moved their drinks to share a table outdoor so the Indian couple could have a full table for themselves. There were a lot of Indian tourists who came to Dharamsala for vacation and stayed for a short period of time. I had learned to identify the Indian tourists from their modern-style clothing consisting of jeans, t-shirts on young men and women, and elaborate-expensive looking saris and kurtas on women. Unlike the local Indians, who wore plain colored cotton or wool kurtas – the women covered their head with shawls and men wore Himachali hats -- the Indians from outside Dharamsala could be called city people from the way they dressed. The Indian couple at the café was quiet, with the
woman wearing a neatly pleated sari and the man wearing a loosely fitted polo shirt tucked in to his jeans. They spoke in small voices and left as soon as they finished their drinks. The two Tibetan guys moved back to their empty table after the Indian couple left. The dogs too came back after a while; a British tourist at my table joked that the dogs looked upset at having had to move from their beds to make way for the Indian couple.

*Infrastructure of Hanging-Out: Analysis*

I argue that Dharamsala’s Tibetan influenced infrastructure is designed in such a way that it creates spaces for Tibetans and Western tourists to bond together. For example, first, a Tibetan residing in Dharamsala would not have to intentionally scheme to socialize with foreign tourists; they can hardly avoid them. Moreover, they do not have to strain behaviorally to interact with Western tourists more easily than local Indians do; they simply find themselves more closely relating and bonding with foreigners with Western liberal ideals than local Indians. Consequently, the infrastructure of hanging-out allows Tibetans to seamlessly position themselves to acquire some type of transnational resources (social, cultural, or financial capital) from their wider social circle. During my fieldwork, I observed that Tibetans had greater access to informal and formal bridging institutions that helped them bond with foreign tourists, and consequentially were able to gain access to transnational resources. I also observed that the same bridging infrastructure did not work for local Indians. I found in Dharamsala that Tibetan non-profit organizations and market places functioned to allowed foreign tourists and Tibetan communities to spend time and socialize. I call these bridging institutions in Dharamsala its “infrastructure of hanging-out.”

As described in the above two scenarios, the infrastructure of hanging-out pulls Tibetans and foreign tourists together to meet, with common intentions, at Tibetan welfare events carried out by non-profits and at leisure activities at cafes and shops in market place areas. But in my time in Dharamsala I never noticed local Indians from any of its other ethnic groups taking advantage of this this infrastructure, only some Indian tourists from other states would barely
participating in the tourist business space. In the example above, those U.S. students were attracted to Dharamsala because of the Tibetan refugee community, and thus, their sole purpose in visiting was to learn and help the Tibetan community in some way. Conveniently, the infrastructure of hanging-out helped this U.S. student group, as it helps Western traveller in general, by inviting them to events held by Tibetan non-profits; events like the English-speaking class and casual dinner parties.

Despite this U.S. student group’s lack of experience in reaching out cross-culturally, they were invited to the space of the language class to mingle and make friends with Tibetans in Dharamsala. Similarly, the café provided a common place for most tourists to spend their leisure time. Regular customers used the small space of the café efficiently by sharing the table and making space for new customers. At the same time, Tibetans and foreign tourists make friends with each other by spending hours together at the café on a regular basis. Therefore, the infrastructure of hanging-out works to bridge the gap between the Tibetan exile community and foreign tourists in Dharamsala but at the same time, also excludes Indians (including both Dharamsala’s Indian residents and Indian tourists), which, as a result, I argue, perpetuates dislike between Tibetans and Indians.

**Conclusion**

I argue that the conflict between the Tibetan refugee community and the local Indian host community in Dharamsala is a symptom, and consequence, of a larger Tibetan cultural practice that directs them to socialize selectively. I argue that the Tibetan refugee community is much closer to foreign tourists than their own local host community because they have common Western liberal ideals and cosmopolitan interests that help to bond them together. This is because the Tibetan diasporic community has adjusted their cultural practices to match Western liberal humanist values so that the community can be more appealing to their Western sympathizers. This way, the Tibetan diaspora, in various places, including Dharamsala, can bond better with
foreign tourists with similar Western liberal values. In Dharamsala, this has led to forming an infrastructure of hanging-out that fosters the relationship between Tibetans and foreign tourists. At the same time, the Tibetan community has not adjusted their cultural practices to appeal to the Indian host community, which is why refugee-host conflict has persisted throughout the years in Dharamsala.
Chapter 5: The Flexibility of the “Free Tibet” Campaign

In March 2016, I attended a Tibetan Independence Day concert during my fieldwork in Dharamsala. The concert was a mixture of traditional dances, Tibetan folk songs, western-style band music, western-style dances, and a video on political prisoners in Tibet. After the introduction of the organization and the event sponsors, the concert part of the event began with the Thangthong Lugar School of Performing Arts who performed a traditional Tibetan drum dance. There were five young girls who were dressed in Chupa (traditional Tibetan dress that looks like a cloak draped from shoulder, coming to ankle length, and is fastened by the neck and waist; it is usually worn with a blouse underneath and belt over the dress) carrying a very colorful drum and a drumstick. Their teacher sang in Tibetan in the front corner while the girls took the center stage dancing beautifully and creating percussive music. The girls ended their performance by pausing in a backbend while playing the drums. It left the audience in awe and the performers left the stage to loud applause. The next performers sang traditional Tibetan folk songs – one of them was Lu, a Tibetan Nomand song that involved an opera style of singing involving a loud, high-pitched influx of the voice. The Lu silenced the audience and left a sad, eerie feeling.

The concert continued with several other solos by contemporary Tibetan singers following them, each singing in Tibetan with background music played with Tibetan instruments.

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48 This was the same concert that I have mentioned before in Chapter 3 regarding the Tibetan teenage dance group “No Parking”.

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such as the *Dramyin* (guitar-like instrument) and *Silnyen* (cymbal-like instrument)\(^49\). After this, the highlight of the event was introduced: “No Parking” (see Chapter 3) – clearly the most popular group to the audience. In fact, the audience demanded encore performances by “No Parking” so the group had to be called back three times. The organizers were busy fumbling between getting the videos ready to show interviews by Tibetan political prisoners and clearing the stage again for more “No Parking” performances. It was a very odd theatre experience to go back and forth between somber stories of political prisoners, and then become submerged by loud cheers, and hip-hop dance music. I left the concert after the announcers gave in to the audience’s demand for a third encore by “No Parking”.

**Introduction**

The organization called Student of Free Tibet-India (SFT) organized the Tibetan Independence Day concert under the theme of “2008 Reclaim Tibet.” This concert was a commemoration of the largest Tibetan protest against China in 2008 that started in Lhasa, the capital of Tibet, then spread throughout the TAR and later to Nepal, India, North America, and Europe. The audiences were informed that the intention of SFT-India was to remind the audience to continue their political activism and spread the word of the Tibetan cause. The other agenda of the independence concert was to express Tibetan nationalist discourse by presenting something that Dharamsala Tibetans were taking part in. Although the Independence Day concert may seem like an odd combination of western music blended with traditional Tibetan performances mixed with videos from political prisoners, the concert successfully portrayed the diverse nature of Tibetan nationalism. I found that from the outside, Tibetan nationalism might seem politically

\(^49\) A *dramyin* is a traditional Himalayan folk music lute with seven strings, used primarily as an accompaniment to singing in the Drukpa Buddhist culture and society in Bhutan, as well as in Tibet, Sikkim and Himalayan West Bengal. A *silnyen* is a Tibetan percussion instrument in the form of a cymbal with a small, or no, central boss. For more information see: Kinga, Sonam (2003). *Attributes and Values of Folk and Popular Songs*. Journal of Bhutan Studies, Vol 3(1): 134-175.
neutral and homogenous; however, Tibetan diaspora people are strongly invested in the diverse and conflicting nature of Tibetan nationalism. One of the largest political debates that I learned of among the Tibetan diaspora is about the topic of “Free Tibet” where one political party (*Rangzen*) supports complete independence of Tibet from China, and the other political party (*Umaylam*) supports partial independence from China and remain as region under Chinese nation-state. At the Independence Day concert too, the organizers, SFT-India, as well as the participants, like the JJI Exile brothers and “No Parking” group, were all taking part in Tibetan nationalist discourse. However, the debate remained invisible to the non-Tibetan audience. And even at other times, this debate about “Free Tibet” taking place within the Tibetan diaspora remains invisible to others, as if all of the Tibetan diaspora shares one simple, homogenous, political position.

In this chapter, I will unpack the complexity of Tibetan nationalism and show why the diversity of Tibetan politics remains invisible to outsiders. I will focus on the political campaign of “Free Tibet”, its meanings, and its opposition, media portrayal, and the discourse on the ground among the Tibetan diaspora, to show the diverse nature of Tibetan politics. I will describe its global popularity in the West and its effect on Tibetans, especially in India. I will argue that the homogenous appearance of the “Free Tibet” campaign is because of the flexible liminality of the Tibetan diaspora is reflected in their political agendas. “Free Tibet” is one appearance of Tibetan political discourse, but it captures the multitude of views within Tibetan nationalist discourse. At the same time, “Free Tibet” seems like a homogenous political agenda from the outside. Therefore, I argue that Tibetans do not have to hide their contradictions because the Free Tibet campaign hides them for them. As a side note, I will be using this chapter as a transitional space in the journey of Tibetans from India to the West. This chapter will consist of stories from Tibetans living in diaspora in India and the U.S.
“Free Tibet” during the Independence Day Concert

The political topic of “Free Tibet” or complete independence is a charged political topic for the Tibetan diaspora. In exile, the Tibetan community has developed two different approaches to the Chinese occupation of the Tibetan state, or, as named by the Chinese government, the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR). In fact, many Tibetans in exile argue that the TAR only includes the U-Tsang district and they remind others that Amdo and Kham should be part of the Tibetan region too (PO 2014, 2016). However, Tibetan exile leaders are content for now to only negotiate for the limited geographical land of Tibet (CTA 2018). On the one hand, there are a majority of Tibetans, including the 14th Dalai Lama and his supporters, who suggest that Tibetans should run the TAR area autonomously while remaining under the larger Chinese governance. This approach is called the Umaylam or Middle Way (Office of HH Dalai Lama 2016). On the other hand, there are Tibetans who have asked for complete independence from China of the three districts, U-Tsang, Amdo, and Kham. This separatist position is called the Rangzen, or the Free Tibet Movement (Students of Free Tibet 2015). In short, there are two ideological positions among the Tibetan diaspora—there are Tibetans who have asked for the complete independence of Tibet from China, also known as the Rangzen group, while in opposition are the Tibetans who have asked for regional control of Tibetan Autonomous Region but working under the government of China, also known as the Middle Way group.

The complete independence of Tibet from China, or, “Free Tibet” position was indirectly talked about during the Tibetan Independence Concert. I understood that the event was, at one site, a performance of Tibetan arts, an activist event of “Free Tibet” propaganda, and an educational event about human rights violation in Tibet. The organizers of the Tibetan Independence Day concert, the Students for a Free Tibet (SFT), was formed in 1994 by Tibetans in New York City to convince young people to press for human rights and independence in Tibet. The goal of the organization is to secure the complete independence of Tibet from China, hence a “Free Tibet”. The organization aims to create pressure on China using economics, politics and
international human rights law (SFT 2015). For example, the organization has gained global recognition for several high-profile protests against China during Olympics torch events on the Golden Gate Bridge, at the Great Wall of China, and on Mount Everest (Phayul 2004, 2007, 2007; CNN 2008). SFT-India adheres to the legacy of the other well-established SFT chapters, but they have added their own unique style of grass-root networking involving educating Tibetan youths, non-violent protesting, and the promotion of Tibetan arts and creativity through event such as the concert I attended. Thus, the Tibetan Independence Day concert of 2016 was one of their activist, political, arts-performance events whose main theme, ‘Reclaim Tibet’, was in commemoration of a worldwide event, ‘the 2008 Tibetan Mass Uprising’.

**Origin of the “Umaylam” Middle Way Movement**

The original idea of Middle Way was formed under the leadership of the 14th Dalai Lama in 1973 (Office of Dalai Lama 2016). The Middle Way policy argues for a political compromise between the Chinese and the Tibetan exile government, where the Tibetan government would accept the governance of China over Tibetan state but the Chinese government would have to allow the Tibetan administration to rule the area\(^5\) (Houston and Wright 2010). While a political tactic, Middle Way\(^5\) is grounded in Buddhist philosophy to achieve *nirvana* (ultimate escape from worldly suffering). The 14th Dalai Lama has said that Tibetan happiness is his ultimate goal; and he believes that Tibetans can achieve this by being under limited Chinese sovereignty (Office

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\(^5\) Tibetologist have argued that the idea of Middle Way, of Tibetans accepting the Chinese sovereign rule over Tibetan state, dates back to when the 14th Dalai Lama was forced to sign the 17-point agreement, and lacked foreign allies willing to support the Tibetan cause (CTA 1997). Others argue its origin was, perhaps, even further back, in 13th Century, when the Tibetan state had a client-patron relationship with the Mongol Empire and then, afterwards, in the 17th century, with the Manchu Qing Empire (Smith, 2014).

\(^5\) The 14th Dalai Lama was using the same language, drawn from the philosophical notion of the ‘middle path’ of the Buddha, that enlightenment is found poised between complete self-denial and hedonism.

There were two main meetings between the Dalai Lama and Chinese authorities in 1987 and 1988 (Houston and Wright 2010). The Dalai Lama later shared the only compatible advice that came from the liberal Chinese politicians: that the Chinese government could be willing to negotiate everything besides the independence of the Tibetan state (Office of Dalai Lama 2016). Realizing the potential for conflict on this issue, the Office of the Dalai Lama conducted a preliminary opinion poll from 1996 to 1997 among the Tibetan diaspora in which more than 64% voted that they would support the leadership and decisions of the Dalai Lama (CTA 1997). Hence, on June 15th 1998, The Middle Way Policy was announced at a European Parliament in Strasbourg as the official political policy of the Tibetan exile government. However, nothing concrete resulted from these meetings and the presentation of Middle Way Policy memorandums to the PRC (CTA 2008, 2009).

Instead of a good Sino-Tibet relationship, resulting from the introduction of the Middle Way Policy, a different reality ensued when Chinese authorities released a White Paper in September 1992 called “Tibet – Its Ownership and Human Rights Situation” (PRC 1992). China’s State Council White Papers are the highest-level official publications of the PRC, and a major part of its international propaganda efforts (Smith 2013). This White Paper (1992) claimed that since Tibet has always been part of China there is neither reason for it to acquire independence, nor any question of anyone disputing China’s sovereignty over Tibet. The merger of the two states, then, was only natural given the long history of conjoined working-together of the two neighboring states (PRC 1992). Moreover, the CCP claimed that it had peacefully liberated the people of the Tibetan state from a feudalistic serfdom ruled over by the religious sect of the Dalai Lama (PRC 1992). Therefore, the claim by the followers of the Dalai Lama that they should take back Tibet could only mean reverting Tibet back to its dark ages. However, it went on, the Chinese nation-state would never allow the occupation of Tibet, nor any loss of personal

A Political Divide over Rangzen & Umaylam

Since the introduction of the Middle Way by the 14th Dalai Lama, however, Tibetans in exile have been divided over this policy. For many Tibetans the Strasbourg proposal, or the Middle Way policy, was a betrayal by Tibetan leadership, whom they thought should be working to gain complete Tibetan independence (Phayul 2006). This was because the Free Tibet movement, Rangzen, a movement that was also a concept, had prevailed since the beginning of the occupancy by China. But after Strasbourg it became the opposition to the Middle Way. The strongest proponent of Rangzen has been the Tibetan Youth Organization (TYC), formed in Dharamsala, India on October 7th, 1970. TYC has carried out various popular protests: indefinite public fasts, protests at the Beijing Olympics with Free Tibet banners, and protests in front of the Chinese Embassy in Delhi accompanied by self-immolations (Phayul 2008, TYC news archive 2008, 2012, Tibet Sun 2012). The Tibetan Youth Congress, hence, has gained the reputation of being “radical,” “terrorist,” “aggressive,” and yet also “effective” (Chinaview, 2008; BBC, 2009; Sinha 2012).

Similarly, other Free Tibet movement activities have mostly been led by Tibetan activist organizations and NGOs like the TYC. The other large international organizations publically promoting the Free Tibet movement, or Rangzen, are: the Free Tibet Campaign (London, UK); Students of Free Tibet (New York, U.S.); International Tibet Independence Movement (Indiana,
u.s.); and the international tibetan aid organization (amsterdam, netherlands). in order to understand this divide within the tibetan exile population, then, it is useful to take a look at the tibetan organizations that are officially recognized by the tibetan exile government. in 2014, there were eight central non-governmental organizations created and run by tibetan exile population that were officially recognized by the government in exile: the tibetan youth congress (est.1970), the tibetan women’s association (est.1959), the cholkha-sum [meaning three provinces; the tibetan geographical area covering three region of amdo, kham, and u-tsong] the ngari association (est. 1993) [representing people of ngari korsum in western tibet], the gu-chu-sum (est. 1991) [meaning, 9, 10, 3 in tibetan signifying pro-independence demonstration months in tibet], the national democratic party of tibet (est.1995), the united association (est.1964), and the students for free tibet (cta 2013). since 2014, some of the ngos, like the united association, the cholkha-sum, and the ngari association, have closed down for various reasons (cta 2017). all of these ngos promote the purpose for social welfare (like women’s rights, public political education, expression of tibetan youth etc.) and have participation from the tibetan diaspora all over the world. the table below shows which ngos support the middle way and which support the “free tibet” movement.

table 5.1: middle way vs. free tibet tibetan organizations (cta website, 2014)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>middle way approach</th>
<th>free tibet movement</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>tibetan women’s association</td>
<td>tibetan youth congress</td>
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<tr>
<td>cholkha-sum</td>
<td>national democratic party of tibet</td>
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<tr>
<td>ngari association</td>
<td>students for free tibet</td>
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<td>gu-chu-sum</td>
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<td>united association</td>
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on-the-ground tibetan political activism

while tibetan organizations are neatly divided between the two political ideologies, the on-the-ground reality is not so clear among the tibetan diaspora. especially in dharamsala, i found that pro-rangzen people expressed their political opinions mostly in indirect ways so as to
not sound like they were against the Tibetan exile government or the Office of the Dalai Lama. In contrast, Tibetans in the U.S. were more overt about their alliance to their favored political camp. During fieldwork, moreover, I found a variety of political expressions that aligned people somewhere in between the two political camps. But the key point to understand is how the Tibetan people and their situation are displayed on the ground, and for this I will now present several ethnographic examples.

The first time I heard people discussing Free Tibet in the field was when I went to interview a French woman living in Dharamsala, India. I had heard from a Nepali resident in Dharamsala that Martha, a French woman, was renting the top two floors of another Nepali family member’s house with her Tibetan husband, Tashi. I learned that the couple were running a tourism business from this space and regularly had French students who would come to work with them. I managed to acquire an appointment with the couple. It was almost five o’clock in the afternoon by the time I got there, and there was a small group of foreigners gathered on the rooftop balcony smoking and just sitting, looking out over the valley. I could tell this was an end of the workday gathering. I was told to go and wait inside the room where Martha would meet me. Another foreign lady said that they had just finished their meeting, so Martha would be out soon.

The room was furnished with two office desks, and on top of them were computers, office supplies, and piles of scattered paper. Martha came and took her seat; behind her was a small string of Tibetan prayer flags\textsuperscript{52} giving off bright colors in the room. After I briefly explained to her what my research was about, she informed me that her husband was on a

\textsuperscript{52} In Tibetan culture, prayer flags propagate well wishes by spreading Buddhist prayers in the air; and it is thought to bless any living thing that comes in contact with the blessed air. For more information see: Sulek, Emilia Roza (2017) \textit{“Fading Colors of the Tibetan Prayer Flag”}. HIMALAYA, the Journal of the Association for Nepal and Himalayan Studies. Vol 37 (1): 122-127.
business trip and that they ran a Buddhist pilgrimage travel agency. They invite students from France to come for a few months of educational and spiritual travelling in the Himalayas. After our introductory conversation, Martha invited in a young Tibetan woman, Lhamo, explaining that she might be able to help us with the interview too.

*A Free Tibet- Ideology of Individual Activism*

Lhamo looked like she was in her 20s, spoke good English, and struck me as very outspoken. Lhamo was working for Martha at the moment during her school break, and was originally from Ladakh, which is in the northern most state of India, Jammu and Kashmir. I started asking my interview questions to both of them, and the interview took the form of a group discussion about the future of Tibetan people in exile. At one point during the discussion, Lhamo shared her own experience of the Tibetan political plight,

“I also participated in the peaceful protest when the Chinese delegates came to Delhi, but I was put in jail by the Indian police for five days. [Lhamo took a pause and sighed] I never imagined I would be in jail for peaceful protest. Most of the NGOS are influenced by India’s aim for mild propaganda for Tibetan cultural revival and all… but most the work is not really [doing] anything [for the freedom of Tibet].”

She continued giving examples of a few scholars in the past that had sent some books written in the Tibetan language to Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR is the official name given by the Chinese state for Tibetan area covered by China) in order to revive Tibetan language education in TAR. Lhamo reiterated that something radical like this on a local level is necessary for Tibetan freedom. Tibetan language education and the everyday use of the Tibetan language has been suppressed in China, and over the years, several news outlets have noted blatant forms of discrimination against Tibetan’s human rights in many public places like schools, service industries, local trade business etc. (RFA 2013; Kirt 2015; NYTimes 2015; TCHRD 2016; Phayul 2016). So Lhamo was addressing this Tibetan language discrimination when she was advocating
for ‘radical’ public activism. Later on, she would also passionately state that she would never seek Indian citizenship because that would not help the Free Tibet cause.

For Lhamo, Free Tibet was an initiative taken at the local level and by individuals for the support of Tibetan freedom from China. To her, the Free Tibet movement meant an ideological change among Free Tibet supporters that would lead to various instances of organized activism against China that could eventually bring change in the TAR area in China. However, Lhamo is skeptical if this can take place on a government-to-government level, especially if the government is the Indian government. Even though the Indian government has given Tibetans a temporary home, and allowed a few initiatives for reviving Tibetan culture, this was not enough for Lhamo. According to Lhamo, mild activist tactics, like those of the Indian government, does very little to put pressure on the Chinese government to hand over Tibet’s freedom. A few days after meeting with Martha and Lhamo, I went to go visit the Tibetan exile government’s offices. Here, I heard a different opinion of the Indian government’s efforts from some Tibetan exile government workers. Among them, At the Tibetan exile government, I was able to acquire an interview with an officer of the Tibetan Library and Archival Collection. The officer explained to me, contral Lhamo, that the Indian government had been the main reason for Tibetan diaspora’s success. He also spoke of Tibetan freedom but, unlike Lhamo, he spoke of ‘Free Tibet’ in terms of a governmental change in the TAR geographical area in China.

Free Tibet – An Ideology of International Politics

The Tibetan exile government is located in between McLeod Ganj and lower Dharamsala. Since it is in between two big towns, it is located on an isolated hill but covers a large geographical space. I was given a shortcut through a Gaddi village. The Tibetan government space was separated from the surrounding Indian villages by a large wall that went all the way around the periphery of the Tibetan exile government’s space. Apart from the Tibetan exile government’s main gate, the compound wall had several informal entrances to create shortcuts
into the Tibetan government area. Inside the compound, there were several Tibetan government buildings and residence halls for the government workers. A few Tibetans in McLeod Ganj told me that they saw the Tibetan exile government as like a ‘mini country’ within the tiny town, and they were not wrong. Once I entered the gate, I noticed a difference in the environment. I saw a very few Indians and more nicely dressed Tibetans in traditional clothing, Chupas. There was no traffic noise or pollution, and, most noticeably, no cars or motorbikes honking at pedestrians. One could feel this peaceful environment as a relief from the outside world’s chaos.

Inside the Library staff’s office, I was seated in a cubica next to a big window looking out to the clean compound of the Tibetan Library and Archival building. A librarian rushed in to greet me. He was a middle aged Tibetan man who was babysitting his son today. He came in apologizing, explaining about being late by saying that he had had to leave his son entertained while he came to our meeting. I said I had no problem waiting and after some short small talk I introduced my research topic. I first asked him why he thought the Tibetan refugees were successful in the South Asia. He said,

“I think Tibetans are successful because of India. Indian government has relaxed its regulations for us, which allows us to have freedom. We can do business, [and] move around, which also allows us to compete with other Indians in the job market. On top of that India also gives scholarships for college and reserved seats in college – maybe 1 or 2 in the college campus.”

I asked him about the foreign scholarships that Tibetans receive from the West. He said,

“The Tibetan education department also finds scholarships. There are those for educational purpose and also outside of academia, which are like crash courses. The training gives them some type of diploma and they can find a job with it… There are individuals from the west who sponsor Tibetan kids. About 40% of Tibetan students who graduate are directly sponsored by the western individuals but [the] Indian government has most for us, there are 60 library staff and we are all under the Indian government salary.”

He continued,

“[The] Indian government has a policy of preserving Tibetan culture and from there we get funds for several projects in Tibetan community, this library is one of them…Indian government wanted us to take care of our own issues like Education, Settlement, Cultural preservation and so on. We have judiciary system that has Tibetan laws but it works under the Indian government rules. So if there is any fight between two parties, they can come to Tibetan court and if they still don’t like the decision, they can go to the Indian court. But our government is an actual democratic model government so when Tibet
becomes free, there will not be any worry for new government because we already have one that can be applied directly to Tibet."

Then, our conversation went off on a tangent about my ethnicity and the cultural commonness between Nepalese and Tibetan people. We ended our interview when the officer’s son (around nine years old), apparently no longer ‘entertained’, ran into the office crying and speaking to his father in Tibetan. He explained to me that a monkey had scared his son while he was playing out in the yard. After a brief laughter and small talks, I thanked the librarian and left.

An Analysis of Free Tibet in Dharamsala

At a glimpse, these two approaches of Tibetan exiles to the Chinese occupation seem neatly dualistic, either Free Tibet or the Middle Way. But these approaches translate differently on the local level among people in Dharamsala, as expressed by above participants. On the one hand, this seems to be a debate about who should take the initiative for change and political activism. For Lhamo, it should be individuals at the local level who instigate change; whereas for the Tibetan exile government officer, change should be put in motion at the state level, and it is government activities that can make a real difference in Tibetan people’s lives. On the other hand, this debate seems to be about how best to put pressure on the Chinese government to obtain the freedom of Tibet. For Lhamo, this pressure should be through radical, loud, and public expression. She did not believe mild political tactics would make a difference; whereas, for the Tibetan exile government officer, the freedom of Tibet will come from international political tactics. According to him, the Indian government is showing its utmost support for the Tibetan exiles by giving political-economic-social leeway to Tibetans in India. Perhaps there are many more ways of locally expressing the contrast between the Free Tibet versus the Middle Way that I was not aware of; but this was what I found in these local-level dialogues during my fieldwork.

53 The staff member is correct in describing the plans of the Tibetan government in exile. The TGiE and Tibetan political leaders all claim to the plan to move the Tibetan governance model directly to Tibet when the plan for middle-way becomes successful.
But I should also mention that the Tibetan exile government’s existence solely relies on India; thus, the Tibetan exile government staff members are naturally biased towards Indian government.

However, one thing Tibetans in Dharamsala had in common was that nobody openly discussed these contradictory perspectives on Free Tibet and the Middle Way. This debate between the Middle Way and Free Tibet came up in conversations as a difference in political or ideological tactics between Tibetan individuals. However, I did not encounter this difference expressed as blatantly contradictory positions. For example, between Lhamo and the Tibetan government officer, it simply seemed at first like they had different opinions on how to tackle the problem of the Chinese occupation in Tibet. Despite their different opinions, it never seemed like they were in opposition to each other. However, I interviewed a Tibetan-American writer who openly took a stance in favor of Free Tibet over the Middle Way. This is when I realized that the Tibetans in Dharamsala were in a much different position than the Tibetans in the U.S.

A “Free Tibet” Conversation in the United States

I had a chance to have a phone interview with a Tibetan-American writer in the U.S. I had found his blogs online. He was a middle-aged man who had come to the U.S. in early 1990s soon after he finished his college education in India. I had found his writings eloquent so I asked him via social media if I could get an interview with him. While speaking to the Tibetan writer, I found out that he was a salesman at a jewelry store in New Jersey but that he liked to write during his free time. He had warned me that he only had 45 minutes to spare because he had to go get his daughter from school. So I got straight to my interview questions. I asked him how he got started writing about Tibet and Tibetans? He said,

“I am doing what I want in my own way. I am writing in papers but it is just my opinion, on Facebook too, people just want to see what I write. That is how it all started. I used to write my opinions on Facebook and just share it with my friends on Facebook. Somebody told me to submit my work on newspaper and get a larger audience. So I did and just a lot of people read my work. I have opinions that [laughing] I can write better. [After a brief
pause without any prompt from me] I believe in Rangzen that is complete independence rather than CTA’s [Tibetan exile government’s] middle way approach. I don’t think that [Middle Way Approach] is good [for the Tibetans].”

Since he brought up the topic without any prompt from me, I asked him “Why do you support Rangzen?” He said,

“You see, 97% of Tibetans are living in Tibet right now under the Chinese occupation. There are only 3% who are outside of Tibet, living in diaspora. The future of Tibet [the country] belongs to the ones in Tibet. [Speaking in future tense] The Tibetan diaspora would only bring about campaign for Tibetan independence.”

We were interrupted by a phone call from his daughter but he was still willing to speak more after he spoke with her. During the interview with the Tibetan-American writer, I realized how much more freely he was willing to speak on the topic of Free Tibet and Middle Way, compared to Tibetans in Dharamsala, and even without any direct question or prompting from me. Moreover, the Tibetan writer was blunt in making his claim that the Tibetan exile government choosing the position of the Middle Way tactic was not good. It is interesting to note that I did not hear Tibetans in Dharamsala openly disagree with the Tibetan exile government’s position and speak so overtly about Rangzen Free Tibet vs. the Middle Way. I contend that the reason for the difference in the rhetoric of Tibetans in Dharamsala compared to Tibetans in the U.S. lies in their place of residence. Tibetans in Dharamsala know they have an image to uphold to the surrounding society and to the global media for the sake of the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan exile community. Tibetans in the U.S., however, are free from this type of responsibility to keep up the image of Tibetans to the world.

This act of cover and overt action of Tibetan exiles could also be analyzed with the Tibetan cultural practice of flexible liminality where the Tibetan exile community in Dharamsala (India) has to be subtle about their political opinions and the Tibetan exile community in the U.S. can be forthright about their political opinions. I argue that the change found in the expression of political opinion among the Tibetan exiles depending on their place of residence is an instance of
adjustments in habitus depending on context. In other words, Tibetan exiles have found a way to use flexible liminality in their political opinions as a strategic common sense depending on their place of residence.

**Covert Political Opinions in Dharamsala**

I argue that the reason for the lack of strong political expression regarding *Rangzen* or *Umalyam* in Dharamsala is because of awareness of the global media attention focused on Dharamsala’s Tibetans. I observed that the Tibetans in Dharamsala usually received a lot of attention from the foreign media, journalist, scholars, activists, and tourists, whereas, Tibetans in the U.S. do not receive the same type or volume of attention from the outside world. A Tibetan NGO director in Dharamsala told me that Tibetans there were frequently interviewed. He himself had given over 100 interviews, but now he was reluctant to give interviews unless the topic interested him. Another time in Dharamsala, during an English conversation class, I was seated with eight high school girls for English conversation practice. Since I was a new volunteer at the organization, the first thing the girls told me was “Please no questions about politics…” [Giggling]. So I could tell that even young schoolgirls had received their own fair share of political questions. The Tibetan NGO director and the Tibetan high-school girls were just a few of the many residents of Dharamsala who have received an overwhelming amount of tourist and research questioning about themselves as Tibetans exiles. Thus, I would argue that the reason Tibetan in Dharamsala are covert about expressing their opinions on the Free Tibet or Middle Way debate is because of their awareness of their sensitive position in Dharamsala.

Tibetans in Dharamsala receive lots of attention from various medias and they have learned to become careful of how they present the “image talk” of Tibetans to the rest of the world. A long-time Tibetan resident of Dharamsala explained to me that many local Tibetans have learned to keep their distance from the foreigners. He continued,
“The people who get interviewed most are those who have newly come to Dharamsala and the political prisoners. The ones who have newly come don't know how the world really works. They have been sheltered from the global news, journalism, and way the [things] works in general. So they are eager to share their part of the story, their journey, and life in Tibet. They are just very eager, and they want to talk to every foreigner. And the political prisoners, they feel responsible too to share what they know, their experience in Tibet. The other people are government workers, and NGOs—but the high level officers are so busy that they pass down the “image talk” to the assistants. So the assistant staff ends up talking to a lot of researchers, journalists, and they get tired of similar questions.”

Hence, many Tibetans have learned to stay away from exposing their opinions but when they do want to express their opinions, or engage in “image talk”, they have to do so carefully so that they do not sound like they are speaking against the Tibetan exile leaders, the Tibetan exile community, or the Dalai Lama. Thus, a key reason for the locally expressed ambiguity and vagueness about the Free Tibet vs. Middle Way debate in Dharamsala is because of a shared responsibility to uphold Tibetan-image to the world.

However, there have been cases where the Tibetan exile community in India seemed to experience a fracture, though both Free Tibet and Middle Way parties quickly mended their public disagreements. For example, when Tibetan exile leaders first actively put forth the Middle Way policy (1999-2000), Free Tibet activists said they were hurt by the idea of not seeking complete independence anymore. One activist stated in a local newspaper, “the Tibetan word for independence, Rangzen, was effectively deleted from all official (and unofficial) communications, and our long-term cry, ‘Bod Rangzen Tzangma Yin!’ (Tibet’s independence is unquestionable!), suddenly became a dirty phrase” (Phayul, 2006). There was a sense of division within the exiled community because of these different opinions. Yet, despite this rift within the Tibetan diaspora, and the opposition between popular “Free Tibet” Tibetan organizations and Tibetan exile leaders, there has also been tolerance between the two camps.

The reason for this seemingly political harmony lies in the willingness of the two groups to show respect to the Dalai Lama and to each other. First, despite their disapproval for Umaylam or the Middle Way, Rangzen supporters have not disrupted Middle Way plans for conferences,
political speeches, and for the Dalai Lama’s high profile international public talks on the Middle Way Approach. Instead, Rangzen supporters have showed public respect and honor to the Dalai Lama on various occasions (TYC 2013, SFT 2015, International Campaign for Tibet 2015).

Second, the leaders of the Tibetan exiled community have accepted that the opposition’s ideas are part of being in a democratic community. Representing the CTA (Tibetan exile government) for the Middle Way education conference, Prof. Rinpoche said that “there was the need for divergent views and lively debates in healthy democracy whether it is independence or Middle way, both aim for the welfare of the Tibetan people” (CTA 2013).

As a result, while the debate within the Tibetan exile community over “Free Tibet vs. Middle Way” may seem like a typical matter of political oppositional parties contradicting each other, I argue that this opposition is expressed differently at the local level based on the surrounding geo-political situation. In Dharamsala, I found that the Tibetans are careful to express their opinions and political party alliances because they have to uphold the Tibetan-image before the constantly watchful eyes of the media, activists, scholars, and tourists. Therefore, their local way of expressing their political stance regarding Free Tibet or the Middle Way comes across as a tactical decision about the best way to deal with the Chinese occupation of Tibet; and one that avoids portraying the deepness of the rift within the Tibetan community. Regardless, they claim, they all have the same goal. In the U.S., on the other hand, Tibetan-Americans feel free of this responsibility for image making or “image talk”. Therefore, they are freer to speak their minds about their political stances, and even feel free to stand openly against the Tibetan exile government.

**Political Harmony in Tibetan Politics**

Despite the large volume of global media attention directed towards the Dharamsala Tibetan community and the numerous public events held by various Tibetan organizations throughout the world, political discourse within the Tibetan diaspora remains invisible or seems
homogenous. The Tibetan exile population is seen as a cohesive and homogenous group from the outside. One of the major reasons for this is due to conscious efforts of supporters of both Rangzen and Middle Way positions; they have been able to create a united and harmonious environment within the Tibetan diaspora despite the existence of opposite points of views. I argue that one of the successful results of this conscious effort for Tibetans to a show-united image has been the “Free Tibet” campaign.

For the Tibetan political cause has gained popularity in South Asia and the West (Smith and Warren 1989, Norbu 2001, Stokes 2010, WashingtonPost 2008, TheGuardian 2011, BBC 2017, CNN 2018). There is definitely much effort put into “image making” by Tibetan activists and organizations, and that is what has made the Tibetan political campaign so popular worldwide. One of the key participants in popularizing the Tibetan diaspora’s plight, of course, is the 14th Dalai Lama, and it is through his tireless efforts that the Tibetan political cause has become popular on a global scale. While I respect and recognize the Dalai Lama’s influence in popularizing the Tibetan political cause, in this section, I want to go beyond recognizing his charismatic influence. Here, I will talk about the communal effort that has formed the social movement; that is, the Tibetan political campaign that has also helped popularize the Tibetan political cause on a global scale.

*The Global Marketing of “Free Tibet”*

It has become common to see “Free Tibet” activism displayed on stickers, bags, badges, clothing and so on (PO 2014, 2015, 2016; See pictures below) in India and the U.S. “Free Tibet” activism and its swag has become so well recognized that it is even used in popular Western entertainment media (See the pictures below). Even the gift shops at the Tibetan Buddhist Monasteries in Kentucky and Indiana carry “Free Tibet” design items. And even though US monasteries (Sera, Drepung Gomang, and Gelug), as branches of the Dalai Lama’s Buddhist school of thought, should be followers of the Dalai Lama’s Middle Way policy. Moreover, it is
common to see the Tibetan flag and the Dalai Lama’s picture splashed on “Free Tibet” campaign events posters (See picture below), even though this directly contradicts the Dalai Lama’s own position of the Middle Way or Umaylam.

Despite the contradiction between Free Tibet and the Middle Way policy, holding a “Free Tibet” banner is not considered controversial or a rebellion against the Tibetan leaders or the Dalai Lama. On the other hand, one does not see many (indeed, hardly any) Tibetan political campaigns led by banners showing the “Middle Way” or Umay-lam approach. In fact, I observed that selling and purchasing these items with “Free Tibet” images on them and displaying them is seen as supporting Tibetan nationalism and the Tibetan political cause. The Free Tibet campaign widely uses the 14th Dalai Lama’s photo, and the Rangzen political camp also uses these same symbols for their political ideology (See the pictures below). Again, neither Rangzen nor Middle Way supporters, nor even the Tibetan’s various political sympathizers, see this use of imagery to represent seemingly contradictory ideas as actually in contradiction, or even in the slightest degree odd. This is all the unique effect of the “Free Tibet” campaign itself working as an empty signifier, as defined by Ernesto Laclau (2005) and I will speak about it in the section below. I should also point out that the image of the 14th Dalai Lama as an icon is being used by supporters of Free Tibet (Rangzen) as an index of their cause, as defined by Charles Sanders Peirce (1902). Even though the 14th Dalai Lama himself would be opposed to the political idea of Rangzen, the 14th Dalai Lama stands as a symbol for Tibetan political cause. On the other hand, the Tibetan Government in Exile would also uses the image of the Dalai Lama as an index of its Middle Way Policy. So the Dalai Lama, as an indexical sign, can say either position.
The Flexible Liminality of “Free Tibet” – A Theoretical Analysis

So Tibetan politics has two large camps, Rangzen and Umalyam. Most Tibetan organizations are clear about which political camp they support. However, people in the Tibetan diaspora can range in action from subtly to strongly expressive of their political expressions. Either way, however, people in the Tibetan diaspora are definitely not trying to hide their political differences. Rather, there is a much larger public political project that hides Tibetan diaspora’s internal differences. The larger political project, commonly called a “campaign” by diaspora Tibetans, is also commonly known as “Free Tibet,” and so I will be calling it the Free Tibet campaign. I would also argue that the Free Tibet campaign is a reflection of the Tibetan diaspora’s “flexible liminality.” As a result, the Free Tibet campaign has, become flexible so that it can hold within itself several different versions of Free Tibet ideology.

“Free Tibet” as an Empty Signifier

As I said above, I contend that the “Free Tibet” campaign works as an “empty signifier”, as such figures are defined by Ernesto Laclau in his book, On Populist Reason (2005). Laclau argues that populism is a political ideology where people from different schools of thoughts can come
together as a homogenous group to stand against an exploitative elite or any dangerous others. Laclau further claims that populist political discourse needs to create a populous hegemonic bloc whose unity can be based on the creation of an empty signifier (Laclau 2005). The empty signifier can be words and ideas that express a universal idea of justice and symbolize a political environment; thus, this signifier is a vague symbolic word or idea, which everybody can use to create their own individual meanings (Laclau 2005). In a way, Laclau has rediscovered what Sherry Ortner said in her 1973 American Anthropologist article on ‘key symbols’, which I will describe in detail below.

I argue that Tibetans use the “Free Tibet” campaign as an empty signifier as defined by Ernesto Laclau (2005). The Tibetan diaspora have their own diverse perspectives on the Tibetan political future, but these remain hidden from their global audience by the empty unity of the Free Tibet signifier. Consequently, the Tibetan diaspora do not have to hide their political opinions because the “Free Tibet” campaign hides it for them. Since the “Free Tibet” campaign works as an empty signifier, the meaning of free Tibet really depends on the individual thinking about the “Free Tibet” campaign, and on whether they are projecting their hopes, their fears, their security, and so on.

Moreover, that is also why we have the Chinese government claiming that Tibet is free from old feudalistic corruption, Tibetan exiles pleading for Tibetan independence from Chinese occupation, and a Tibetan exile government trying to negotiate with China to gain autonomy over geographical Tibetan land. For all of these different parties is either asking for a “Free Tibet” or else claiming that there already is a “Free Tibet.” Here, the Free Tibet campaign becomes an empty vessel ready to be filled by several different ideologies and groups. Sometimes, the “Free Tibet” becomes a unifying symbol where the different Tibetan political opinions come together under a unifying umbrella of “Free Tibet”; and other times, “Free Tibet” used by the Chinese becomes a politically defensive mechanism for the Chinese nation-state for Tibetan occupation by China.
However, I argue that “Free Tibet” is not a completely empty signifier because it allows members to fill it in with ideologies that support Tibetan political independence, cultural promotion, and Tibetan Buddhism. Even though “Free Tibet” is an empty vessel, it has restrictions about is representable, and so the “Free Tibet” symbol seems to represent both a dichotomy and a continuum within the political ideologies of the Tibetan diaspora.

Despite this political difference within the Tibetan exile community, both political camps have time and again mended their disagreements, as discussed above. The Tibetan exile leaders disapprove of the Rangzen organization’s activism but they have been passive in regards to the activities carried out by the Rangzen group. I contend that even without the watchful eyes of the media, Tibetans of opposing political camps do respect each other; they are not simply making creative comments to preserve their image on media. Instead, the two Tibetan political camps are finding creative ways to co-exist alongside each other and that is what we find reflective in the media. As I have argued above, this also shows why, though there is still disagreement between the two parties about the proper way to approach the Tibetan political cause, both camps remain respectful of each other and tolerant, even if disapproving, of each other’s activities.

“Free Tibet” – a Summarizing Symbol and a Consensus Framework

While I am making an argument that the “Free Tibet” campaign is an empty signifier, where the campaign just reflects whatever an individual may want to see in it, the people involved in the Tibetan political cause may not think so. The Free Tibet campaign, regardless of its contradictions and complexity, means something to the people who follow it. It is not simply a carefree individual’s blind plight that forms into the Free Tibet campaign. For the people in the Tibetan political movement, whether they are in the Middle Way camp, or the Rangzen camp, or a neutral party simply supporting the Tibetan diaspora, the “Free Tibet” campaign has come to stand as a central symbol for all encompassing events related towards the support of the Tibetan diaspora. In order to elaborate these perspectives, I want to use two different theories that
resonate with the “Free Tibet” campaign – first, Sherry Ortner’s summarizing symbol (1972), and second, Patrick Mooney and Scott Hunt’s (2009) notion of sharp and flat keys.

Ortner (1972) argues that summarizing symbols are those that become compact sacred symbols for a community. Such a symbol could range from a physical item, like a national flag, to words that pull members into some kind of communal commitment. Ortner also calls this a ‘catalyzed feeling’ for members, one where they are all feeling a commitment of the same item. However, Ortner also says that while such summarizing symbols work to pull people towards the same community, what they are committing to may not be the same, or, simply, not relevant to that unity. For example, a national flag may mean different things to different people, but it still works to bring an entire citizenry under the same umbrella of nationalism. Similarly, Free Tibet works as a summarizing symbol for the Tibetan diaspora because it brings the entire Tibetan diaspora and its supporters under the same umbrella. However, Free Tibet does not mean the same to all participants. Regardless of this, however, and in terms of summarizing symbol theory, this variety in perception of Free Tibet does not matter; what matters is that all members of the Tibetan community are feeling a commitment towards the Free Tibet community.

Looking at Free Tibet from another angle, there is Mooney and Hunt’s (2009) argument that something called a consensus framework is a strategy used by an organization to lead a campaign without causing opposition. Tibetan political organizations, I think, are using just such a consensus framework in “Free Tibet” to put all Tibetan political activities, both Rangzen and Umaylam motivated events, under its one banner. The Rangzen groups also receive a large following of Tibetans and foreigners despite their radical activist (sometimes even non-Buddhist) events and their direct opposition to the Dalai Lama’s Middle Way or Umaylam position. The Dalai Lama’s Middle Way Policy or Umaylam followers also use a “Free Tibet” catch phrase to promote their version of the Tibetan political cause. Furthermore, as Mooney and Hunt (2009) explain, there can be two keys for every such ‘frame’: a flat key and a sharp key. The sharp key is, in their model, is the dominant interpretation of the frame; and the flat key is, hence, the
alternative interpretation of the frame. In the case of the “Free Tibet” frame, the sharp key is embodied by the Rangzen group, who state that China needs to completely abandon the occupancy of Tibet; whereas, the flat key is that of the Dalai Lama’s Middle Way or Umaylam followers who say that China can still rule over Tibet as long as local governance is handed over to the Tibetan exile government. Within the cover of “Free Tibet”, then, the Rangzen group can ask for their completely free Tibet while the Umaylam group can seek their middle path to fulfill the needs of both the Chinese and Tibetan people while, in the end, still achieving a free Tibet. In other words despite the existence of several competing versions of “Free Tibet,” a Mooney and Hunt consensus frame has enabled all Tibetan political activities and activists to seem homogenous and non-conflicting.

The Free Tibet campaign, therefor, is an excellent example of the flexible nature of the Tibetan diaspora, which I will explain in detail in the next chapter in which I describe their flexible liminality further. For now, I argue the flexible liminality of Tibetans can be characterized as the Tibetan diaspora’s ability to adjust to any situation, people, and geo-politics that confront them. For example, Tibetan Buddhism is a form of tantric Mahayana Buddhism that mainly focuses on monastic practitioners, or monks, when it comes to attaining enlightenment; but it has come to be known in the West as perfectly aligned with the Western liberal values of community development, women’s rights, environmental rights, animal rights, human rights, and individual self-actualization. So Tibetan Buddhism has become both the traditional school of tantric Mahayana, and the Western liberal philosophy. In another case, Tibetans living in Dharamsala had a good understanding of Western cultural norms, as well as a good understanding of Indian cultural norms. So, while Indian and western tourists had difficulty bridging cultural differences between each other, Tibetans could mingle easily with the Western tourists and live under the same roof with their Indian neighbors (See Chap 4). Hence, I argue that Tibetans in diaspora have developed a unique form of cultural flexibility, which I call
flexible liminality. This is the very reason they are able to construct a global political campaign like the “Free Tibet” campaign.

The “Free Tibet” campaign is a flexible entity; it is an embodiment of the Tibetan diaspora’s flexible liminality. I argue that the Tibetans or their supporters never had to explain their true thoughts related to Free Tibet because the campaign itself shifts and adjusts to everybody’s needs. Until examined closely, the Free Tibet campaign may function as a human rights movement, or a socialist justice movement, or an anti-China movement, or a pro-China movement, or a Buddhist religious rights movement. Until the contradictions are no longer overwhelming, all politically active Tibetans can view the Free Tibet movement as a summarizing symbol of their diaspora, a unifying signification that pacifies the interests of all parties. As a result, from the outside, the “Free Tibet” campaign looks like a homogenous political movement.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that despite the general acceptance of the “Free Tibet” campaign as a tagline for Tibetan political activism, there is more to it. The “Free Tibet” campaign, in its original form, only spoke to one of the popular Tibetan exile political camps, the Rangzen, which seeks the complete independence of Tibet from China. The other Tibetan exile political camp, the Middle Way Policy, was introduced by the Dalai Lama and is largely accepted by Tibetan leadership and the Dalai Lama’s religious monasteries. However, over time, “Free Tibet” has come to stand for any Tibetan exile population related event or campaign – whether run by the Rangzen or by the Middle Way camp. Hence, my argument that the “Free Tibet” campaign has become an empty signifier as described by Laclau (2005); an open cup into which individual Tibetans and their supporters may pour their various hopes and dreams about Tibet.

However, I also realize that supporters of the “Free Tibet” campaign do not really share the same aims; and thus, I argue, that for such members, and when looked at it from the
perspective of those within this social movement, “Free Tibet” has become also a summarizing symbol as described by Ortner (1972), and a consensus framework as described by Mooney and Hunt (2009). Here, that is, members have come to accept the all-encompassing slogan of “Free Tibet” for all their forms of Tibetan exile related political activism, and despite their own knowledge of the contradictory ideologies of its members. For “Free Tibet” brings all Tibetan exile related activities under one umbrella. As a result, Tibetan political activities, ideologies, and efforts can seem homogenous to outsiders, even though they are not. I contend, further, that it is the flexible liminality practiced by diaspora Tibetans that, has transformed “Free Tibet” into a flexible entity. In this way “Free Tibet” has come to represent a variety of contradicting ideologies as if they form one united front of Tibetan political activism.
Chapter 6: “Tibetan-ness”- The Tibetan Exile’s Journey to the West

I was video chatting with my Tibetan friend, Phurbu (the same Tibetan man I introduced in Chapter 1), in Dharamsala after coming back to the United States. We were sharing things about ourselves that had happened since I moved from Dharamsala. I am offering this particular snippet of our conversation here because it depicts the confusion the “refugee” category holds for Tibetan exiles.

Sneha: I work at a refugee resettlement office now. So, I help newly arrived refugees get settled in in the U.S.
Phurbu: Have you met any Tibetan refugees there?
Sneha: No… because the U.S. government doesn’t recognize Tibetans as refugees, so I don’t see any Tibetans here.
Phurbu: Oh… that’s right.
Sneha: Yeah… Since the first batch of Tibetans in 1990s, the U.S. government hasn’t resettled any other.
Phurbu: Ah yes, yes, I remember now.
[Pause…]
Sneha: From what I know, I think most Tibetans just apply for asylum when they get to the U.S. So, they don’t go through a government resettlement agency like this one.
Phurbu: That’s true, true. Some of my friends did that.
Sneha: Do you know the asylum process? I mean, if you want to come to the U.S. later how will you go through with it?
Phurbu: I have my family who lives in the Jersey area so if I want to come to the U.S., I will just come through them.
Sneha: Oh okay, it will be nice if you came to the U.S.
Phurbu: Yeah [laughing] it will be nice. We will see about it. I am also thinking of leaving Dharamsala…

Introduction

The Tibetan exile community casually recognizes and calls themselves “refugees” because this has become a commonplace identity for Tibetans exiles living in India – I will discuss this more in the sections below. However, calling oneself a refugee is quite different from being recognized as a refugee by an international organization like the United Nations or host countries. Tibetan exiles are not recognized as refugees in their main host country, India, and

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54 UNHCR states, “A refugee is someone who has been forced to flee his or her country because of persecution, war, or violence. A refugee has a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group” (UN Geneva Convention 1951, UN Protocol 1967).
neither has the UN-India led any initiative to approve Tibetan exiles refugee status. This chapter will explore why the Tibetan exile community self-proclaims their refugee identity, and will explicate the peculiar style of Tibetan nationalism Tibetans use to justify their refugee or victimized identity. Additionally, I will also talk about the dark side of liminality that Tibetan exiles experience due to their stateless status in India, and alternative methods used by Tibetan exiles to substitute for the refugee resettlement services they are denied in western countries.

In this chapter, I will explain two key aspects of the Tibetan exile “refugee-hood” experience. First, there is the effect of legal and bureaucratic work on the liminality of Tibetan exiles in India (including, Nepal) where they must live as neither “citizens” nor “refugees” (UN Convention 1951). To illustrate this I will convey stories of the struggles of Tibetans to attain asylum in the U.S. As a comparison to the Tibetan exile’s story of immigration and resettlement in the U.S., I will also introduce the resettlement story of a UNHCR refugee from South Africa. My exploration of these two stories will help us to understand where differences between the forms of liminality experienced by these two groups began. Second, I will introduce the unique form of Tibetan nationalism – called Tibetan-ness – that Tibetans use to externalize their victimized identity, and retaliate against China’s narrative that Tibet was never an independent state.

I have argued in previous chapters that the ability of Tibetan exiles to adjust their cultural practices to the influences of multiple nation-states has garnered them better life chances. However, flexible liminality is not a magic lamp that equally endows all Tibetan exiles with better life chances, and, in fact, some Tibetan exiles have been caught in very inflexible situations because of their liminal status. The very nature of liminality, as described by Victor Turner, is dangerous: or, as he puts it, “frequently likened to death, to being in the womb, to invisibility, to darkness, to bisexuality, to wilderness, and to an eclipse of the sun or moon” (Turner 1961: 95).

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55 Even though Tibetan exiles are not legally refugees, I use the term “refugee-hood” and “exile-ness” to illustrate their experience living as displaced population in foreign-host countries.
In other words, liminality relates to a radical segregation from regular society, and for an individual, it frequently provokes the feeling of social death or invisibility from others in the regular society. It is unusual; therefore, to find a social group like Tibetan exiles that both experience liminality and use this marginalized status to gain better life chances. Yet it is through liminality that Tibetan exiles have gained opportunities that are not available to other non-Tibetan populations. Regardless, liminality does not protect all Tibetan exiles from the oppressive nature of liminality. In this chapter, I will also shed some light on the geo-political influences on flexible liminality that allow some Tibetan exiles to gain better life chances even as others are left behind in perpetual liminality.

I have two goals for this chapter – first, to show how the Chinese government’s narrative that Tibet was never an independent state plays a huge role in the lives of the Tibetan exile community. The international community (UN, India, and the U.S.), out of deference to China, has barred the Tibetan exile population from being recognized as having refugee status (HRLN 2007; Talmon 1999; Hess 2009; Brauen 2011; Artiles 2009); and this has assured them perpetual hardship when it comes to attaining stable citizenship status, or even the identification of having Tibetan heritage (Nowak 1984; Vahali 2009; Diehl 2002; Mishra 2014). Previously, I have talked about Tibetan exile dreams of going abroad for a better life and of representing the Tibetan cause on a global scale. Here, I will talk about the factors that affect the Tibetan exile’s ability to resettle in Western nation-states and to take up the responsibility to advocate for the Tibetan political cause. This chapter will talk about the journey of Tibetans who are attempting to resettle in western countries; those who have recently arrived in the U.S., and the process Tibetans go through to become U.S. citizens.

Second, I will show how Tibetans who have resettled in the U.S. are affected by the Chinese government’s narrative, and how they attempt to preserve their Tibetan identity in the U.S. Tibetans in the U.S. see their legal citizenship as a powerful tool to bring them closer to their home country of Tibet; but at the same time, many Tibetans also have much difficulty
establishing their Tibetan identity to others in the U.S. (Hess 2009). This chapter will convey the stories of Tibetans living in the U.S. and their words of struggle and of finding success as first- and second-generation migrants making their way to living transnational lives as Tibetan-Americans.

Not Refugees

Tibetan exiles are caught in the complex geo-politics that go on between India, China, and the Western nation-states (U.S., Canada, France, Australia etc.). I have stated before that this is one of the two factors influencing the Tibetan exile practice of flexible liminality. One of the most influential geo-polities shaping the Tibetan exile experience is China, and the Chinese government’s narrative claim that Tibet was never an independent state\(^{56}\), which is why the international community does not recognize Tibetan exiles as “refugee”. The UN grants refugee status to migrant groups who can prove that they are being persecuted in their home country and hence are forced to flee the country (UN Convention 1951; UN Protocol 1967). However, if the Chinese government claims that there is no need for Tibetans to flee their home country, then, their reasoning for forced migration disappears. Which is why, Tibetans are disqualified from UN’s definition of refugee category.

The consequence of not being recognized as refugees by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), or as a “victimized population” by the host country, is that the exile group loses UNHCR’s umbrella of services and humanitarian assistance provided by the host country. In India, often Indian politicians symbolically call Tibetan exiles “refugees” but that does not mean that India has legally granted them the status of refugees or asylum-

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seekers (See Chap 2 for more detail) (The Guardian 2014). Tibetan exiles have not been recognized as refugees from the United Nations because the Chinese government claims that Tibet was never an independent country, and the Chinese nation-state always had some type of governance over the Tibetan state even prior to the complete occupation of Tibet in 1950s (PRC White Paper 1992) 57. Thus, Tibetan exiles in India (including Nepal) are not recognized as refugees. I argue that despite, or even because of, these geo-political complexities, the Tibetan exile community has managed to craft their experience of liminality for better life chances (HRLN 2007; Frechette 2004; Nowak 1984). I will first describe the geo-politics surrounding the Tibetan exile community and how it shapes their liminality. Next, I will show the various ways that Tibetan exiles are attempting to overcome the shortcomings caused by their liminality.

Usually, any host country has the legal ability to extend humanitarian support to a displaced population that qualifies for refugees or asylum-seeker status. This they do if those in question cannot return to their home-country due to fear of persecution, for this qualifies the population for the host country’s humanitarian assistance under international law (UN Convention 1951; UN Protocol 1967). Tibetan exiles in India are not recognized as refugees and they are treated as “foreigners” in the country, albeit foreigners who enjoy the freedom to live, work, and travel within the country (TJC 2011; Artiles 2009; HRLN 2007; Bhatia 2002). Indeed, India has given Tibetan exiles more freedom than it provides any other refugee group in the country. India has graciously accepted the Tibetan exiles since 1959, and has been sympathetic to

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Tibetan residents in India, but they have never openly opposed China’s claim that Tibet was never an independent state.\(^{58}\)

On the other hand, not being recognized as refugees deters Tibetan exiles from attaining stable citizenship in most foreign countries because, legally, Tibetan exiles are seen as regular foreign tourists, not as a persecuted or displaced population (Hess 2009). Similar to this Indian government policy, other western nation-states that are sympathetic towards Tibet (e.g. Switzerland, Australia, Canada, U.S., France and so on) have also only accepted Tibetans as displaced people, not as legal refugees (Hess 2009; Prost 2006). In the United States, Tibetans have only once been accepted in a wave of 1000 displaced people (not refugees) in 1992; since then, all other Tibetans going to the U.S. have resettled via the asylum-seeker (not refugees) or family reunion category (Hess 2009). I will speak about the difference between asylum-seeker and refugee more in detail later in the chapter. Similar to India, the U.S. does not want to jeopardize their political relationship with China, and so, the U.S. also has never rejected China’s narrative about Tibet.

Tibetan exiles are unable to access refugee status from the UNHCR because the Tibetan exile community cannot show the UNHCR that Tibet was an independent country before Chinese occupation (DIIR 2018; See Tibetan government in exile’s report here https://tibet.net/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/DIIR_report_2018-web.pdf.). China’s deterrent claim that Tibet was never an independent country halts all argument for legal refugee status for Tibetans (DIIR 2018). There are several scholarly and legal forms of evidence pointing towards the independence of the Tibetan state, legitimate governance over the Tibetans, and the forceful Chinese occupation of Tibet (Schaik 2010; McGranahan 2010; Goldstein 1989, 2012; von Furter-Haimendorf 1990). However, China argues that Tibet was never an independent country, that Tibet was always under larger territorial governance of foreign neighboring states like Mongolia, and Qing Dynasty

\(^{58}\) India does not accept Tibetans as refugees to maintain its Sino-Indo relationship. India has never opposed China by claiming that Tibet was an independent country (TJC 2011; HRLN 2007; Bhatia 2002; Talmon 1998; McConnell 2011)
(current People’s Republic of China), which further shows that the Chinese Communist Party only took over the direct governance of the Tibetan area in 1959 to improve the quality of life of people living in it (Schaik 2010; Goldstein 2007; Shakya 1991; Nowak 1984). Consequently, today, if Tibetans do decide to leave the Tibetan region of China and live in foreign countries for prolonged periods, it is marked as their individual decision to do so. China claims that their country considers Tibetans to be Chinese citizens, not victims of colonization or cultural genocide.

**Liminality in India**

The nation-states hosting Tibetan exiles need to walk a fine line between keeping good relations with China and sympathizing with the Tibetan exile population. As mentioned above, India has not recognized Tibetans as a victimized population but has allowed Tibetans to stay in India as honorary foreign guests (TJC 2011; HRLN 2007; Bhatia 2002; Talmon 1998; McConnell 2011). This means that India does not have to provide military protection and humanitarian support that it is obligated to provide towards other refugee groups like Tamil refugees, Afghani refugees, and Burmese (Myanmar) refugees (Artiles 2009; HRLC 2007). As a result, life for Tibetan exiles is comparatively better than for other refugees. That said, being stateless foreign residents means that Tibetans in India cannot live their lives to the fullest as citizens nor can they rely on international organizations for resettlement, as can other refugees. Let me portray the liminality of Tibetan exile life through my interviewees’ stories.

One of my interviewees from Dharamsala is Tenzin. She seemed to me like a friendly person. I met Tenzin at Dharamsala’s marketplace where she was working at a tourist shop as a sales person. Tenzin had good spoken English, and although we couldn’t socialize much in person due to her work hours, we exchanged WhatsApp numbers, so we could stay in touch. Tenzin is in her late 20s and is the oldest of her siblings. She remains active on social media, so
we were able to stay in touch even after I came back to the U.S. I asked her for an interview via
WhatsApp and she was eager to share her story for my research work. Tenzin said,

“I have MA in Economics from Madras [reputed University in South India] but cannot
get a job to my qualification because they ask for citizenship papers, and a passport,
which I don't have, they don't agree with my RC and ID card. Fortunately, I got a sales
position here [Dharamsala] but the pay is low…My youngest brother only had completed
10th standard and he joined the army because we couldn’t afford his further studies, [in a
small voice] he wanted to continue his studies – but he sacrificed his [career] life for our
family.”

I had noticed from my fieldwork that many young Tibetans in India (including Nepal),
like Tenzin, aspire to go abroad to earn a better income and support their families. Tenzin was
slowly saving money to apply for travel documents to either U.S. or Canada because she had
school friends who could help her in those countries.

Additionally, many of my interviewees expressed that they only feel safe around the
Tibetan settlements in India like Dharamsala or Majnu ka tilla in New Delhi. There were several
horror stories of corrupt police and border patrolers threating Tibetan lives. One interviewee was
a middle age Tibetan woman who recounted a horrifying event that occurred while she was
traveling to Nepal. My Tibetan friend and I were chatting at a café when a middle-age woman
walking home called my friend’s name. When my friend asked her to recall her story for me, the
middle-aged woman started telling her story in Tibetan and my friend translated this into English
for me. The middle-aged woman was travelling with her four children to Kathmandu to meet her
elderly mother. She said at every Indian border she had to pay Rs 200-Rs 500 to get past the
border patrol. She said,

“They asked for identification paper, I showed them my RC but this meant nothing to
them, [sigh] they even wanted to tear my RC in front of me. So after [a] long time saying
please, please, and finally negotiating [signaling money with her hand], they let me go
through. This happened at every station. Finally, when I saw my mother, I hugged her
and we cried together for a long time.”

The RC and ID cards for Tibetans are the main forms of identity paperwork Tibetans must hold,
but the lack of mainstream recognition of these documents by Indian officials puts Tibetans in a
vulnerable position (Artiles 2009; TJC 2011; HRLN 2007; Bhatia 2002; McConell 2011). The lack of citizenship rights marks Tibetans in India as outcasts in dire need of legal protection, whether for travel, employment or education. Thus, some Tibetans, like the ones I spoke to, feel desperate to get to western countries for a better quality of life for themselves and their family. However, it is not easy for Tibetans to obtain access to the U.S. There are only certain channels through which Tibetan exiles can manage to go abroad: family, educational institutes, and employment sponsorships. So, if the Tibetans do not have established American sponsorship partners willing to ‘pull’ Tibetans into the U.S., they cannot get into the U.S. Many foreigners living in the U.S. are asked by Tibetans in India and Nepal to help them get to the U.S.

Below is a social media conversation I had with a middle-aged Tibetan monk after I had come back to the U.S. from India. I had become close friends with this monk while teaching him English in Dharamsala. He looked like he was in his 50s and spoke fondly of his dream to go to the U.S. someday. His main monastery is in Nepal and, after attaining the highest degree possible, he spends his days now travelling to Tibetan areas in South India, Delhi, and Dharamsala. Whenever we spoke, he spoke a little in English and rest in Nepali and Hindi. I could understand him when we spoke in person, but on online chat, his writings took a little while for me to understand. The monk friend had to rely a lot on online translation software to write in English so his sentences may not be very clear below. I could understand his writing from having several personal conversations prior to our online communication.

[This conversation occurred after exchanging short chat about our health, weather, and work]

Monk friend: I am no money. What I do.
Sneha: Money is always a problem. I know!!
Monk friend: I will come USA? Your help me!!!!
Sneha: Sorry friend! I am not a U.S. citizen I cannot help you come to the U.S… Maybe I can help you somehow when I am in India or Nepal? Maybe your monastery can help you with sponsorship?
[Pause in chat for over 20 minutes]
Monk friend: Ok. have a great day. Bye. Bye. I am sleeping.
Sneha: Okay Good Night
Monk friend: Thanks, my sweet friend.
I observed that it was not easy for Tibetans living in India (as well as in Nepal) without legal paperwork or stable income sources to apply for travel visas to western countries. Many Tibetans (like my monk friend mentioned above) cannot even get foreign people or institutes to sponsor them. This is the ugly truth of living a liminal life for Tibetan exiles. I argue that it is a commendable effort of Tibetan exiles to seek better life chances even in the face of prolonged liminality and minimal citizenship rights. This is what makes the flexible liminality of Tibetan exiles a unique and valuable condition. Despite the struggle, I heard several success stories of Tibetans who acquired scholarships in American Universities or obtained job offers in American businesses, and many came to the U.S. with the aid of naturalized-American family support. In order to better understand the factors influencing flexible liminality, I will present the case study of Tibetans who have migrated to the U.S. and of the Tibetan-Americans who are balancing their Tibetan identity as a duty to their family and the exile government.

_Liminality in the United States_

The short conversation I recounted with Phurbu at the beginning of this chapter showed how Tibetan exiles themselves often do not know the legality behind the term refugee. I observed that the geo-political complexity of the Tibetan exile community, and the legality of being a target refugee population, remains invisible, even to Tibetans. In the United States, Tibetan exiles do not fall under the category of refugees; similar to their situation in India, they are not seen as a victimized population. Many Tibetans are able to resettle in the U.S., however, by going through sponsorships to travel to the U.S., and then seeking the asylum-seeker\(^59\) status. Unlike refugees resettled by the UNHCR, asylum seekers have to physically arrive in the U.S. territory and only

\(^59\) According to the UNHCR, and under the current law of the United States the definition of Asylum-seekers is as follows: a person may qualify for asylum within the United States if that person can demonstrate that he or she has been persecuted or can show a ‘credible fear’ of future persecution because of his or her political opinion, race, nationality, religion, or membership in a social group (UNHCR 1961, USCIS 2018)
then prove their vulnerable situation to the U.S. government\textsuperscript{60}. Moreover, as asylum-seekers they do not have any rights or benefits until their petition is accepted and they gain the status of Asylee (TJC 2011). I argue that despite the difficulty in gaining travel permits to get to the West, or even resettle in the West, the Tibetan exile community have crafted avenues for individual Tibetans to be able to resettle in the West. I will describe the creative avenues channeled by the Tibetan exile community for migration and resettlement to the U.S.

The 2009 CTA (Tibetan exile government) census revealed that there are approximately 10,000 people in the U.S. who claim Tibetan heritage (CTA Planning Commission 2009; U.S. census 2010). However, most Tibetans are skeptical towards the census report because, as many mentioned to me, they know several Tibetans living the U.S. who are in the process of acquiring their permanent residency or asylum. The number revealed in the official census statistics is generally of people who have legally acquired citizenship or permanent residency in the U.S. and does not cover the population of Tibetans who are still in the process of gaining permanent residency in the U.S. Thus, the number of actual Tibetans living in the U.S. in 2018 can be safely said to be above 10,000. The main migration stream provided for Tibetan exiles was the 1990s Tibetan U.S. Resettlement Program (TUSRP) where the first 1000 Tibetans were invited to resettle in the U.S. These 1000 Tibetan migrants to the U.S. were also called “anchor relatives” because they were expected to invite their immediate family (spouse and children under 21 years) to resettle in the U.S. after they had become U.S. citizens (NYTimes 1991; Hess 2009).

Even today, many Tibetans who have resettled in the U.S use the same process of family migration. The most common answer I received to “how did you come to the U.S.?” was, “I came through my parents/mother/father,” or, “I came through my husband/wife,” or, “I came through

\textsuperscript{60} It should be noted that after January 2018, there have been changes in U.S. asylum seeker application process implemented by the U.S. President Trump. However, I conducted my interviews and research before this, while the changes were still being implemented; therefore, my participants had some idea of changes that were about to occur to asylum seeker application but were not sure what would change. My participants’ answers relied on the asylum seeker application process prior to changes from the Trump Administration.
my sister/brother.” It is difficult to find statistics about methods of resettlement for Tibetans in the U.S. but, from speaking to my Tibetan interlocutors, most seem to have found their way in the U.S. via their immediate family network. The government calls this type of resettlement in the U.S. “family reunion.” Anybody who is a U.S. citizen, permanent resident, or a refugee/asylee can seek to sponsor their immediate family to become a U.S. resident and, eventually a citizen. They do not come under the same category as refugees or asylee, and they simply must have immediate family members (Parents, Siblings, Children, Spouse) who are U.S. citizen or residents.

The next type of resettlement of Tibetans is through the asylum-seeker category. As mentioned above, the asylum seekers have to be physically present in the U.S. There are several ways that Tibetan exiles have pursued opportunities to arrive in the U.S. – student visas (F1), religious visas (R1/R2), tourist visas (B2), and employment visas (H1B); full list of the visa types can be found here https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas.html.

It is not easy to acquire these visas; even a Tibetan scholar or a religious clerk (Tibetan monks/nuns) must be vetted by a U.S. institution, such as Buddhist monastery or religious/educational institutions, and invited to come to the U.S. This is considered to be a highly prestigious event. One of my interviewees, Mingma, had just finished her first year in a U.S. university. I came to know Mingma through other Tibetan friends who were also alumni of the same university as her. Mingma is in her early 20s; she had a cheerful personality and aspires to use her skills to become a nurse. She explained that she was the first of her seven siblings to attain such high level of education successfully. She told me that her short-term goal is to apply for Asylum status and get U.S. citizenship as soon as possible so she could sponsor her younger siblings for higher education in the U.S. Mingma explained,

“I was always a very good student, I even got into Delhi University in scholarship, you know it is a very competitive place to get in. But I got rejected from so many U.S. colleges. For two years, I kept trying and when I was ready to give up then, I heard back from [XYZ] college saying I was accepted. I was so happy! ...I want to help my younger brothers and sisters to come here too”
Even after getting all the paperwork ready, it is an uphill battle to prove your intent to migrate to the U.S. embassy in India and Nepal to get a U.S. visa. From what I gathered, many Tibetans were failing to acquire visas even after they had spent a large amount of money on applications and travel. I was able to speak with Martha, a staff member at a Buddhist monastery in Louisville. She was helping Tibetan monks at a Buddhist Monastery in Louisville acquire R1 visas to do Buddhism tours. The same monks from the monastery in South India have been visiting the Buddhist monastery in Louisville since 2002 for regular sacred tours of the U.S. But, Martha said,

“since 2017 we have been having a hard time getting monks for our Buddhism tour. Even before, it used to be difficult getting visa for the monks, but now it’s like impossible. There are always the same 9 monks who come for our tour, and in 2017, only one got the approval for a visa… [Sighing in disbelief] so we had to cancel the whole event.”

After all these bureaucratic trials, when Tibetans can finally get to the U.S., there are various organizations and Tibetan social support groups that help Tibetans go through the process of being an asylum-seeker. When talking to Tibetans, they said they had help from family and friends who had earlier gone through the process and who helped them network with organizations that could help newly arrived Tibetans. I learned that most Tibetan non-profit organizations in the U.S., no matter their organization’s stated purpose, would go out of their way to help newly arrived Tibetans to assimilate and find lawyers for their asylum applications. I was able to gather a better understanding about the application and bureaucratic process of asylum seeking from the people’s stories I found on legal websites like that maintained by the Tibetan Justice Center (http://www.tibetjustice.org/?page_id=68). Some of the sample petitions available online for Tibetans to use were anywhere from 30-35 pages long, detailing the asylum-seeker’s life history and why they fear returning back to the Tibetan-Chinese territory. One common theme was that every single asylum-seeker’s case is different. Even though one may have the
same background and travel history, nobody could guarantee that Tibetan asylum-seekers would get approved for asylum.

According to other Tibetans who had gone through this process, it is better to get an immigration lawyer willing to work pro-bono for the Tibetan cause. Additionally, they said, the entire process is very complicated and could take anywhere from two months to two years.

Tenzin and her husband came with college scholarships, and right after they graduated from college (before their student visa expired) they applied for asylum together through a lawyer willing to work pro-bono for Tibetans in the U.S. Tenzin said,

“We applied for citizenship through asylum status in the state of California right after college. We went through it okay but...there are others who are just stuck in the process of asylum and they are just waiting and waiting forever... We had to stay with my family members until then with no other place to go. It’s so difficult to even talk about it, I just want to forget that situation.”

In the United States, Tibetan exiles do not fall into the category of refugees; and, similar to in India, they are not seen as a ‘victimized population’ under the UN definition. Only once has the U.S. government extended an official helping hand towards Tibetan exiles. Ed Bednar, NYC Director of Refugee Services, was moved by the Dalai Lama’s speech in 1979, and convinced Massachusetts Congressman Rodney Barker to help bring Tibetans from India and Nepal as displaced people (Howe 1991, Hess 2009). In 1990, Congressman Barney Frank was able to pass a bill (1990 U.S. Immigration Act section 134), which allowed 1000 Tibetans from India and Nepal to resettle in the U.S. as displaced people (Howe 1991, Hess 2009). This resettlement act was called the Tibetan United States Resettlement Program (TUSRP). The Immigration Act required showing the migrants as self-sufficient immigrants and not dependent refugees. In other words, Tibetans would not receive any U.S. federal funding or the government services that are given to legal refugees resettled in the U.S. for the first 3-8 months after their arrival (Hess 2009). As a result, the TUSRP relied upon the idea of “cluster sites communities” for Tibetan migrants; and they were required to have a job offer, English-language tutoring, and housing arrangement,
all prior to their arrival to the U.S. (Howe 1991, Hess 2009). These pre-arrival arrangements for Tibetan migrants, however, were made possible by Tibetan exile government support, by various Tibetan support organizations, and by volunteers from U.S. communities who opened their homes to the new migrants (Howe 1991, Hess 2009).

TUSRP has been the largest migration program to bring Tibetan exiles to the West at one time, and since then, no other official U.S. government support has been extended towards the Tibetan exile population. Prior to that, in 1988 the U.S. Congress passed a bill to sponsor displaced Tibetan students to study in American universities called the Tibetan Scholarship Program (TSP) (U.S. Department of State, 2010). As of April 2010, 364 Tibetan students have acquired entry to an American University through the TSP program (Yeshi 2012; TSP 2010) I have been told that currently the conventional method for Tibetans wanting to settle in the U.S. is, first, to legally arrive in the U.S. via various foreign visas (student, travel, tourist, employer etc.), and then apply for asylum-seeker status. The other methods for Tibetans to acquire permanent residency are by marrying a U.S. citizen, going through the channel of family reunion, or by getting sponsorship from an employing institution or affiliated religious institute.

These Tibetans exile stories of migration and resettlement in the U.S. are very different from what occurs with UNHCR recognized refugees. In order to show how different this can be, I will introduce a story of Daniel, a UNHCR recognized refugee. In doing so, I will be directly comparing the resettlement stories of Tibetan exiles to a UNHCR refugee to show the true difference between calling oneself a refugee and being officially recognized as a refugee. My aim is to portray the creative infrastructure of migration and resettlement that has been built by the Tibetan exile community to compensate for their exclusion from the structured bureaucratic refugee resettlement infrastructure that guides UNHCR recognized refugees.
UNHCR Refugee Resettlement

I worked as a caseworker (2016) and interpreter (2016-2018) at a refugee resettlement agency in Kentucky as part of my ethnographic research for the doctoral program. The refugee resettlement agencies, like the one I was involved in, work on behalf of the US government in lieu of the larger resettlement agencies to help newly arrived refugees to resettlement in a particular city. During my time at the refugee resettlement agency, I was able to develop close relationships with staff, volunteers/interns, and refugees who were actively involved in the agency. For example, I developed a close working relationship with a staff member, Daniel. After learning his story, I asked Daniel if could interview him and he agreed.

Daniel is a Congolese-American man who was resettled in Lexington, KY from South Africa. I had come to know Daniel as a kind and helpful person at the resettlement agency. He was always dressed nicely and liked to chat with me about various social theories on diaspora. He was always there to interpret and help other refugee clients from Central Africa during office hours at the Louisville resettlement agency. Daniel came to the U.S. in 2001 after the Congolese militia targeted his family. Today, Daniel is a well-respected staff member at the refugee resettlement agency. Some of his close friends at work call him a nerd for his perpetual delight in conversations about social theories.

In 2000, Daniel fled his hometown in Congo for South Africa in order to have a better life and political freedom. In South Africa, he first submitted his application as an asylum seeker to South African Homeland Security. Here he had to pledge for his case and wait until the judge looked at his petition. Daniel explained the paper work process to me

“The government gave me a document stating that I was an asylum-seeker in the country and until the government approved me as an asylum, I had to renew this document. But I had also stated that I wanted to be resettled in either U.S. or Canada; I knew [a] few friends and family members who had gone there. So, the government also had to wait around for the UNHCR to pick my case. Since I was a single guy, no family behind, I knew I had a long wait.”
Daniel knew his case could take anywhere from 6 months to 2 years, but his case got called in sooner than he anticipated. He found out that his uncle was almost kidnapped by the Congolese militia and had had to escape to South Africa as well. Daniel said, “then, just in one night, the South African Police took us under high protection status. We were told to pack up our bags and leave for a remote town to live incognito until the UNHCR was able to arrange our resettlement process.” Daniel and his uncle’s status were changed to the refugee category because of the newly manifested evidence of their victimhood, and the UNHCR program subsequently resettled them. Daniel’s uncle was higher up on the list for resettlement, so his uncle migrated to the U.S. within two months. Daniel, on the other hand, had to wait for another five months until his number was called for resettlement. Daniel said,

“There were refugee services, just like our[s], in South Africa. Imagine I was young, alone, and waiting without anything, the refugee services there helped me. I am forever in debt to them. That is why I work at the resettlement agency here, I think it is my duty to give back what I received. It is also my academic and professional activist pursuit that brings me to work every single day to help other refugees.”

From my fieldwork at a refugee resettlement agency, I soon learned the rest of the bureaucratic process that Daniel would have had to go through. Once the UNHCR approves the case, the local resettlement office receives information about incoming refugees from the national resettlement office (called VOLAG – short for Voluntary Agencies), and the local agency prepares for the refugee’s arrival. In Daniel’s case, he was brought in from EMM (short for Episcopal Migration Ministries) for resettlement in Lexington, Kentucky. Once the local resettlement office receives the arrival date of the refugees, the caseworker assigned to the ‘case’ (a refugee family or individual) goes to receive the clients at the airport and drop them off at a rented-apartment the resettlement organization has sought out for them. The resettlement organization is also responsible for spending the federal ‘welcome money’ that each refugee receives on arriving in the U.S. The ‘welcome money’ is $925 for each individual and this money is directly dispensed to the resettlement organization to be used for housing, food, transportation,
and other specific basic needs. The ‘welcome money’ is to be used within the first 90 days of the refugee’s arrival in the U.S.; otherwise, the money is absorbed back to the U.S. government. Thus, for the first three months, the resettlement agency only distributes the ‘welcome money’ in denominations of gift card to grocery stores, bus passes or tickets, and a limited amount of cash for pocket money.

Besides the ‘welcome money,’ the refugees can still get government welfare assistance in the form of RCA (Refugee Cash Assistance), and, in Kentucky, KTAP (Kentucky Transitional Assistance Program) from the Kentucky state government, until the eighth month after their arrival in the U.S. The resettlement agency is responsible for applying for government services like, food stamps, medical insurance, KTAP, and a social security card for the refugees within their first two weeks of arrival. These services change according to various states’ laws and benefits. In Kentucky, refugees can apply for KTAP and food stamps that help the family with food and transportation assistance depending on the family size. These programs require refugees to actively volunteer or do something to acquire jobs. However, for the first two months, refugees are allowed to count their English as a second language (ESL) classes as part of their active employment and skill building. From the third month, all adult members of the household have to do volunteer work in order to build their employable skills. The state government requires all families relying on KTAP and food stamp to volunteer 35 hours per week for each adult in the household in order to continue receiving state government services.

Below is a flow chart summarizing the procedure that a refugee goes through until they arrive in the U.S. I also learned about this process during my resettlement agency caseworker tenure. This process for a refugee is a complicated and challenging procedure that should not be taken for granted. First, the refugees have to set up an application for their status that puts them into the category of either P1- regular refugee, P2- special concern refugee, or P3- family member of a refugee. After being filtered through this paperwork, they meet a U.S. refugee coordinator who interviews them to further verify their information. Thereafter, if they are approved from the
interview, refugees go through an intensive orientation about U.S. bureaucratic processes and social life in the U.S. Meanwhile, there is another layer of interrogation by U.S. immigration services. The refugee’s information is put into databases with their fingerprints and criminal history to learn if the refugees are eligible for admission to the U.S. If the refugees pass through that, they are sent to the clinic for medical screening. Soon after that, refugees go through a cultural orientation where they are taught airport norms and provided with International Organization Migration (IOM) loans for their airplane ticket. Once the refugees land in the U.S., they go through an additional background check and interview with the U.S. Customs and border staff. This process could take from few minutes to hours or days depending on each refugee’s case.

Figure 6.1: United States Refugee Admissions Program Flow Chart (USRAP 2018)
There is a stark difference in the migration and resettlement process of Tibetan exiles, like Tenzin and Mingma, compared to what happens with a UNHCR recognized refugee like Daniel. The difference begins with whether or not one’s group is recognized as a persecuted or victimized population by international organizations, the UN, and host countries. While refugees like Daniel can petition for his refugee case to be heard based on his ethnic group’s victimized status, the Tibetan exile population cannot do the same. International organizations, given the geo-politics surrounding the Tibetan exile community (those of India, UNHCR, and other western countries), do not consider them a persecuted population in any official sense recognized under international law. Western countries like the U.S., hence, would rather grant asylum based on individual petition rather than recognize the entire population of the Tibetan diaspora as victims of cultural genocide.

From my knowledge as a refugee resettlement caseworker, of course, and given the process of resettlement for UNHCR refugees, I know the journey of Tibetans from exile in India to the U.S., and their eventual resettlement process there, is remarkable. Indeed, I say it is even more remarkable because they are able to accomplish it due to what they themselves have done; that is, through their flexible liminality and the institution they have built to support it. I argue that the Tibetan migration and resettlement process is remarkable because the entire procedure is the large infrastructure, born of flexible liminality, that the Tibetan exile community has built to guide individual Tibetan’s toward resettlement in the U.S. and the better life chances that affords.

Upon comparing the Tibetan exile’s migration process to that of a UNHCR vetted refugee, I found two stark differences: first, UNCHR refugees receive support from international organizations and host-nation-states to resettle in western nation-states; second, in the selection process for resettlement, a refugee’s legal qualifications outweigh whatever individual skills or qualifications they might have for resettlement (UN Convention 1958; UN Protocol 1967). In terms of getting protection from external agencies, Daniel, for example, because he belonged to a
pre-existing refugee group arriving from Congo, and could provide enough evidence of his being in danger, was temporarily given protection by his first host country, South Africa, and thereafter given protection by UNHCR and marked as fitting for resettlement. A Tibetan exile in India can gain residency in the host country, India (or Nepal or Bhutan), but they do not receive any military protection, and despite their aspirations for resettlement to other countries, they cannot get support for this from international organizations like the UNHCR. Before even beginning the process of resettlement in the U.S., a Tibetan exile will have to use their educational qualifications, an institution’s prestige, their family/friend network, their English language skills, and must be able to prove their financial and social ability just to be able to travel to the U.S. For example, in the case of Mingma and monks seeking entry to conduct a religious tour, mentioned above, they had to polish their educational and religious skills just to be recognized by the sponsoring institutes in the U.S., and even then they could easily be denied travel visa by the U.S. American embassy in India. It does not become easier for Tibetan exiles after they arrive in the U.S. because they have to go through the bureaucratic processes of asylum seeking or sponsored residency via Tibetan-American family members.

In comparison, UNHCR refugees, like Daniel, are vetted by host nation-states in large numbers simply because they belong to the legal category of refugee. Daniel did not have to prove his employment or educational skills, cultural competency, or use his social network with his host countries. Daniel was placed in the U.S. because of the request on his application and the fact that the U.S. government accepted refugees. Next, he was placed in a city matching his language skills and ethnic community. Tibetan exiles miss out on this type of encompassing refugee support and resettlement facilities because they are not a legally recognized refugee group.

As an additional note, I should clarify that it is difficult to be a UNHCR refugee as well; the difficulties are just different. From my work at a resettlement agency, I learned that from the day a refugee applies for resettlement, it may take anywhere from two months to five years before
they arrive at the airport of their desired country. Until refugees receive confirmation for
resettlement, many of my refugee clients told me they lived in a temporary camp without good
amenities, no authorization to employment, minimum ration for food, and secluded from
mingling with citizens. My refugee clients often expressed that they were happy to leave the
temporary camp because even though they felt safe, they felt like they were not living a full life.
My point is not to minimalize the difficulty of a UNCHR vetted refugee’s journey to
resettlement; but, rather, to show how a Tibetan exile’s journey to resettlement is different from
that of a UNHCR vetted refugee.

In other words, the very threads (i.e. the interests of multiple geo-polities) that weave and
enable the flexible liminality of Tibetan exiles also creates a barrier for Tibetan exiles that keeps
them from receiving refugee-related services. I argue that the Tibetan exile community’s
liminality begins with the Chinese government’s narrative claim that Tibet was never an
independent country, and is anchored by their various host countries’ needs to keep a cordial
relationship with China. Because Tibetan exiles are not accepted as a victimized population by
many countries, UNHCR cannot extend support to the Tibetans. Thus, Tibetan exiles have been
left on their own to improvise creative ways to maneuver toward better life chances for
themselves. In lieu of limited support for Tibetans from multiple geo-polities and the UN, I
contend that flexible liminality has been the cultural practice that has helped Tibetan exiles grab
opportunities where they present themselves.

**Tibetan-ness in the United States**

I contend that the countries hosting Tibetan exiles understand that Tibetans should fit into
the regular legal category of “refugees,” yet, they cannot declare Tibetans “refugees” out of fear
of ruining their international relationship with China. I argue that this inherent contradiction, and
hypocrisy, born of geopolitics is what the Tibetan diaspora have to deal with every single day.
Despite common knowledge of the Chinese occupation of Tibet, Tibetans exiles are treated as
mere tourists in India, and regular immigrants in the U.S. – not as a victimized, displaced, population (HRLN 2007; Hess 2009; Artiles 2009; Yeshi 2012). Moreover, I observed that the Tibetan exiles are also faced with the challenge to prove their Tibetan nationalism in order to counter the Chinese government’s narrative that Tibet was never an independent state. This is where I argue that the practice of “Tibetan-ness” comes alive, for Tibetan exiles must externalize their nationalism to showcase their counter-narrative that Tibet did once exist as an independent state.

After resettlement in the U.S., I argue that the Tibetans in the U.S. feel they are handed an invisible baton of nationalist duty called “Tibetan-ness.” Along with the better life chances for economic success and mobility comes a duty to maintain their Tibetan nationalism in the U.S. (Hess 2009). Here, I argue the Tibetan exile community has made another exceptional cultural adjustment to combat the Chinese government’s narrative that Tibet was never an independent country. My participants have informed me that the Tibetan exiles conduct “Tibetan-ness” to become a member in good standing exile of their community. From my observations and interviews, I understood “Tibetan-ness” to be a set of identity markers that can be improved on by individual effort: that is, by gaining a good command of the Tibetan language, carrying out Buddhist philosophy, taking part in Tibetan community service or political events, and advocating Tibet’s cause to non-Tibetan people. While Tibetans in India also carry out “Tibetan-ness” (See Chapter 3), Tibetans living in the U.S. realize that they have the greater ability to exhibit their Tibetan identity on a global scale; so, they advocate Tibetan causes to non-Tibetans as a duty they feel they owe towards their family, the Tibetan community, and the exile government. Below are few examples of how Tibetan diaspora speak about Tibetan-ness and their long-distance nationalist duty:

In May 2018, I was able to speak with a Tibetan-American woman, Dawa, on the phone. She had come to the U.S. about seven years ago to live with her husband. Dawa is in her late 20s,
pursuing a career in nursing and during her free time, she volunteered at different Tibetan organizations in her area.

[Towards the end of the interview]

Sneha: How do you respond to people who don't know where Tibet is or what happened to Tibetans?
Dawa: [laughing…] A lot of people have asked me, ‘where are you from?’ But you know in this area there are many Chinese, Hmong and other Asians. When I say, I am a Tibetan,’ if they don't understand I then explain, ‘I am a Tibetan, born and raised in India. Tibet is a country beyond Nepal and it is currently under Chinese occupation.’

The same week, I was able to speak with another Tibetan student, Phentsuk, currently living in the U.S. She had just finished her first year in college. Phentsuk was in her early 20s and was pursuing a Bachelor’s degree but hadn’t decided if she would like a career in law, nursing, or education.

[Towards the end of the interview]

Sneha: You have been in the U.S. for a little while now, how do you respond to Americans who ask where Tibet is?
Phentsuk: On campus, many people are educated about Tibet, so it is not a problem. But for others who don’t know about Tibet, I usually say ‘I am a Tibetan born and raised in India. Tibet is a country within China right now. I have never seen Tibet in [my life but I was raised in a Tibetan settlement in India where we were taught Tibetan values, culture and language so I can proudly say I am a Tibetan.’

In September 2017, I spoke with Kunga, a Tibetan-American man in his mid 20s. He had moved to the U.S. when he was barely 10 years old. His parents were one of the lucky 1000s in the TUSRP migration.

[Towards the beginning of the interview]

Sneha: What is it like growing up as Tibetan in American society?
Kunga: It was hard because there weren’t any other Tibetans around us, just my family. And so many Americans don't know what happened to Tibet. I always had to say I am not Chinese – I am Tibetan. I will tell you one time in school, maybe elementary school, my teacher told me to point out on the map where I was from… But I couldn’t find Tibet on the world map [laughing…] it was bad, I mean that time, I just felt so bad, but now I know to say ‘Tibet is under Chinese occupation so you won’t find it on the map.’

In June 2018, I was able to speak with a Tibetan student, Pasang, who had been in the U.S. for three years now. Pasang grew up in the Bir Tibetan settlement, a small hill town close to
Dharamsala in India. Pasang was awarded a full-ride scholarship to a U.S. college right after she finished her high school in India. She is a smart, outspoken woman in her early 20s, and she has been active in Tibetan organizations in the U.S. for the past three summers teaching Tibetan language to young Tibetan-Americans who were born in the U.S.

[15 minutes into the interview]
Sneha: What do you think of Tibetans who were raised in the U.S.? Are they passionate about Tibetan cause?
Pasang: Some are very passionate, and some don’t care at all. It’s half-half. In America, there is more freedom of speech and human rights so they [Tibetans born in the U.S.] can speak loudly about [the] Tibetan cause. [Snickering…] they are even more devoted to preserving Tibetan culture than Tibetans in India. But some are opposite. I understand… it is an identity crisis for Tibetans here. You are in a city where nobody knows where you came from and there are not many other Tibetans around. It can be daunting. You just want to assimilate and forget about it [Tibetan heritage].
Sneha: But do all Tibetans have to take part in Tibetan political cause?
Pasang: So, being a Tibetan means you have a duty, it is not so much about personal choice. You can ignore it, but you have a refugee mark in you. We went through cultural genocide in Tibet, so we have to preserve our culture outside. Our Tibetan community expects everybody to preserve the concept of Tibetan-ness. So that everybody can speak the [Tibetan] language, [become] educated about politics, [have the ability to] meet a stranger and advocate for [the] Tibetan cause, carry out Buddhist values, and things like that. Our society, exile government, and parents, everybody is pressing you to do it. It is a big task so some young Tibetans who don't want to do it all. It is understandable, but culture is everything that makes our identity.

Analyzing Tibetan-ness

In various interviews and casual conversations I had with Tibetans in the U.S., I observed that most Tibetans do understand and seriously partake in their responsibility for performing Tibetan-ness. Whether they are Tibetans who have newly arrived in the U.S., have lived in the U.S. for while, or were born or raised in the U.S., many of my participants had learned to nurture some form of Tibetan-ness. Their Tibetan-ness showed most naturally when asked, “Where are you from?” It is a very casual question but translates into a complex one for Tibetan exiles. This very question is charged with the complex geo-political battle that Tibetan exiles have to live within. It is not easy to state the country of your origin if it does not even exist on a world map, like with the case of the participants above. On the other hand, to pass up this question would be a shame to one’s identity, one’s community, and one’s exile government. For Tibetan exiles, the
answer to “where are you from?” is an opportunity to advocate for Tibetan politics, carry out their Tibetan-ness, and to share in the Tibetan community’s answer to the Chinese occupation of Tibet.

In the above conversation with Pasang, she helped me really understand the meaning of Tibetan-ness and the individual responsibility of carrying the ‘refugee mark.’ Pasang explained that Tibetan-ness is the duty Tibetans feel to know their language, practice Buddhist values, be educated about their exile government and Tibetan politics, and advocate to non-Tibetans about Tibet. She also recognized that it could be a huge responsibility for Tibetans living in the U.S. – going against the natural direction of assimilation within the American community and causing one to stand out as a Tibetan person. Of course, unlike Pasang, who grew up within a Tibetan settlement and so could easily adapt her identity, Tibetans in the U.S. are spread out and often have a hard time nurturing their Tibetan identity. But while Tibetan-ness is an individual practice that can be learned and conducted, with more or less intensity, along with one’s other activities, Pasang indicated that all Tibetans naturally carry the “refugee mark”. The refugee mark is the burden of being part of the Tibetan diaspora; a mark that is automatically passed onto all Tibetans and is present even when a Tibetan individual ignores their responsibility of Tibetan-ness.

In other words, there are two ways to gain Tibetan nationalist identity in exile: first, an individual can portray characteristics of Tibetan-ness to create a good social standing for themselves within the exile community; second, via the naturally occurring ‘refugee mark’ that is passed on to all Tibetan placed or born in diaspora. It is hard to recognize the ‘refugee mark’ within the Tibetan diaspora, but Tibetan-ness was easily found among the Tibetans in the U.S. The conversation with Pasang reminded me of other conversations I had with Tibetans living in the U.S. who similarly talked about the importance of advocating for Tibet and their Tibetan identity. The practice of Tibetan-ness shows one way that Tibetan flexible liminality functions on the ground. As a side note, I have only been able to touch the surface of Tibetan-ness in this dissertation; more research will need to be conducted to understand the full extent of Tibetan-ness and the externalization of Tibetan nationalism.
The practice of flexible liminality by an ethnic group relies on multiple exclusions from different geo-political entities, and the ethnic group’s ability to make cultural adjustments to those doing the exclusioning. The Tibetan diaspora interacts with the Chinese government to counter their narrative and replace it with Tibetan nationalist response by externalizing their nationalism, their Tibetanness, in an attractive way that invites the interest and sympathy of individual Westerners despite official disinterest by their governments. This was evident during a fieldwork trip for Public Talk by the Dalai Lama to Indiana in 2016 with my research assistant, David.

There were about 4000 audience members at the Public Talk by the Dalai Lama and the most visible identity of the attendants to the Public Talk was white-Americans who had interest in western Buddhism or liberal-philosophical ideas preached by the Dalai Lama. David and I tried our best to speak with as many audience members as possible during the day event. We noticed that many audience members were from Indiana, and the surrounding area (Illinois, Kentucky, Ohio, Tennessee etc.). We learned that many people came to learn about the Public Talk event from their local Buddhist monastery, interfaith organizations, and Tibetan community center (incase of Tibetan-Americans). This was an interesting find because despite the large celebrity status of the Dalai Lama, the Public Talk events are not popular in immediate social media. Even for me, as a scholar of Tibetan exiles, I learned of this Public Talk from David, who learned of it from our local Buddhist monastery in Louisville, KY. For many attendant members, this event involved a family or organization group trip – all of the people we spoke to had travelled in groups. It was interested to find clusters of audience members before and after the event, and almost all the time, people standing around together were from the same location. When asked how they came to learn of the event, almost all spoke of their community center, monastery, or network of interfaith organizations. Thus, from my observations, I argue that Buddhist monasteries (including, religious and education institutes), as well as, other Tibetan community
organizations (like, community centers) are a key source to educate western audience about Tibetan community.

Tibetan-ness as a way of externalizing nationalist sentiment is a unique phenomenon in Diaspora Studies that works through the Tibetan diaspora’s practice of flexible liminality. Anthropologically, I would argue that it is a peculiar situation where for a member of a diaspora to be compelled to display their nationalism externally to promote their political plight to outsiders. In the case of other diaspora, studies have talked about various diaspora groups portraying nationalist sentiments through political support in their home country, also called long-distance nationalism (Schiller 2005, Toloyan 2000, Whitaker 2006, Anderson 1992). However, these studies have only talked about diasporas encouraging homeland nationalism, realistically or unrealistically, from a distance through financial and symbolic support (Schiller 2005, Toloyan 2000, Whitaker 2006, Anderson 1992). In such cases the intended audience is the diaspora group and their larger imagined community alone. In the case of Tibetans, though, practicing their nationalist identity – their Tibetanness – involves displaying their identity as a way of advocating their cause. This is, Tibetan diaspora nationalism involves practicing Tibetanness to showcase and explain their cause in the most attractive way to outsiders. In a way Tibetanness is a performance that is meant to attract sympathy from foreigners and it is used to preserve Tibetan nationalist identity. As with the ‘infrastructure of hanging out’ in Dharamsala, then, practicing Tibetanness in the U.S. is a way for marginalized Tibetans to build bridges to Westerners. It is flexible liminality in yet another form. Since Tibetanness involves externalizing Tibetan identity, educating foreigners (western sympathizer, especially) about Tibetan culture, and speaking about Tibetan political cause, the primary form of Tibetanness is a form of outreach to the West.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have highlighted the struggles and achievements of Tibetan exiles on their journey to the West. Tibetans are not considered legal refugees because the Chinese
government has claimed that Tibet was never an independent country; from this point of view all Tibetan exiles are simply living out of their home country out of personal choice, not because of persecution or victimization. The host countries sheltering Tibetan exiles have also officially accepted this narrative; hence, Tibetans in India (including, Nepal) are legally treated as foreign guests; and Tibetans in the U.S. are only allowed entry as regular, temporary, visitors. Tibetan exiles are left without any refugee-related support (like UNHCR resettlement services) and live their protracted exile lives in South Asia without the benefit of either citizenship or UNHCR recognized refugee status. As a result, many Tibetans aspire to resettle in Western countries where they can apply for asylum and gain permanent citizenship. In order to travel to the U.S., however, Tibetan exiles have to either use their family and friend networks in the U.S. or prove their educational or religious skills to the U.S. institutions that can sponsor them. Unlike UNHCR refugees, who are vetted just for being refugees, Tibetan exiles have to use their personal skills, social networks, and qualifications just to get into the; and then work further, via asylum-seeking processes or family sponsorship, to remain in the U.S. Even after their resettlement to the U.S., Tibetan exiles still feel like they carry the mark of the refugee, which is the exile community’s expectation that each Tibetan must publicly exhibit their Tibetan-ness. Tibetan-ness is the duty, passed on to every Tibetan in diaspora, to advocate the Tibetan cause to non-Tibetans, and to preserve Tibetan culture via language, religion, community service, and forms of political activism that remain, for the most part, yet also attractive to Westerners.
Chapter 7: The U.S. Anti-Immigrant Storm: The Tibetan Diaspora’s Story

I was able to interview a member of Louisville’s Tibetan monastery\(^{61}\) staff named Martha. She is the key staff member responsible for the bureaucratic work of visas, travel, and legality for Tibetan monks to stay in the United States. Martha has been a friend to the Louisville resident monks for over ten years but still shows her respect to them by bowing deeply during religious events. She is a white middle-aged woman with short-cropped hair and a welcoming smile. Martha sharply remembers most visitors after their first visit to the monastery. She remembered my name even after my absence from the monastery for two years, and when I requested an interview, she graciously obliged. After conversing about the visa process at length, I asked her if the staff had witnessed any discrimination towards Tibetans during the visa application process, travelling, or after arriving in the city. Martha explained there was more discrimination against Tibetans while they were going through visa process at the U.S. Embassy in Delhi [India], mostly witnessed during visa interviews with Tibetans; otherwise, the monks, going through their monastic institution, had not really witnessed any discrimination within the U.S. Martha described one event that summed up her opinion of how Louisville, for example, viewed Tibetans in the city.

Martha: Your kind of are really noticeable in robes [Tibetan monks wear bright red robe with yellow colors mixed]. Some people were curious and sometimes rude, but it’s based on not knowing they are being rude… But individuals have been consistently friendly… One time, our attendant monks were walking around sightseeing [in Louisville], and some people walking past bowed down to them [laughing] they [Tibetan monks] were really surprised.

Sneha: Were they Tibetans or Asians who knew the Tibetan monks, or just regular Americans?

Martha: Just regular- white- Americans- showing respect to our monks [with a big smile on her face]. Isn’t that amazing?

Sneha: Wow, that really is amazing. I wonder how they knew to bow and show respect like that?

Martha: It may have been because they have seen His Holiness [the Dalai Lama] and seen how other people bow down to him. Our monks here wear the same robe as the Dalai Lama so they probably wanted to show that respect to a Tibetan monk too. That is just what I think though.

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\(^{61}\) I will not be using the official name of Louisville’s Tibetan monastery for discretion. In this chapter, I will be calling them “Louisville’s Tibetan Monastery” to better identify them.
Introduction

The story above is remarkable in the United States in 2017. Here were immigrants, and non-white, non-Christian people, being shown respect and acceptance by ‘regular’ Americans from the host community. Yet in the United States, since the election of the President Donald Trump, there has been reported a sharp increase in hate-crimes, including against immigrants. FBI data showed that since 2014 to 2016, hate crime increased by 11.7%; and other research from California State University showed a rise of hate crime of 12% from 2016 to 2017 (Levin and Reitzel 2018). There has been a surge of anti-immigrant sentiment in the news since the 2016 Presidential election, during which non-white people were targeted for speaking in a foreign language, wearing non-western clothing, or simply existing as a non-white people (TheDailyDot 2018). In 2016, Louisville, KY, right after the Presidential election, a White elderly woman yelled at a Latino woman in the JCPenny’s check-out line to “speak in English;” and “go back to wherever the f*** you came from” (NBCNews 2016). In 2017, I also heard from the Louisville’s refugee resettlement agency that a Syrian female client came to the office to complain that she was harassed at the bus station by other bystanders for wearing a headscarf and full-length covering. The agency made sure to keep the Syrian client’s wish that her identity be kept anonymous but distributed the story to alert all staff members to be vigilant about keeping refugees safe.

Louisville is a unique city in Kentucky for having a long history of post-revolutionary war immigrants (West East European, Southeast & South Asian, Caribbean, African) attracted by industrialization, trade, and refugee resettlement programs as a means to settle and find new lives in the U.S. (The Urban Inst. 2007; Yater 1987, McDowell 1962). Nonetheless, Louisville has not been an exception to the recent nation-wide rise in anti-immigrant sentiment as seen by the

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62 I worked at the Louisville’s refugee resettlement agency since 2016, as an intern, full time caseworker, and later as a translator/interpreter. In this chapter, I will keep the name of the organization anonymous and simply call it “refugee resettlement agency.”
outwardly racist expressions of a white woman in JCPenny’s and the harassment of the Syrian woman at the bus station. Given these instances of anti-immigrant sentiment, it is intriguing to hear that Tibetan monks, publicly expressing, with their clearly non Western orange robes, a different religion and ethnicity-race, were nonetheless offered respect and acceptance by a random group of white people within the city. Hence, in this chapter, I will discuss recent changes in U.S. immigration laws and attitudes toward foreign migrants, and show how the Tibetan diaspora is weathering the anti-immigrant storm in the U.S. I will argue that the ubiquitous, celebrated, status of the 14th Dalai Lama has garnered acceptance for the Tibetan diaspora in the U.S. but also that the Tibetan diaspora’s ability to adjust to external influences has created a shelter for them to use protect them from the recent anti-immigrant climate.

In order to understand why regular white Americans were bowing down to Tibetan monks, I will first introduce the city of Louisville and the way it is seen by the immigrants in the city. I will briefly talk about the history of Louisville, the leadership that represents the city, and the history of immigration within the city. Thereafter, I will describe, ethnographically, how migrant groups initially find religious institutions as entry points to assimilation within the city’s community. I will highlight how Tibetan ethnic groups are received relatively well, compared to other immigrant groups, within Louisville; a reception that includes a deep respect and personal affiliation that has developed between the Dalai Lama and Louisville’s Mayor, Greg Fischer. And, I will argue that the well-developed acceptance of Tibetans within the U.S. community arises from the long history of Western Buddhism, and from a Tibetan flexible liminality that has adjusted Tibetan practices to fit the western imagination of Tibet. Lastly, I will talk about the scholarship of “ideal refugees/immigrants”, and argue that Tibetans in U.S. are frequently thought to be a model minority by commentators in the US because Tibetans are influenced by their flexible liminality, prior to their entrance to the U.S., to adjust themselves to become “ideal refugees/immigrants.”
U.S. Immigration Policy under the Trump Administration

My years of dissertation research and writing (2016-2018) were during rapidly changing times for immigrants in the United States. The 45th president of the U.S., Donald Trump, was elected in November 2016, and immediately we saw a plummet in the numbers of refugee received by the U.S. The 2018 U.S. immigration statistics shows a 59% decline in the number of refugees received by the U.S. since the election of President Trump (CNS News 2016). In 2017, similar anti-migrant sentiments were followed by the Trump administration when it imposed a travel ban for migrant from Chad, Iran, Libya, North Korea, Somalia, Syria, Venezuela, and Yemen (CNN 2017).

In the offices of refugee resettlement agencies in Kentucky, I observed a correspondingly rapid drop in employment and volunteers after 2016 simply because there was no work for staff members to do. In 2018, the U.S. stepped up detention actions by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) against illegal migrants after President Trump signed an executive order, called Enhancing Public Safety in the Interior of the United States (EO), on January 2017. ICE reports show that from 2016 to 2017 the arrest and removal of migrants rose by 30%, which was the highest number of administrative arrests of the past three years (ICE 2017). In April 2018, the Department of Justice announced a new “zero tolerance policy” regarding border crossings that explicitly mandated child separation and the denial of a migrant’s right to request asylum. In other words, if ICE caught undocumented or illegal migrants in the U.S., ICE would separate them from their children and deported them without any legal hearing. As of May 2018, the Department of Health and Human Services reported that there were 10,773 migrant children in custody, a sharp rise from 8,886 in April 2018 (WashingtonPost 2018).

Similarly, the Trump administration also has revoked protection status for migrants from ‘perilous’ countries of origin, forcing those migrants to return to their home countries, and deporting those who have overstayed their temporary visa status. For example, 15,000 Temporary Protection Status (TPS) visas were given out in 2015 to migrants from Nepal after a disastrous
8.1 Richter scale earthquake there (ThinkProgress News 2018). There are still about 9,000 Nepali TPS immigrants living in the U.S. since their homes were destroyed by the 2015 earthquake who have now been given a year to depart from the U.S. There is a total of 321,220 immigrants who were given TPS and now are being asked to go back to their home countries (Romero 2018; Journal of Migration Studies 2017).

The sweep of such anti-migrant sentiments from President Trump’s administration was felt strongly in my second dissertation field site, Kentucky. Politically, the state of Kentucky usually leans towards the Republican Party, and in the 2016 Presidential election it did so too, as 62.54% of Kentucky’s voters voted for President Donald Trump (NYTimes 2016). The exception for the Presidential election was Jefferson County (which includes Louisville) and Fayette County (which includes Lexington), who voted for the liberal Democratic Party candidate, Hillary Clinton (NYTimes 2017). Given the newly elected President Trump’s anti-migrant sentiments, the Mayors of Kentucky’s two Democratic party cities made their stance clear the following year; after the white supremacist rally in Charlottesville, VA in August 2017, the mayors of Louisville and Lexington reviewed the city’s public art and removed Confederate monuments in order to denounce the U.S. history of bigotry, racism, and slavery (InsiderLouisville 2017).

My dissertation field site, Louisville, is a unique, diversity-welcoming city within the largely socially and economically conservative and nationalist state of Kentucky. A better representation of the city of Louisville is the elected mayor, Greg Fischer. Since the beginning of his term in 2010, Mayor Fischer has pushed for Louisville to become an economically and

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63 The Republican Party is one of the two big political parties represented in the U.S. government; the opposition party is the Democratic Party. The Republican Party for the most part stands for conservative values and economic and social policies like, less government spending, pro-life, decreased taxes, etc.

64 White Supremacists are group of people who follow a racist ideology holding that white/Caucasian people are superior to other races. In the U.S., they display support for the white population and for nationalist ideals preserving privilege for the U.S. white population. The Confederate battle flag and confederate soldier monuments are favorite symbols of white supremacists in the U.S.
socially progressive city. This showed up in the results when in 2015 Louisville entered the top 20% of states absorbing refugee resettlement in the U.S. (Washington Post 2015). The Mayor of Louisville even led a pro-immigration rally in January 2017 after U.S. President Donald Trump declared a travel ban on selected countries (Courier Journal 2017).

**Louisville, Kentucky (KY)**

Metropolitan Louisville includes 22 surrounding counties, 14 in Kentucky and 8 in Southern Indiana (The Urban Inst. 2007). This also has led to people commonly referring to Louisville Metropolitan as ‘Kentuckiana’. The Ohio River provided the geographical advantage that allowed the city of Louisville to quickly turn into a 19th-century major shipping port for a variety of goods, from cattle, to basic provisions, to lime, brick etc. to be shipped from the Northeast Pennsylvania and Europe (Heller 1922). Much of Louisville’s history is associated with the Ohio River as a source of transportation and geographical borderline (Yater 1987, McDowell 1962).

Socially, Louisville had its own internal tension regarding race, slavery, and immigrants (Yater 1987, McDowell 1962). During the civil war period, since Indiana was a free state, Louisville was often an escape portal for African-American slaves fleeing to the north (Adams 2011). When the civil war broke out in 1861, Kentucky declared neutrality and became an important geographic barrier state (Yater 1987, McDowell 1962). Even before the civil war, Louisville had a head-on confrontation between new-immigrants and ‘nativists’ (people who believed that only those born in the U.S. should be have political power) (Yater 1987, McDowell 1962). As a result, the well-known tragedy of 1855, ‘Bloody Monday,’ a riot between new-

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65 During World War II, Louisville was a center for the factory war production of aircraft (Johnson 1984). The manufacturing industry continued to be the primary to the economy of Louisville; some of the big manufacturing companies in the city now are Ford Truck Plant (Automotive Vehicles), General Electric (Home Appliances), and Brown-Forman Heaven Hill (a bourbon distillery), among many more.
immigrants from Europe and native-born Americans occurred in Louisville, KY (McDowell 1962). I will speak more about it in later section.

*Immigrants in Louisville*

Louisville’s non-European immigrant populations have been in the United States for a shorter period than is true for similar populations in the rest of the country (The Urban Inst. 2007). Kentucky began receiving its first group of non-European refugees after the end of the Vietnam War in 1975 (Kentucky Office of Refugee 2018). However, the majority of migrants prior to 1980s were from Europe, Canada, and Oceania; the demography of migrants for Louisville changed after 1990 to reflect a greater numbers of migrants coming from Asia-Pacific, Latin America-Caribbean, and Africa (The Urban Inst. 2007). A 2004 survey by the Louisville Metro showed that only 4.5% of the city’s residents were foreign born, and among them, 38% identified as Latin American, 35% as Asian, 15% as African, and 12% as European/Canadian (The Urban Inst. 2007). However, between 1990 and 2000 foreign-born immigrants in Kentucky grew by 135%, putting it among the top ten fastest growing state for immigrants (The Urban Inst. 2007).

![Figure 7.1: New Immigration Growth by States (1990-2000)](source.png)
Immigrant’s social community in Louisville

In this rapidly growing city of immigrants, I wanted to understand how migrants were finding assimilating into the Louisville community, and what factors affected the extent of their assimilation. After speaking with multiple resettlement staff members in Louisville, I learned that one of the ways for migrants to find their community is via religious institutions (churches, temples, and monasteries, etc.). A male resettlement staff member, Daniel, (in his mid 30s) who mostly worked with newly arrived refugees from South and Central Africa explained,

“Every ethnic group has its own community – mainly revolving around spirituality like Church, mosque, temples. There is so much ethnic variety even just for refugees from Congo – whether you are from East Congo or West Congo matters because they don’t like each other. But in a new country, you need place to celebrate holidays together, and you need places for funerals, weddings, birthdays etc. Religious institutes are the first place lending the new refugees a helpful hand for social integration. You feel like a community by celebrating festival and prayers. Then come social organizations, once you have a stronger bond with your community, like the Somali youth organization here in Louisville. Then come professional and private communities, like with friends and family.”

From my observations, I too noticed that many of my refugee clients found their initial social community through a religious organization (like a mosque, temple, church etc.). As Daniel above also explained, even though refugees may dislike this or that about their fellow migrants, refugees will still share the acceptance of religious institutions. Refugee families were using religious institutions, that is, where they could carry out common activities (praying, singing, dancing, sharing food etc.) to form communal bonds with each other. I will give two ethnographic accounts of how immigrants were forming communal bonds at faith institutions. These involve two very different families that I worked closely with during my field work in Louisville – first a newly-arrived, non-English speaking, Rohingya refugee family that I was able to observe closely as their caseworker, and second a well-settled Tibetan-American family I met at the Louisville monastery. Before that, let me briefly visit theoretical models present for immigrants incorporating in the western host countries.
In terms of speaking about immigrants incorporating into western host communities, specifically North American and European countries have created three main models that social and political scientists tend to be divided on: assimilation (urge migrants to adopt the host community’s cultural and linguistic practices), multiculturalism (the idea that migrant groups might or should retain enough of their former cultural practices and language to retain a distinct group identity), and segregationist (distinguish ethnic-cultural communities by legal framework). Some people, politically, favor assimilation into a homogenous American and European population, while others see this as a kind of cultural imperialism (Alba 1999, Yazbeck Haddad & Balz 2006, Murray 2006, Silverman 2007). On the other hand, there are conservatives who think only assimilation into homogenous American or European communities should be allowed (Warner and Srole 1945, Sowell 1996). There are other mixed arguments regarding assimilation versus multiculturalism wherein some sociologists minimalize the need to have two extreme sides; some scholars have now found that different ethnic group members are starting to emphasize and express the need for harmonious coexistence rather than taking sides for assimilation or multiculturalism (Vani and John 2009, Lambert and Taylor 1988, Wolsko and Judd 2006, Rodgriguez-Garcia 2010). The current U.S. President Donald Trump’s politics, however, wants neither assimilation nor multiculturalism; rather, President Trump holds a ‘nativists’ position that Juan Perea, in his book Immigrant Out! (1997), argues is basically an stance so opposed to foreigners as to deem any immigrant population as illegal and alien within the host community (Perea 1997:2).

In the case of Louisville’s immigrant population, I side with Dan Rodgriguez-Garcia (2010) who argues for going beyond bimodal thinking towards a “mutualist model of socio-cultural incorporation that reconciles cultural diversity with social cohesion.” Rodgriguez-Garcia tends to have an optimistic outlook, and imagines that interculturalist incorporation is possible when all social members have full social and political participation in a cohesive manner. Thus, the interculturalist model encourages cross-cultural interactions for better mutual understanding
and incorporation between groups. My research fieldwork on Louisville immigrants is not fully faceted enough to definitely argue for the interculturalist mode. But from my observations of various refugee groups and the Tibetan community, I tend to think the interculturalist model the most useful and likely. The immigrant population in Louisville is not functioning in isolation within their own ethnic groups; nor is the population completely assimilated within American society; instead, as we will see with the Rohingya family, migrants are seeking to form a community with people from different ethnic groups but similar common socio-religious values. Moreover, I argue that religious institutions in Louisville have opened their doors for migrants to find, or make, a social community with people from various other ethnic groups who have similar socio-religious values. Hence, I side with the interculturalist model because it best reflects what I was seeing in Louisville where immigrant families frequently found their solace with other ethnic groups within the communal spaces of shared religious institutions.

I also argue that this same is true for the Tibetan migrant community as well, for they too are creatively using religious institutional spaces to form a social community. In the next section, I argue that in addition to using religious institutions for communal gatherings, the Tibetan community is also practicing flexible Tibetanness in them; that is, preserving Tibetan cultural traits and spreading them to the host population. The ability of the Tibetan community to spread their signature cultural practices, and agency to their American host community is unique. Tibetan diaspora’s assimilation tactic and use of Tibetanness does not fit into any of the models of assimilation previously put forward by scholars. Hence, it has to be taken into account by my theoretical model of flexible liminality.

**Religious Institution for Communal Integration**

A Rohingya family of five (a father, mother, and three children) was a refugee case handed to me as a refugee resettlement caseworker. The father of the family was in his early 30s, the mother of the family was in her mid-20s, the oldest child was 12, and the youngest child was
about a year old. Due to the age of the youngest children, the mother usually had to stay home and could not visit our offices. This was the first year that the resettlement agency was receiving Rohingya families, so we could not find anybody who spoke the language. The father spoke Urdu (similar to Hindi), which is why I could communicate well enough with him; otherwise, the rest of the family simply did not have any way of communicating with others. I was worried about the mother of the family since she was getting even more isolated because of the language barrier. We were able to enroll her in a refugee program for mothers with young children, but that was the extent of my power as a caseworker.

About a month later, I spoke with the family again and the father of the family told me that the family was doing better than when they first arrived because they had found a mosque to visit regularly. At the mosque, he was able to meet up with other Muslim families in a social environment. He was also able to have his wife socialize with his acquaintances from the mosque. It may have only been a small progress, but it provided an entry for a new immigrant family to assimilate into the community. Despite the language barrier, the religious community provided a common bond for the new Rohingya family to satisfyingly socialize within the American community. Muslims as a religious community have been much marginalized since the 9/11 event, so this Rohingya family’s entry into the Mosque helped them assimilate within a subset of American society but it still does not completely integrate them into U.S. society. Thus, I argue for the intermediary model in understanding the assimilation of immigrants in U.S. society.

66 As a refugee resettlement caseworker, I had the power to extend my American cultural knowledge, give information about programs available in the city for the refugees, and put the refugees in touch with other families to become friends with. My capability of building deeper friendships was limited, however, because of my professional responsibilities for other refugees and the agency. I was also informed that I should not build too much of a personal relationship with refugees in order to best provide my services as a caseworker. However, this was negotiated by each caseworker in their own personal way. For example, caseworkers were not to receive any food/drinks at the refugee’s house during work hours, but there were some caseworkers that accepted food/drinks because they felt disrespectful rejecting kindness and cultural practices of guest/host behavior.

67 I found out that the Louisville mosque community consisted of people from various ethnic communities such as Somali, Iraqi, Syrian etc.
In the case of the Tibetan community in Louisville I observed, as well, that many isolated Tibetan families from neighboring states (Indiana, Ohio, Tennessee) came together to Louisville to meet-up at the Tibetan Buddhist monastery for Tibetan holidays. One day I was invited to a Tibetan woman’s house for an interview. She was a middle-aged woman, whom I shall call Pema, who was working from home to babysit her young children. Pema and her husband have lived in Kentucky for the past decade. The two went to college in Kentucky and found careers within the state. I entered Pema’s house and was welcomed with hugs from her children since we had met before at the Louisville monastery. Her living room walls were garnered with Tibetan *Thangka* art \(^{68}\) and were furnished modestly with two couches and a large table. I asked her how people in the Tibetan community met with each other here. Pema said,

“Mostly we meet at the monastery itself. In big cities, where there is a large Tibetan community, they have community centers, [a] separate monastery, youth organizations, and many separate-separate centers for different things. Here, we [Tibetan community] have the monastery in Louisville, [laughing] it is our community center, monastery, everything!”

In Summer 2017, the Tibetan monastery hosted a youth camp for Tibetan children, where the Tibetan children could learn Tibetan songs, dances, alphabets, and explore the city together. In summer 2018, the Tibetan monastery hosted Tibetan cultural events, open to the public at large, for which the monastery invited Tibetan musicians, activists, prestigious lamas [monks], and laid out Tibetan food and drinks.

The Louisville Tibetan monastery started hosting social events with Tibetan families only in the past five years. When I had a conversation with staff members and Buddhist followers of the Louisville monastery, both groups informed me that the Louisville monastery gained many of the Tibetan families who used to gather at Bloomington, Indiana’s monastery. But after the death of the Dalai Lama’s brother, Thubten Norbu (who used to head the Bloomington monastery), the

\(^{68}\) *Thangka* Art is a religious Tibetan Buddhist painting on cotton scroll or applique on silk scroll. Thangka is usually hung in monasteries and private homes after a priest/lama conducts a prayer ceremony and blesses the Thangka.
Tibetan families from the surrounding states slowly shifted their community gatherings 106 miles south to the Louisville monastery. The staff and followers of the monastery all thought the shift was due to the friendly nature of the head lama of Louisville’s monastery, affectionately called “Geshe la” by everybody. To understand why Geshe la’s friendly nature attracted Tibetan families, I talked to a Tibetan man from Ohio who regularly attended these social gatherings. Dorje is in his early 50s; he has a calm nature and a ready smile for everyone during social gatherings. I asked Dorje what it was about Geshe la and the Louisville monastery that attracted so many Tibetan families from a hundred miles away. Dorje said,

“It is I think a Tibetan thing, where if you invite someone personally, you are more likely to go to that event. But if you just say ‘please come to this event, and oh bring friends’, you won’t invite friends [laughing]. So you have to get the invitation personally, and Geshe la is very good about maintaining that personal contact with each families...we [dorje and his wife] used to go to the Bloomington monastery for Tibetan events but our Tibetan friends started coming here and we got to know people here [Louisville monastery] too so we come here now.”

In Louisville, the majority of immigrants have found their social assimilation into the U.S. via religious institutions. For the Tibetan community as well, the Louisville monastery has provided them space for social communal gatherings. As Pema mentioned above, cities with a larger population of immigrants have a variety of organizations for social gatherings, religious functions, and political activities; but for a city such as Louisville that hosts a small and relatively new population of immigrants, religious institutions like the Louisville monastery have become spaces for Tibetan community gatherings. This also eventually led me to understand that Louisville, as a city, has strong inter-faith programs.

**Louisville’s Interfaith Program**

Even before Mayor Fischer’s election, Louisville was a migrant friendly city and a city encouraging of inter-faith dialogues. When I spoke with local Louisville residents who were born and raised in the city, I learned that there used to be more of an aversion between people
belonging to different churches. A simple search on Google about Christianity in Louisville brought me to one of the most regretful riots in the history of Louisville, the event called “Bloody Monday.” “Bloody Monday” took place in 1855 and was the result of the hangover of 19th Century anti-immigrant sentiments towards the newly settled Germans and Irish migrants (Courier Journal 2015). Americans, mostly “natives” born, white Protestants, felt threatened by new immigrants, Irish and German Catholicism, and socially liberal ideas about racial equality (Courier Journal 2015).

From my observations, the history of this bad relationship between Catholics and Protestants in Louisville has encouraged a lot of the city’s current interest in inter-faith activity between various faiths. I spoke with a long-time member of an interfaith program, Patty, an Asian-American woman in her 50s who first got involved in the program as her Church’s priest. Today, Patty is a retired priest who regularly attends interfaith program and speaks of religious diversity in the city. Patty and I met at the Tibetan monastery for a fire-puja ceremony, and during a break of the ceremony I asked her about interfaith programs in Louisville, she commented,

“Louisville is unique anyway; interfaith work here is very unique for the size of the city… Which is attributed to IPP [Interfaith Peace Program] and CIR [Center for Interfaith Relations] as they have consistently gathered people and created the dialogues. And then we have a city leader like our Mayor Fischer who gathers religious leaders and meets with them to ask about the city, [Leaning closely to me in a friendly manner] I don’t think that is really common [giggle].”

**Tibetans in Louisville**

In Louisville, there are only six permanent Tibetan residents and one Tibetan Buddhist monastery that also perform as a community center for all Tibetans from the tri-state area (OH, IN, KY). During Tibetan holidays, there are over twenty different Tibetan families (around 50 people) who travel from surrounding states, Indiana, Ohio, Tennessee, and from around Kentucky, to celebrate holidays at the Louisville monastery. Given such a small population of Tibetans, it is remarkable to find that the Tibetan community has a large presence in Louisville.
For example, the Tibetan Buddhist monks are regularly welcomed to perform prayers for auspicious beginnings and create sand mandala offerings for social wellbeing in the city.\(^69\)

American Louisville residents are regular visitors at the monastery for religious (Sunday morning prayer, full moon puja, fire offering puja etc.) and social events (momo\(^70\) and movie nights, Tibetan lecture guests etc.). A staff at the Tibetan monastery disclosed that the Tibetan monastery in Louisville has 1700 people on the list for regular monastery’s newsletter and events, and 190 of them are paid members that means the members get regular exclusive discounts on events and hear more details on the decision-making process of the board members. In comparison, other immigrant communities who have come to Louisville via refugee resettlement programs, like Somalis, Iraqis, Syrians, Congolese, and Bhutanese people, do not have the same type or degree of representation in the Louisville community.

Most of the Tibetan community’s presence in Louisville is realized through their Tibetan Buddhist monastery that has created a special space for itself in the heart of the city.\(^71\) The city of Louisville was preparing for another visit by the Dalai Lama in 2017 but unfortunately this was cancelled because of his health problems.\(^72\) In 2017, again, Tibetan monks were denied U.S. entry visa so the staff members from the Louisville monastery along with Tibetan monks visited the main monastery in India, and also visited the Dalai Lama in Dharamsala. While waiting in New Delhi to make their transit to Dharamsala, the monks found out that Louisville Mayor Greg Fischer was also in New Delhi for a City Mayors meeting. When Mayor Fischer learned of the Louisville monastery member’s plan to visit the Dalai Lama, he decided to extend his business

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\(^69\) “Tibetan Monks create sand mandala for world peace” (Courier Journal 2016); “Tibetan Monks perform prayer and sand mandala to pray against gun violence” (WDRB News 2015, 2016)

\(^70\) Momo are Tibetan style steamed dumplings stuffed with meat or vegetables

\(^71\) A remarkable example is when the Tibetan monastery invited the 14th Dalai Lama to come to Louisville for a public speech in 2013; the mayor was personally involved in the tour of the city during the Dalai Lama stay in Louisville. The 2013 Dalai Lama’s public speech drew approximately 15,000 people to the YUM! Center, and I talked with several audience members who had driven from as far away, respectively, as the states of Washington and Colorado State specifically to attend the Dalai Lama’s talk.
trip for a couple of days to visit the Dalai Lama himself together with the monastery group. Below is the picture of Mayor Fischer (wearing *khata*- a silk scarf with printed prayers, presented in Tibetan culture to respected guests) and the Dalai Lama (posing with a Muhammad Ali hat gift\(^{73}\)).

Figure 7.2: The 14\(^{th}\) Dalai Lama is wearing a Muhammad Ali hat, posing for photo with Louisville’s Mayor Greg Fisher. Feb 20\(^{th}\), 2018 in Dharamsala, India. Photo Courtesy: DGCEC

At this particular meeting, in February 2018, Mayor Fischer took the opportunity to inform the Dalai Lama about the Mayor’s compassion project. The compassion project was started in November 2011, when the mayor declared Louisville, KY as a compassion city and signed a commitment for a 10 yearlong compassion campaign. Mayor Fischer recognized that the political quest for compassion goals were similar to what the Dalai Lama also spoke about during his public speech in Louisville. So, during Mayor Fischer’s recent visit to India, he found it important to show the report about making Louisville into a compassion city to the Dalai Lama.

I have been informed by several of my interlocutors that it is hard to receive someone like the Dalai Lama, who speaks of kindness and compassion, with xenophobia; instead, socially liberal politicians like Mayor Greg Fischer, eagerly honor and seek to identify with the Dalai

\(^{73}\) Louisville prides itself for producing an activist & boxer – celebrity Muhammad Ali. One of the major works in the city for social justice program is held by an organization called the Ali Center. By presenting the Ali hat, Mayor Fischer was presenting a souvenir to the Dalai Lama from the city of Louisville, KY.
Lama and his philosophy. The charismatic persona of the 14th Dalai Lama is irresistible (as I have mentioned in previous chapters). It is the amiable philosophy and appealing presence of the 14th Dalai Lama that has earned him acceptance within the international arena. From my observation of the Tibetan community, the Dalai Lama has opened a space for the Tibetan diaspora and Tibetan Buddhism within Western cities.

It is clear from my observations that the Dalai Lama has made a sufficiently positive impression on his Western audience to impute some of that good will onto other Tibetan monks as well. However, I will argue that it is not enough of an explanation to say that the 14th Dalai Lama’s popular personality is what causes Americans to like and respect all Tibetans and Tibetan Buddhism (and even exempt them from xenophobia in the U.S.). Instead, we will have to visit the history of how Tibetan Buddhism and Tibet have made their way to the West.

Why Tibetans? Lamaism and Western Buddhism

During the early 1900s the Tibetan state was still minimally involved in international politics because of its own desire to remain as a neutral Buddhist state (Schaik 2010; Goldstein 2007). The Western world heard of Tibet during this time through adventurers, missionaries, and military travelers (Schaik 2010). During this time, Western audiences fascinated by Tibetan Buddhism started Buddhist-influenced societies as a result of their imaginary identification with the religion (Shakya 1991; Lopez 1999, 1998, Frechette 2004). For example, in the late 19th century Madam Blavatsky (founder of the theosophy movement) borrowed and popularized tantric Tibetan Buddhist notions to awaken spiritual enlightenment for people in the West, and Evan Wentz wrote the Tibetan Book of the Dead, wherein a European man demands respect by insisting he is a reincarnated high Tibetan lama (Lopez 1999, 1998). These created new, largely imaginary, points of departure for Westerners seeking to understand Tibetan Buddhism and Lamaism, and fit them within even larger Western imaginaries about the supposedly mystical, anti-materialistic, and therefore desirable East (Lopez 1999, 1998).
Lamaism was originally a derogatory term used by European colonists (1920-1950) for what the colonists believed to be a “tainted Buddhist philosophy” which had adopted superstitious rituals such as venerating senior monks and teachers, worshiping deities, and Buddhist teachings used by priests-like lamas, to bring luck to lay people (Huber 1956; Lopez 1999; James 1997; Dapsance 2017). But eventually a new type of western imagination of Tibet arose when a ‘new-age’ (1970-80s) audience started, in the late 1960s, to revive the 19th century works of Madam Blavatsky (Lopez 1999, 1998). This in turn led some to express a desire to be a part of Tibetan identity, as if ‘Tibetan’ was an empty signifier waiting to be filled with their Western imagination (Lopez 1999, 1998). This time, far from being critical, the Western audience of Tibetan Buddhism wanted an exotic, new age religion ready with promises of individual spiritual enlightenment and self-contentment (Huber 1956; Lopez 1999; James 1997; Dapsance 2017). Thus, the earlier colonial scorn about Lamaism was replaced with visions of hoped for Eastern enlightenment in the land of Tibet, or Shangri-La, as in the imaginary Tibet-like utopia created by James Hilton for his 1933 novel Lost Horizons, and subsequently adopted by a western neo-Orientalist audiences as a model of their imagined Tibet, a land filled with secrets and promises of self-fulfillment (Lopez 1999).

After 1959, post-colonial Tibetan exiles come face to face with this western version of Tibet, Tibetan Buddhism, and the Tibetan state. For example, the movie Lost Horizon (1937), based on Hilton’s book, wove a Shangri La myth that portrayed a version of Tibet that the Tibetan exiles could not relate to (Shakya 1991; Goldstein 2007; Schaik 2010). The combined fantasy of Lamaism and Tibetan Buddhism in the New Age cult and in the Shangri La myth seeps into all aspects of Tibetan’s social, religious, and individual identity (Shakya 1991; Lopez 1999, 1998, Frechette 2004). Strangely, however, these Western imaginaries woven about Tibet created a sympathetic if inaccurate image of their homeland for newly exiled Tibetans to use (Frechette 2004). In 1960, Switzerland became the first nation to grant complete asylum to Tibetan exiles, claiming Tibetans are “mountain people, just like the Swiss” (SwissInfo.Ch 2010). Other western
nations supported Tibetan exiles with humanitarian aid, sponsorships, and resettlement (See Chapter 1&2).

As newly arrived exiles in western environments, Tibetan lamas found the venue of western Buddhism quite useful in conveying Buddhism to western audiences (Lopez 1999; Frechette 2004; Goldstein 2007; Dapsance 2017). This is not to say that Tibetan lamas are simply taking advantage of Western followers or lying to their Western students. Rather, I have been told that Tibetan lamas have learned that western followers want only certain aspects of Tibetan Buddhist philosophy. Even the 14th Dalai Lama presents Tibetan Buddhism as a philosophy of the mind. So Tibetan monks quickly learned that they were better off not disturbing the Western version of Buddhism, which treated Buddhism as a scholarly philosophy rather than as a religion (The Dalai Lama 2011). Unlike the practices the Lamas carried out for Tibetans, western followers were not interested in communal-social-ritualistic events at the monastery, nor in venerating the Rinpoches (reincarnated great teachers) and Geshes (the highest degree obtained by monks) for their enlightened spiritual attainments and practical techniques like, compassion, mindfulness, meditation, etc. (Lopez 1999; Dapsance 2017).

From my observations at the Louisville monastery, the Western followers of Tibetan Buddhism range in interest from those seeking strictly philosophical knowledge to those seeking a thorough religious scholarship about Tibetan Buddhism. Sophie, a middle-aged woman, spoke to me about her motivation for coming to the Louisville monastery. Sophie said, “I heard the Dalai Lama once and I really liked what he said, so I started coming to the center here to learn more about eastern philosophy.” Like Sophie, I have heard other monastery members also say on several occasions, “Buddhism is so much [more] like philosophy than religion” or “the Sunday morning classes are like [a] philosophy seminar.”

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Another Buddhist follower, David, in his late 20s, was very motivated to become a Tibetan monk, and talked about his experience of joining the Louisville monastery. David explained,

“Basically, what motivated me was when I was around 14-15, I started reading different religious books… I think it was my 14th birthday when my mom got me a book called *How to Expand Love* by the Dalai Lama… Overall I think I got into Buddhism before Buddhism was cool… So, I was looking for different dharma centers of any kind. It wasn’t just Tibetan. I just googled it and I saw that it was a Tibetan center [in Louisville]. So, I went to the center and I just opened the door and walked up the stairs- there was this little mahakala statue [Buddhist protective deity], that I didn't recognize it was mahakala at the landing. He has got this little scary wrathful face things looking at me and upstairs the monks were in the middle of saying prayers. This was different – it wasn’t Buddhism as I expected [meaning, not the scholarly or philosophical at first-look]. I feel like a lot of people are turned away – these are just elements of Tibetan Buddhist culture – I think people think it’s supernatural and too much about lamas. Anyway, I just sat there for the teaching and I was 16 years old back [then and] I didn't know what the teachings were about. But I went back every Sundays and I really liked it.”

The followers of the Louisville monastery came to the center for various reasons. Some followers only came to seek philosophical knowledge, whereas others wanted to soak in the ritualistic and religious aspects of Tibetan Buddhism. As mentioned by David, there were some Western audiences who wanted to differentiate what they regarded as supernatural aspects from Buddhist philosophy, and some eventually turned away from the center when they could not separate the two. When I spoke with the staff at the Louisville monastery, they seem to have realized the varied needs of their audience, which is why the monastery now has two legally registered names for the same organization: one, Tashi Norbu (pseudonym) that signifies it as an educational and Tibetan activist institute, and the other, Chopel Gompa (psuedonym) that signifies the religious pursuit of the center. The monastery explained that the two names helped them in acquiring visas for monks from India, but they also signify the dual work that the monastery conducts. Nonetheless, the varied needs and demands of the western audience of Tibetan Buddhism, do useful to the Louisville monastery center, were there because the western imaginary had already created a space for Tibet and Tibetan Buddhism in Louisville.
I argue that rather than remaining oriental others, Tibetans have been re-introducing themselves to the West, and adjusting themselves to prevailing western imaginaries about Tibet, to remake themselves as, in a sense, Western subjects. This is part of Tibetan flexible liminality, which includes the practice of adjusting cultural practices to meet external foreign influences. The flexible liminality of Tibetans relies on the interest multiple nation-states have in Tibet and their ability to adjust their cultural practices to influences to those external entities. In previous chapters, I have argued that Tibetan exiles are influenced by multiple geo-political entities and have adjusted their cultural practices to accommodate these various external influences. As a result, over time, the adjustment made by Tibetan exiles to external influences has garnered them better life chances. This ability to roll with the multicultural punches thrown by the world at large is what I call the flexible liminality of Tibetan exiles. In the case of the Louisville Tibetans, we can see in them a good example of how cultural adjustments are made by Tibetans in diaspora.

From my observations, people of the Tibetan diaspora are respectfully using a pre-existing space created by the Western imagination, yet still reeducating Western audiences about an actual Tibet and actual Tibetan Buddhism (as compared to how Tibet is imagined). As mentioned in Chapter 1, Vajrayana Buddhism is a form of Mahayana Buddhism that uses a faster vehicle to liberation through tantric ritual. The religious practice involves using *mantras* (prayer chants), *dharanis* (incantation and recitation), *mudras* (bodily gestures used to seal spiritual energy), and *mandalas* (diagram or geometric pattern representing Buddhist cosmos), and visualization of deities and Buddhas (Davidson 2002).

The Louisville monastery balanced true-Tibetan practice and demand from Western audiences was visible in the Louisville monastery’s continuing use of rituals, prayers, deity worship, and other *puja* ceremonies (*mantras, dharanis, mudras, mandalas, deity and Buddhas worship*), while at the same time conducting a Sunday morning public congregation as a Buddhist philosophical seminar. Traditionally, Buddhist philosophical seminars were only reserved for Buddhist students interested in becoming monks/nuns, but at the Louisville monastery this has
become a weekly public event that coincides with the American tradition of Sunday morning church services and Sunday school. The Sunday congregation at the Louisville Monastery still starts and ends with Tibetan prayers that everybody recites from an English translation of Tibetan words; and thus, still takes place within the realm of true Tibetan practices. This once again shows the balancing of demands from a western audience with the need to educate westerners using true-Tibetan practices.

Analysis: Americans bowing to Tibetan Monks

Going back, then, to the story in the beginning of this chapter about regular Americans bowing down to show respect to Tibetan monks in Louisville, we can now ask: why are some Americans willing to accept and respect Tibetans, especially, in the current incredibly sensitive political climate of U.S. anti-immigrant politics? If even in Louisville other ethnic groups are being targeted with verbal (and sometimes physical) abuse for being different, why are Tibetans (for the most part) excluded from such xenophobia? However much it was pleasing to learn from most of my Tibetan interlocutors in the U.S. that Tibetan immigrants have not been targets of full fledge hate-crimes, the puzzle of their relatively benign treatment remains. A few of my interlocutors did mention that Americans who assumed that the Tibetans were not born in the U.S passively criticized them for having an accent, or, in other cases. However, I recognize that Tibetans in the U.S. cannot completely bypass the history of orientalism and racism that is common for American residents of Asian heritage. Regardless, Americans bowing to Tibetan monks is an action by regular Americans signifying an acceptance and respect for Tibetans and Tibetan Buddhism in general.

I argue that there are three main reasons why those Americans bowed to Tibetan monks in Louisville, KY that relate to the larger issue of why Tibetan immigrants, for the most part, have been well treated. First, Louisville has laid a good foundation for inter-faith dialogue between different religious institutions. Moreover, Louisville’s Mayor even encourages this inter-faith
work by inviting the leaders of different religion to consult with him about the city’s progress. It is within this space of inter-faith diversity that Louisville’s Tibetan monastery (and the Tibetan diaspora) found recognition in the city of Louisville. Second, the popular charismatic impression created by the 14th Dalai Lama has bequeathed to Western audiences an overflowing sense of respect towards the Tibet and Tibetan Buddhism. We can see the evidence for this in Louisville Mayor Greg Fischer wanting to make a visit to the Dalai Lama’s hometown in Dharamsala and proudly presenting his work on the compassion project. The compassion project has been front and center in Mayor Fischer’s election campaign since 2010; and, finally, after eight years, with the project showing good social-economic progress, he wanted to share this with the Dalai Lama (See Louisville’s website for project progress: https://louisvilleky.gov/government/compassionate-city).

Lastly, the Tibetan diaspora has created an incredible balance between the pre-existing western imaginaries about Tibet and re-educating western audiences to an appreciation of actual Tibetan practices. This can be seen from David’s remark above about American Buddhist followers not employing the “superstitious” or ritual aspects of Buddhism, the Louisville monastery’s use of two different registered names for their religious and educational purposes, and from the Louisville monastery’s efforts to address their American audience’s demand for Buddhist philosophical rather than obviously religious seminars.

These factors of inter-faith dialogue, the Dalai Lama’s popularity, and the Louisville monastery’s efforts to keep up the interest of American audiences in Buddhism, have made a generous space for Tibet and Tibetan Buddhism in the landscape of Louisville city. However, Tibetans with Asian phenotypic profiles may never be exempt from the racial profiling and orientalist attitude commonly held by Americans towards Asians residing in the U.S. There could be a whole other study about Tibetans becoming Asian Americans, but this will have to be addressed in future research. My research now only covers the visible public actions that immigrants face while interacting with Americans in the U.S. From my observations in the city of
Louisville, I note that Louisville residents have accepted Tibetans better than any other immigrant community. I argue that, ultimately, the reason for this better acceptance of the Tibetan diaspora lies in the flexible liminality of the Tibetan exile community.

**Tibetans – Ideal Refugees/Immigrants**

The Tibetan diaspora have entered the Western refugee stereotype of the “ideal refugee/immigrant”. Tibetan exiles have built on the previous Western imaginaries of Shangri-La and yet are re-educating their Western audiences with actual Tibetan practices. From my observation, other migrant populations in Louisville (like Syrian refuges, Bhutanese refugees, etc.) did not have the same type of voice or power to influence Americans. In order to better evaluate the “ideal refugee/immigrant” stereotype in the U.S., I will use scholarship on ‘refugeeness’ in Anthropology. It can be limiting to attempt to describe the ‘refugee’ experience using simply legal definitions by “category” of people. In the case of Tibetans, they are not recognized by the UNHCR or host nations as refugees (See Chap 6). Thus, refugeeness is more often recognized within refugee studies in Anthropology as a better avenue to understanding the holistic experiences of refugees.

Lissa Malkki (1995, 1996) argues that refugeeness is a “matter of becoming” that is learned by the refugees from the administrators that oversee refugees in exile. Malkki argues that for refugee administrators, including the media and sponsors, there is a preference to see a distant image of refugees (i.e. the physical display of them as a homeless, helpless, victimized, bodily ill, mass of bodies), rather than to hear their stories of displacement. Malkki argues that the physical display of refugees was what the administrators, media, and sponsors considered a better representation of refugeeness, rather than the real voices and stories conveyed by the refugees.

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75 The scholarship only speaks of the legal category of refugee, but since Tibetans are not considered legal refugees but have to seek asylum once they land in the U.S., I will call them immigrants. Besides the geo-political purposes, any Tibetan exiles could easily fall under the category of refugee or asylum-seeker.
themselves. Moreover, by creating an image of a “universal humanitarian subject,” humanitarian interventions can provide a “real refugee” to donors and evoke sympathy from sponsors. Marta Szcepanik (2016) references the recent Syrian refugee crisis in Europe to illustrate that politicians and media do play out the same stereotypes, first described by Malkki, of good versus bad refugees. Szcepanik also argues that material possessions, gender, travelling single or with family, places of origin, and reliance on social welfare are factors used for deciding between good versus bad refugees. Aihwa Ong’s (2003) research on Asian American immigrants in California argues that belonging to the U.S. has always had “unofficial social meanings and criteria,” which the government imbues when training new immigrant subjects via policies, and through welfare distribution. However, the government also has an orientalist tendency or bias when training Asian Americans to become “model minorities”76. For example, Ong argues that early Chinese immigrants in the 1920s were taught to be civilized by scientific management in factory settings and by training for moral conduct via refugee resettlement agencies.

I agree with Malkki and Szcepanik that refugeeness can become a learned skill for displaced people and immigrants. While refugeeness can be used to define the conditions of exclusion and displacement (Novak 2013; Puscas 2009; Agier 2002; Chimni 2000; Gallagher 1996; Keely 1996; Malkki 1995), it also can encompass the burden of resettlement and assimilation for immigrants in the host country (Marfleet 2007; Cernea 2000; Mortland 1987; Chambers 1986). In this light, refugeeness can define the burden for refugee/immigrant of becoming “ideal refugees” and “model minorities.” Lissa Malkki (1995, 1996) argues that refugees have to adapt to refugee administrators’ expectations of a universal humanitarian subject to better evoke sympathy from donors and sponsors, and as Szcepanik (2016) and Ong (2003) explain, refugees/immigrants are also subjected to the host country’s ideal standard for

76 There has been much research conducted to understand the “model minority” construction in the case of Asians in North America. The “model minority” notion signifies individuals who are intelligent, industrious, enduring, obedient, academically resourceful, and highly successful. (Lee1996, Sue & Okazki 1991, Suzuki 1989, 2002, Min 2004, Li 2005)
citizenship. In the U.S., refugees/immigrants are expected to shed all foreign cultural tendencies and adapt American moral values, and, especially, learn to become independent of government welfare and humanitarian industry. From my observation of the refugee resettlement agency, refugees were pushed and bureaucratically controlled to have employment as soon as possible (within first 3 months of arrival) and, thus, to become financially self-sufficient. Refugee resettlement staff members rewarded an immigrant’s financial independence with government financial incentives and social praise.

One aspect of the U.S. government’s perspective that already put Tibetans in the “ideal refugee/immigrant” or “model minority” category was their recognition that most Tibetans do not rely on government welfare or humanitarian assistance. Because most Tibetans are not classified as refugees, Tibetan exiles cannot rely on humanitarian agencies to help them settle in the U.S. (See Chap 6); they have to do it all by their own skills or contacts. Soon after applying for asylum from the U.S. government, most Tibetans are forced to seek out jobs because they cannot easily receive or rely on government welfare. Moreover, Tibetans who arrive in the United States sponsored by educational Institutions can finish their educations before having to seek a change in their immigration status. This is in contrast to officially resettled refugees who have to seek work immediately.

All of these factors filter the Tibetan exile population down to a carefully selected, best-of-the-best, Tibetans; those who could settle best in the U.S. (See Chap 6). As a result, most Tibetan interlocutors I spoke with were well educated, English speaking, highly skilled, and highly motivated to acquire good-paying jobs, hence, apparently confirming the stereotype of the “model minority” so often characterizing Asians in North America.

A Tibetan woman I spoke with who came to the U.S. on a college full-scholarship explained to me, “As a migrant, we know we got very lucky, we have this opportunity that others

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77 In Kentucky, the Wilson/Fish (W/F) program is a subset of government funding to increase refugee’s self-sufficiency. W/F awards refugees with bonus financial reward for acquiring job within the first three months of arrival.
back home really want. So, we feel like we have to prove ourselves, make something of ourselves” (Interview 2018). The combination of high-skill employment training, impressive educational background, and the grit to work hard for good employment in the U.S. have shone Tibetans from U.S. government perspective “ideal refugees” or a “model minority.” Indeed, I have observed that, in a way, Tibetans do fit the description of the stereotypical model minority as defined by the U.S. government. What this characterization alone does not reveal is how the Tibetan exile community has built intricately designed religious and educational institutions, and hanging-out infrastructural spaces, to help educate and socialize Tibetan exiles before they come so they satisfy the criteria for U.S. resettlement. Thereafter, Tibetan exiles are further carefully selected by U.S. institutions (those sponsoring them for visas); and usually such institutions are aware of the Tibetan political cause, and already sympathize with the Tibetan exile community, which is why they are willing to help Tibetan immigrate to the U.S. in the first place.

I argue that the effort from the Tibetan exile community to nurture Tibetan exiles to make them “fit” enough to pass through some U.S. institution’s selection process, and the U.S. embassy’s visa process, produces best-of-the-best individuals (though education, language skills, religious degree, etc.) just so they will have an opportunity to come to the U.S. As a result, Tibetan exiles that had the opportunity to get sponsors and resettle in the U.S. display “model minority” traits in the U.S. It should be noted that I am not advocating, here, the selective criteria modeled by the U.S. government because they do not help the entire Tibetan diaspora, only a selected few. Regardless of this, I have noticed that the Tibetan exiles who make it to the U.S. already express their best model minority traits through their educational advances, financial independence, community service, and so on. These individuals had to nurture these skills just to be able to immigrate to the U.S. Hence, I argue, ultimately, that it is the combined force of the Dalai Lama’s charisma, the Tibetan exile community’s institutions designed to nurture Tibetans in exile, and the selective immigration of Tibetan diaspora in the U.S., that has allowed Tibetan diaspora to fit into the stereotype of the “ideal refugee/immigrant,” and “model minority.” Thus, I
agree with Malkki and Szcepanik that “refugeeness” and being an “ideal refugee” is an act of becoming.

We can see with the case of the Tibetan diaspora that though they lack access to the category of refugee, and thus humanitarian assistance, they are still responding to external expectations for them to “act” according to the media’s expectations about good refugees. This is a reflection of flexible liminality working among Tibetan exiles. That is, when Tibetans are influenced by multiple geo-polities, they adjust their practices accordingly to match such external forces. As Ong has commented, there is a certain standard of expectation immigrants must meet to become citizens in the U.S., and Tibetan exiles are meeting those criteria because their resettlement process is already so highly shaped by external geo-politics. Thus, they are not learning to become a “model minority” after resettlement; rather, Tibetan exiles that have the potential to be “model minority” are being selected through the international Tibetan movement’s own bureaucratic filter to resettle in the U.S.

Conclusion

I started this chapter with an unusual story about regular Americans in Louisville bowing down to show respect to Tibetan monks in the middle of a road. The whole chapter is structured around trying to understand this behavior by regular Americans in a climate of anti-immigrant feeling in the U.S. In the last section, I asked if Tibetans in the U.S. have embodied the stereotype of the “ideal refugee” or of the “model minority.” I have ethnographically described the city of Louisville to better understand the models and values of its host residents. This led us to the knowledge that Louisville has a strong inter-faith tradition that is upheld both by the leadership of various religious institutions but also by the city’s Mayor as well. It is in the space created by this welcoming environment of inter-faith work in Louisville that the Tibetan monastery and Tibetan diaspora have found their way into the city. The Dalai Lama’s charismatic personality has distributed the good reputation of Tibetans and Tibetan Buddhism to Western audiences.
Additionally, I argue that the Louisville monastery upholds a balance between Western imaginaries of Tibet and actual Tibetan Buddhism, and reeducates its Western audience using true-Tibet and true-Tibetan Buddhism. I contend this too is a trait of a flexible liminality that delicately adjusts to external influences. All these reasons combined have left a powerful impression of Tibetans and Tibetan Buddhism on their Western audience, which, I argue, is the context within which the story of Americans bowing to Tibetan monk in Louisville, KY makes sense. Lastly, I also argue that Tibetans embody the stereotype of “model minority” and “ideal refugee/immigrant” only because they are nurtured by surrounding education, religious, social institutions to pass the rigorous vetting to immigrate to the U.S. prior to resettlement in the U.S. that helps them act like a model minority in the U.S. Hence, the Tibetan exile community has formed institutions to craft best Tibetans who can pass the extremely competitive process for resettlement in the U.S. ultimately creating them into American standard “model minority”. This tactic is, what I argue, part of Tibetan exile’s unique geo-politically crafted refugeeess.
Chapter 8: The Qualities of Liminality: Degree of Flexibility in Liminal Condition

Introduction & Overview

At a public event in the U.S., I met a Tibetan-Canadian woman, Choden. She was a middle-aged woman who had moved to Canada with her parents at around 10 years of age and grew up listening to her parent’s story of fleeing Tibet. Now Choden runs an NGO that helps Tibetans living in Tibet. Choden proudly stated,

“We are so small and [yet] we are so loud; [playfully] added in fact all of my Kurdistani and Palestinian friends are jealous of the Tibetan [nationalist/political] campaign here [U.S. and Canada].”

There is some truth in the above statement made by Choden. The Tibetan exile community has exhibited a proactive cultural practice that helps them adjust to local circumstances, Dharamsala, India or Louisville, KY, wherever their exile-hood has landed them. I argue that the Tibetan exile community uses this unique proactive cultural practice to layout opportunities for individual Tibetan exiles to enjoy better life chances. I call this unique cultural practice flexible liminality. Flexible liminality can be used to describe the cultural practice of the Tibetan exile community, and the reason for the Tibetan diaspora’s socio-economic and political success worldwide.

Describing the revealing and advantageous use of flexible liminality by the Tibetan exile community has been my dissertation’s key goal. However, for this chapter, I would also like to highlight a practical theoretical use of flexible liminality. In order to find out why the Tibetan diaspora’s political plight and cultural preservation struggle has been so successful compared with other exile groups, we will have to look at exile groups more generally through the theoretical lenses of flexible liminality.

Throughout the dissertation, I have argued that flexible liminality relies on two aspects – geo-political influences acting on the ethnic group, and the ethnic groups’ own ability to adjust their cultural practices to such external influences. In each chapter of this dissertation I have explained different aspects of the Tibetan exile’s flexible liminality – from multiple geo-political
influences that surround them to tactical uses of Tibetan exile formal and informal institutions to help guide the cultural practice of Tibetan individuals. It shows an active effort on the part of the Tibetan exile community to gain the most out of their liminal conditions. I will summarize the characteristics of *flexible liminality as a cultural practice* that I have learned from the Tibetan exile community and apply the *flexible liminality theory* to analyze what types of liminality different exile groups are experiencing.

My objective in this chapter is to first describe the theoretical contribution of my theory of flexible liminality to refugee and liminality studies. I suggest that the theory of flexible liminality tests for the quality of the liminality being experienced, which is an important characteristic to know about a group or individual experiencing liminal conditions. Then, I will summarize four distinct attributes of the Tibetan exile community’s flexible liminality. Next, I will explain the different types of liminal characteristics visible for the Syrian exile community and Latino community in the U.S. I argue that these communities in the U.S. have liminality that historically changes back and forth between flexible and inflexible forms depending on U.S. politics. A new look at case studies from two liminal communities will help portray how to use the theory of flexible liminality in order to test for another exile group’s quality of liminality. After looking at these case studies of the Syrian and Latino communities, I will revisit Choden, the Tibetan-Canadian woman, and her statement about the success of the Tibetan exile community in comparison to other exile groups, to inquire why that has come to be so. Finally, I will argue that the theory of flexible liminality could be a useful analytical tool for government and refugee service agencies to use to help understand, and more fairly deal with, a marginalized group’s quality of liminality. Nonetheless, there is still more research to be done on liminality and refugee studies, and for that, I will talk about gaps in this study and recommend future scholarly work.
Theoretical Contribution to Anthropology

Liminality and Refugee Studies

Liminality is a common condition experienced by all exile populations in the world (van Gennep 1960). However, I argue that not all who go through liminality have the same experience. In anthropology, the early scholars of liminality were mostly just concerned with distinguishing liminality as a standard structural condition (Turner 1967; Douglas 1966). Arnold van Gennep was the first to introduce the idea of liminality in his book The Rites of Passage (1960 [1909]), as a transitional rite marked as a period of transition. Victor Turner further developed and popularized the idea of liminality through his essay Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in Rites of Passage (1967), and later through the Ndembu ethnography in his book The Forest of Symbols (1969). For Turner, liminality is any situation, object, or subject, taking place in any space and time that is stuck in the “betwixt and between” (Thomassen 2009). In her book, Purity and Danger (1966), Mary Douglas takes the idea of liminality a little further by seeing liminality as a conceptual structure that is important to the wellbeing of a functioning society. Douglas takes a neo-functionalist approach to explain why well-organized societies need to include and exclude objects to maintain social categories and orders (Douglas 1966).

I contend that surely there would be objects in categories other than inside or outside of society as described by early functionalist scholars. For example, just thinking of one case for now, the Hijra (transgender- male to female) population of North India (Nanda 1990). In North India, the hijra group are for the most part excluded, even looked down upon, from the point of view of conventionally patriarchal Indian family and society (Nanda 1990). Even I have observed the hostility hijras experience from the regular Indian population during my fieldwork in India. In Delhi I saw hijras, in dire conditions of health, begging by the jammed up traffic; and when they walked over to our taxi, the driver, yelling obscenities, just shooed them away. However, I also know that they are often happily accepted by the regular Indian community during religious ceremonies, and are deemed religiously important to society (Nanda 1990).
Later liminality scholars have recognized that there is more than one standard threshold of liminality, which created a need to explore the characteristics of liminality itself (Jackson 1990, Garsten 1999, Dutton 2005, Yang 2000). Thus, we have studies that have imagined liminality on a scale that placed a subject closer to extreme liminality or farther away from the extreme experience of liminality (Jackson 1990, Garsten 1999, Dutton 2005, Yang 2000, Thomasen 2009, 2015). Thomasen’s analysis of Turner’s explanation of liminality states:

If the dimensions of subject/space/time each have three basic dimensions, one could bring in another variable, namely “scale,” referring to the “degree” to which liminality is experienced, or, in other words, the intensiveness of the liminal or period… it does seem meaningful to suggest that there are degrees of liminality, and that the degree depends on the extent to which the liminal experience can be weighted against persisting structures (Thomassen 2009:18)

Similar to liminality scholars, early refugee study scholars have also homogenized the liminal conditions of refugees and immigrants. Giorgio Agamben, in his book, *Homo Sacer* (1995), puts forward the idea of liminality in refugee studies through the theoretical concept of the “bare life.” Agamben uses this term to describe the crude form of a state’s control of an individual’s body shown in current day refugees residing in camps. The nature of “bare life” (as revealed by refugees) creates problems for the modern nation-state because refugees bring into question the taken-for-granted idea of a link between a birth-nation and individual-citizens (Agamben 1988). Liisa Malkki, in her book *Purity and Exile* (1995), draws ideas from the functionalist perspective of what nation-state’s need within the liminal or polluted category, and applies it to a refugee population. Malkki problematizes the universalized image of the ‘refugee’ and its association with bare humanity. Malkki argues that a refugee population threatens the “national order of things” by being “matter out of place.”

The majority of current literature on refugees relies on various exclusion theories that speak of refugees as “bare-life,” liminal, and polluted beings (Chambers 1986; Harrell-Bond 1986; Chavez 1992; Turner 2010; Owens 2009). Most critical refugee scholarship recognizes the influence that the geo-political and humanitarian organization’s refugee category has on
individuals’ social-political identities (Malkki 1995, Doty, 1996, Tambiah 1985, Bigo 2002, Turner 2010). While I agree it is important to understand the refugee experience in terms of geo-political complexities surrounding the exile population, I contend there must be more than one type of liminality experience for refugee and immigrant life.

Similar to later liminality studies scholars, refugee study scholars have also distinguished between the characteristics of a variety of refugee experiences in terms of their degree of liminality. For example, in refugee studies, scholars have described those refugees living closer to the host community as having been assimilated and less liminal compared to refugees living in isolated camps (Malkki 1995, Turner 2010) – thus stating differences in socio-economic experience for refugees who live in more isolated camps versus refugees who live in town alongside the host community (Chambers 1986, Whitaker 1999, Cernea 2000, Malkki 1995, Marfleet 2007, Mortland 1987, Montclos and Kagwanja 2000, Turner 2010). I recognize the importance in understanding the degree of liminality for refugee and immigrant groups; however, there has not been a discussion on the quality of liminality experienced by refugee or immigrant groups. And the quality of liminality I particularly want to discuss here is flexibility or inflexibility. I argue that this quality of liminality is an important characteristic of liminality, and that, by considering this, my theory of flexible liminality can contribute towards both liminality and refugee studies. While the degree of liminality is a test for how close or far away a group or individual is from extreme liminal conditions, my theory of flexible liminality looks closely at the type of liminality, regardless of its degree, lived by the group or individual. The theory of flexible liminality tests for the quality of liminality for a group or individuals already within the liminal condition. In other words, I argue that the theory of flexible liminality contributes to our understanding by showing that while liminal conditions may vary by degree of liminality, they also do on a quality scale that ranges from inflexible to considerably flexible.
Characteristics of the Tibetan Exile Community’s Flexible Liminality

1. Multiple Exclusions

In summarizing my argument about multiple exclusions, I have argued that Tibetan exile groups attract interest from several, competing, geopolitically powerful states and power blocks: namely, China, India, and the West (U.S., Canada, Australia, France, Switzerland etc.). Tibetan exiles are excluded from each geo-political entity in different ways that best suit the entities involved given their international relationships with other competing states and powers. For example, India allows Tibetan exiles to stay in the country as foreign guests but has not legally issued them a UNCHR ‘refugee’ category because that would pit them directly against China, which claims that Tibetan exiles are not victimized population (Nowak 1984; HRLN 2007; Artiles 2009; McConnell 2011). On the other hand, western countries, like the U.S., have allowed Tibetan individuals to apply for resettlement in the West through individual applications from asylum-seekers but without a continuous open resettlement program for the whole exile group (Hess 2009; Yeshi 2012; TJC 2011). As a result, I argue that western countries like the U.S. have been able to maintain a delicate balance between obliquely recognizing Chinese behavior in Tibet without directly confronting them about Tibet’s status, something that would endanger their international relationship with China. Thus, the U.S. does not recognize Tibetans as members of a ‘victimized population’ generally, but does, or did, grant selected Tibetans human rights-based asylum according to each individual Tibetan’s situation (Hess 2009). Hence, three different nation states show three different forms of exclusion.

I argue that the Tibetan exile community has responded to each geo-political entity’s exclusion differently in order to best acquire opportunities from competing geo-polities. First, the Tibetan exile community is actively retaliating against the Chinese government’s (false) narrative that Tibet was never an independent state by creating a new sense of Tibetan nationalism, ‘Tibetanness’, which included responsibility for members of the diaspora to speak out about the Tibetan political plight to outsiders (See Chap 2 & 6). Moreover, the exile community is
renegotiating their Tibetan identity to include, or incorporate, a larger Buddhist population in India, Nepal, and Bhutan, as Tibetans (See Chap 2). The Tibetan exile community has found the political freedom to express their Tibetan nationalist identity, thus ensuring that larger numbers of Tibetans participate in Tibetan exile social-cultural-political welfare and activism (See Chap 2). Second, since most Tibetan exile social and political organizations are in India, the exile community has found a stronghold in India for political activism (See Chap 2). To maintain this stronghold, the Tibetan exile community discourages individual Tibetans from taking up Indian citizenship as a means of escaping their excluded and marginalized status in India (See Chap 2, 4 & 6).

Lastly, Tibetan exile community is paving a path for individual Tibetans to resettle in the West and find their better life opportunities (See Chap 4&6). The Tibetan exile community, along with exile political leaders and the exile government, has been working slowly to build up a good reputation for Tibetans in the West through their marketing of Buddhist philosophy, liberal humanist values, and the charismatic appeal of the 14th Dalai Lama to the West (See Chap 6&7). These paved the way for Tibetan individuals to resettle in the western countries. However, Tibetan individuals were also attempting to align themselves to best suit the positions laid out by institutions and agents in the West so that they could be sponsored to resettle in the West (See Chap 4&6). These institutions and agents in the West were opening doors for Tibetan individuals out of empathy for Tibetan exiles in general, while also selecting the ‘best’ of Tibetans in terms of them having the appropriate skills needed by their own institutions (See Chap 6&7). Thus, in various ways, the effort of the Tibetan exile community slowly carved a way for individual Tibetans to resettle in the West and acquire better life chances.

2. **Cultural Practice of Tibetan Exile Community**

Flexible liminality is a cultural practice adopted by the Tibetan exile community. I argue that flexible liminality is not just an individual attitude, but a distinct set of cultural practices set up by formal and informal institutions over time. I observed these institutions manifested in the form of
the Tibetan government in exile, cafés and non-profits in Dharamsala, and as Tibetan community centers and monasteries in the U.S. (See Chap 4, 6&7). I also found other less tangible institutions guiding Tibetan exiles in the form of social-media platforms to maintain exile social networks that also spread and maintain the responsibility Tibetan exiles feel to externalize their political agenda and maintain their refugee ‘mark’ through the display of ‘Tibetan-ness’ (See Chap 6). I argue that these institutions built by the Tibetan exile community set guidelines for Tibetan individuals to follow in developing attitudes and behaviors that fit well within the customs of these institutions (See Chap 4, 6 &7). In this last sense, flexible liminality for Tibetans is also a form of habitus, as described by Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu 1977).

All this starts from a Tibetan government in exile that has laid down a path for Tibetans in exile to follow to find good life chances wherever their exile-hood may land them. In adopting liberal democratic governance and western liberal humanist philosophies, Tibetan exiles have created a sympathetic space within a foreign geo-political zone, the West that cannot completely either accept or reject Tibetans (See Chap 7). Of course, the Tibetan diaspora, living in various marginalized conditions, and spread throughout the Indian subcontinent (including Nepal and Bhutan), China (in the Tibetan Autonomous Area), and various western countries, must adjust to radically different conditions (See Chap 6).

It is not enough for Tibetan exile leaders alone to uphold the cultural practice of flexible liminality to provide better life chances for their exile community; instead, I argue that there are institutions of various degrees of formality placed throughout the Tibetan exile community to ensure that Tibetan individuals are properly guided (See Chap 4, 5, 6&7). For example, the cafés and non-profits in Dharamsala, which create a relaxing ambiance in which Tibetan and foreign tourists can spend time socializing (See Chap 4). These infrastructures of hanging out – of cafés and non-profits ‘experiences’ -- enable diverse populations within the city to bond together, and for the most part, there were abundant Tibetans and foreign tourists or Indians who were interested in the welfare and plight of the Tibetan exile community (See Chap 4). These
infrastructures invited in participants for educational or social welfare purposes and promoted bonding in the form of teacher-student relationships, casual friendships, and connecting colleagues for scholarly and human rights campaigns (See Chap 4 &6).

Another type of institution is the political campaign of “Free Tibet” that has paved a path for Tibetan exiles to portray their political plight to the global media (See Chap 5). The “Free Tibet” campaign stretches out to encompass all directions of political opinion among its participants – whether human rights, Rangzen, or Umaylam. In this way the infrastructure of “Free Tibet” dissolves contradicting opinions to form one united front (See Chap 5). This is a very good example of the cultural practice of flexible liminality, wherein one can find maneuvering room even within dire, marginalized, conditions. For Tibetan individuals, “Free Tibet” has turned into a larger-than-life, or larger than their own small community’s life, political cry for the exile community and their supporters (See Chap 5). Because of this, they are obligated to forgo the public expression of individual opinions and join the campaign to form a united voice against Chinese occupation. In this way, the “Free Tibet” infrastructure takes over to fulfill the purpose of the Tibetan exile community and to guides individual Tibetans to participate in the larger political campaign without the friction of openly expressed individual political differences (See Chap 5).

3. Downside of Flexible Liminality

There are two looming negative aspects of the Tibetan exile’s flexible liminality. First, the condition of liminality itself is not an easy space for any individual to occupy (See Chap 2&6). It is a marginalized situation wherein people experience intense socio-political-economic discrimination. Some of the problems experienced by the Tibetan exile community in Dharamsala were social discrimination by certain Indian populations, youth who were highly educated but unemployed, and the continual insecurity of being stateless people (See Chap 2&6). Further, Tibetan flexible liminality does not cover or benefit all Tibetans in exile. Many Tibetans who, because of lack of resources or language skills, cannot become part of the infrastructure that
provides opportunities for success have to dwell in the world of legal insecurity, socio-economic deprivation, fear of persecution in various foreign host countries, and so on (See Chap 2&6). In the West, the largest problem expressed to me by the Tibetan exile community was that of maintaining their Tibetan identity and performing their Tibetan-ness by becoming politically active (See Chap 6). For young Tibetans growing up in the West it is difficult that exile government leaders, and the Tibetan community in general, are expecting them to resist too much assimilation in the west and adopt a large nationalist responsibility for a state that they have never seen (See Chap 6). Tibetan flexible liminality is a path paved for a liminal life; how will it fare among Tibetan youths who no longer feel quite so liminal? However, regardless, flexible liminality is a tough practice along a difficult path in different ways for each Tibetan exile.

The second negative aspect of flexible liminality in Tibetans is that Dharamsala has become a mecca for Tibetan exile socio-political activities but also a fertile ground for manifestations of flexible liminality. While it is good for the Tibetan exile community to receive global attention for their activities, for Tibetan individuals it can become overbearing to constantly receive this type of attention (See Chap 2). Dharamsala was filled with foreign tourists attracted by the Tibetan exile community and the type of activities in which they could participate with Tibetans (See Chap 4). However, one result of so many foreigners travelling to see Dharamsala’s Tibetans was what one might call visibility fatigue, as Tibetan individuals and organizations were prompted to answer, over and over again, deep political and identity questions on an everyday basis (See Chap 2). This transforms needed and wanted attention for Tibetans into an uncomfortable daily form of too-close scrutiny. I saw many Tibetans shying away from foreigners even before they asked any questions (See Chap 2). Many Tibetan individuals in Dharamsala even saw my polite requests for help with my research work as overbearing attention (See Chap 2). And I often questioned whether my research was helpful or merely another intrusive burden for Tibetans in Dharamsala. Ultimately, my Tibetan research assistant in
Dharamsala was a great help to me when it came to understanding this invisible, yet overbearing, part of the lives of Dharamsala Tibetans (See Chap 2).

4. Transforming Surrounding Geo-Politics

The Tibetan exile community is influenced by multiple geo-political entities and their mutual competitions, but they are also active in transforming their host communities and anyone who is interested and listening to them (See Chap 6&7). I have learned to understand how a marginalized group could also actively transform the geo-politics that surround them through the Tibetan exile community. Most refugee scholarship explains the victimizing conditions of exile communities, and rightfully so, because most exile communities do not have the same scope for active agency as I found in the Tibetan exile community. When the Tibetan exile community first came face to face with outsiders, they were surprised by the western orientalist imaginaries already present for Tibetans (See Chap 7). Tibetan leadership, headed by the 14th Dalai Lama, used the same space crafted by such western imaginaries to access humanitarian aid and support for the resettlement of Tibetan exiles. Tibetan exiles in India and the West were surrounded by the mythology of Shangri-La and the shadows of Lamaism (See Chapter 7). I have observed that the Tibetan exile community is slowly re-educating their foreign audiences, and their supporters in general, about the real Tibet and Tibetan culture (See Chapter 7).

We can find the slow transformation of the foreign audience created by the Tibetan exile community in the popularity of Tibetan political activism, in the widening acceptance of Tibetan Buddhism in the West and India (Nepal and Bhutan), and the increasingly easy acceptance of the Tibetan population in various geo-politics (See Chapter 6&7). It should be noted that I am not claiming that Tibetan individuals have any powers of influence over larger geo-political entities such as states or the UN; rather, it is the Tibetan exile community’s cultural practices that have crafted a space for Tibetan individuals to find ways to assimilate in foreign host countries. These spaces are found in the form of educational, religious, and human-rights activist organizations, and so on (See Chapter 4,5,6&7). There are various political activist organizations dedicated to
promoting the Tibetan political cause, including the “Free Tibet” movement. A large number of supporters for the Tibetan political cause are non-Tibetans from India and from various western countries. The popularity of Tibetan political movements of the “Free Tibet” movement lead through activist organizations like the Students of Free Tibet, shows the dedication of the Tibetan community to educating other non-Tibetans about the Chinese occupation and human rights violations in Tibet (See Chap 5). Besides political activism, the Tibetan exile community has also found themselves being welcomed to various religious centers in India and the West (See Chapter 7). The ideas of Tibetan Buddhism as either unintelligible Lamaism or as a new-age experiment with tantric Buddhism has been replaced by real Tibetan Lamas (Buddhism teachers, including the Dalai Lama), who are teaching true Tibetan-Buddhist philosophies guided within the realm of Tibetan religious customs, like the firewood puja, Tibetan deity worship, prayers, etc. (See Chap 7).

Lastly, Tibetans have found themselves resettling in various foreign countries and each Tibetan is expected to take-up the responsibility of upholding Tibetan-ness (See Chap 6). This Tibetan-ness requires one to identify with their liminal place in the world as a Tibetan exile recognizing the Tibetan refugee mark within them regardless of their citizenship (See Chap 6). They also must externalize their Tibetan political cause to outsiders as a nationalist duty towards the Tibetan state. The Tibetan exile community, government, and family members all expect Tibetan individuals to preserve Tibetan culture, values, and nationalist duty (See Chap 6). As a result, the Tibetan political cause is popular and sympathized with by people within various nation states. At the same time, the Tibetan exile community also manages to re-educate and transform their geo-political interlocutors wherever their exile-hood has landed them (See Chapter 4,5,6&7).
Applying Flexible Liminality to other Exile Groups

Analyzing the Quality of Liminality: the Case of a Syrian Exile Community

It is important to note that the marginalized ethnic groups this dissertation seeks to understand are experiencing liminal conditions. The key contribution of this dissertation is to provide a way to test the characteristics of a group’s liminal condition. Previous scholars have talked about the ways to test for the degree of liminality of a marginalized group as stated above. However, I am not making the same argument. The quality that flexible liminality, as a theoretical concept, allows us to address is how flexible or inflexible an ethnic group’s liminal condition is. Thus, I am trying to understand the quality of a marginalized group’s liminality.

It would be best to try to understand the quality of liminality as on a scale with one end being “flexible,” the other end “inflexible,” and the rest leaning towards either flexibility or inflexibility. As mentioned above, the Tibetan exile group is flexible in their liminality because of their ability to maneuver within their marginalized conditions, and transform, or at least have an effect on, the geo-politics influencing them. In Chapter 3, I applied the theory of flexible liminality to Dharamsala’s host communities, the Gaddi and the Gorkhali, to show why they couldn’t develop the same cultural practice of flexible liminality as Tibetans. I concluded that while both communities (Gaddi and Gorkhali) were willing to adjust their cultural practices, they just did not have enough geo-political entities interested in them to allow maneuver within their marginalized conditions. Thus, the Dharamsala host communities were fairly inflexible in their quality of liminality.

On the far side of the scale, a relevant example of a very inflexible liminality is that of the Syrian exile community. As of December 2017, the estimated number of Syrian refugees living outside of Syria was 5,440,749 (UNHCR 2017). There are approximately forty-eight host countries where the Syrian refugee population is over 1000, and thirty-three host countries where the Syrian refugee population is over 10,000 (UNCHR 2017). Due to this mass resettlement of Syrian refugees, geo-politics from North America, Europe, the Middle East and Asia (a selected
few countries) are highly interested in them. This upsurge, mass migration of Syrian exile population has been one of the most highly discussed topics in international politics since 2011 – even leading to the formation of its own name, the “Syrian Refugee Crisis.” Thus, it is safe to assume, in analyzing their quality of liminality that the Syrian refugee population has been of interest to multiple geo-polities. However, the question is, how much maneuvering room, or influencing ability, do Syrian refugee group have to influence the attitudes and practices of the multiple geo-political entities that are interested in them?

To answer this, we will take a look at some of the stances taken by the geo-political entities interested in the “Syrian Refugee Crisis.” In North America, the United States President Donald Trump kept his 2016 election campaign promise and immediately placed a ban on selected immigrant populations; that included Syrian refugees. The 2017 Muslim travel ban, executed by the Trump administration in the U.S., dropped Syrian resettlement in the U.S. from 15,479 in 2016 to 3,024 in 2017 and to only 11 by April 2018 (Refugee Processing Center, USCIS 2018). In European countries, immigrants crossing the border to escape their victimized conditions increased steadily. Starting in 2007-2014, Greece and Bulgaria constructed a fence to keep immigrants from the Middle East and Africa from entering the country illegally (BBC 2014). Other European countries like Italy, Germany, and the United Kingdom, have conducted international negotiations to dissuade immigrants from entering or remaining in host countries.

Nonetheless, in 2015, it was estimated that 1.02 million immigrants had arrived safely past European borders by sea, while over 3,700 had died or went missing trying to reach to European shores; and almost half of this population was from Syria (UNHCR & IOM 2015). Following the 2015 European Migration Crisis, the European Union imposed restrictions on refugee entries, leading to a political divides on immigration policies between countries in the

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78 The spring of 2011 marked the beginning of the conflict in Syria between government of Bashar al-Assad and the various opposing forces. Many Syrians started by fleeing to close neighboring countries like Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Egypt, and Turkey. See Manuel Castells (2012) “Networks of Outrage and Hope” Polity Press. U.K.
European Union and non-member European countries (Park 2015, Greenhill 2016). In the Middle East, the countries neighboring Syria (namely Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan) have received most of the Syrian refugees. There are over 3.5 million Syrian refugees in Turkey, over 1 million in Lebanon, and over 1.4 million in Jordan (UNCHR 2018, Human Rights Watch 2018, Relief Web 2018). While these host countries are allowing Syrian refugees to assimilate in cities, overpopulation and crowded cities have caused tension with the host communities. The large infiltration of the Syrian refugee population is an easy target for some politicians to aim blame for poor economies, structural problems, and any deterioration of public life.

This negative response to the Syrian exile community from various geo-political directions shows that they have not, in general, been well received by surrounding states. In fact, Syrian refugee groups have come to have negative stereotypes associated with them in most host countries that leave them little room to influence the either polities that surround them or the geopolitics that led to their situation. A simple search on the Internet about the “Syrian Refugee Crisis” shows that the key issue for host nation-states, scholars, and the news media is dealing with the sheer volume of the Syrian exile population. The large number of Syrian refugees created two types of concerned dialogues: first, a fear of invasion by a large foreign population; second, discussion about the best strategies for resettling Syrian refugees. The most common stance taken by the geo-political entities to deal with the fear of immigrants (especially Syrians) has been to block their entry or limit the number of Syrian refugees allowed in, as seen by the actions taken by the U.S., U.K., Greece, Germany, and many others (UNHCR 2017, Ostrand 2015, Berti 2015). In response, scholars have critiqued the narrow identity and moral criteria used by western governments for deciding which Syrian refugees might be accepted for resettlement (Alhanaee and Csala 2015, Heisbourg 2015, Kallius et. al. 2016, Collins et.al. 2018).

While host countries are trying to decide whether they should resettle Syrian refugees or not, voices from the Syrian exile community have been drowned out. The only time the Syrian exile community was heard loudly was in 2015 when the body of a three-year old Syrian boy,
Ayland Kurdi, was washed up on the shore of Turkey (NRP 2015). Since then, the motion for Syrian resettlement has been activated again, along with the argument that all refugees, no matter their identity, are a victimized population deserving of the world’s empathy (Bello 2015, Ostrand 2015, Holmes and Castaneda 2016). Popular media also supported the refugee resettlement movement; a good example is a popular poem by Warsan Shires called “Home” (2015), where she speaks in sympathy for African refugees like herself, citing the incident of Aylan Kurdi. A well-known stanza states,

No one leave home unless  
home is the mouth of a shark  
You only run for the border  
when you see the whole city running as well  
no one puts their children in a boat  
unless the water is safer than land.

However, this small feat of the Syrian refugee community did not last very long. The increase in immigrant and refugee quotas for European countries after 2015 only stirred up the discussion of a correlation to an increase in the crime rate in various host countries (The Atlantic 2016, PEW 2016, Reuters 2018). In international politics, anti-immigrant politicians were blaming a real or imagined rise in the crime rate (especially related to murder and rape) on immigrants. For example, U.S. President Trump announced to the press regarding the 2016 New Year’s mass sexual assault in Germany⁷⁹: “… and you know what a disaster this massive immigration has been to Germany and the people of Germany” (Washington Post 2016). The largest number of immigrants in 2014-2015 was the Syrian refugee community in Germany; however, nowhere during the news about the mass sexual assault did people hear from the Syrian refugee community directly. Later, the media revealed that there was not enough evidence to say definitively that this mass sexual assault had occurred at all (Independent.com, 2017). Similar instances of Syrian refugee being spuriously blamed have occurred in numerous host countries.

⁷⁹ In 2016, the New Year’s Eve mass sexual assault in Cologne, Hamburg and other German cities, was based on a received complaint that more than 1200 women were sexually assaulted. The perpetrators involved were thought to be from foreign Arab-speaking countries, and over 2000 men of North African descendent were suspected of the assault (Washington Post, 2016).

Moreover, many interviews releasing the “real voices” of Syrian refugees have been tainted with political interests. In Scotland, the DailyMail Report in 2016 published a news article from a newly resettled Syrian family depicting them as depressed and feeling trapped in the Island of Bute. Later, it was revealed that the news editors eliminated the first part of the interview where the Syrian family expressed gratitude and spoke of their desire to be in a place where there was a larger Syrian community (The Guardian 2016). The Syrian family’s true interview was manipulated to make it seem as if their resettlement in Scotland was an undesired event, whereas, according to a new conversations with the Syrian family, they were actually simply expressing their initial thoughts on resettlement and the difficulties regarding assimilation in a new country (TheGuardian 2016).

On observing the media reports and geo-politics surrounding the Syrian refugee community, I argue that the Syrian refugee community has an inflexible liminality. The Syrian refugee community has been of interest to international politics because of the sheer volume of exiles seeking refuge in various countries. Despite the multiple geo-political entities interested in the Syrians, the Syrian exile community does not have the voice or room to negotiate their position within the geo-politics that surround them. What small voice they do seem to have is spoken from the mouth of the media, who may have their own political agenda, or from the naked suffering of a victimized body like that of the three-year old boy. I recognize that more research will need to be done to completely understand the quality of liminality experienced by the Syrian exile community; however, in this dissertation, I have used the Syrian refugee’s example to contrast their liminal conditions to the Tibetan exile community’s liminal conditions. The Tibetan exile community, compared the Syrian exile community, is also in a liminal condition but bears their liminality in a flexible manner, wherein they can voice their opinions on international politics and attract outside supporters for their opinions. The Syrian exile community does not
have this flexibility – thus, I contend that the Syrian refugee community is experiencing the far end of inflexibility in the quality of their liminality.

*Flexibility changing overtime: the Case of Latino Immigrants in the U.S.*

In order to understand another characteristic of the quality of liminality, I will use the case of the undocumented Latino community in the United States and compare their liminality during the term of President Barack Obama (2009-2017) with their liminality during the term of President Donald Trump (2017-present). I argue that the quality of liminality that a group experiences can change over time with a change in sentiments from the geo-politics surrounding them. Undocumented Latino migrants are immigrants originating from Mexico, South America, and the Caribbean, living in the U.S. without authorization from the U.S. government. Despite the focus on undocumented Latino migrants, it is hard to overlook the overall “illegal alien” stereotype surrounding the Latino community. My key argument is that undocumented Latino migrants had some limited flexibility in their liminality under the term of President Obama. Furthermore, that that little amount of flexibility has completely disappeared under the term of President Trump. Additionally, it is clear that the Latino ethnic community in general has come under suspicion within the anti-immigrant environment established by the Trump administration. Hence, the liminality of the Latino ethnic community has also slowly become less flexible in the U.S. I will first talk about general impressions of the Latino community in the U.S. and then explain the difference in their experience of liminality from 2009 to 2018.

Since World War II, there has been large flow of migrants crossing the Mexico-U.S. border, but since the 1970s, crossing the border without authorization has become difficult and costly. Hence, a previously temporary workforce population decided to remain in the U.S. rather than risk crossing the border at a future date (Massey and Pren 2012, Arbona 2010). In 2017, the Latino population in the U.S. constituted of 16.7% of the country’s population (PEW 2017). This Latino population traces their origin from Mexico (63.3%), South America (13%), Puerto Rico
(9%), and Cuba (4%) (PEW 2017). The latest estimate of the unauthorized population in the U.S. was 11 million, constituting about 3.4% of the U.S. population. Until 2009, unauthorized immigrants were mostly from Mexico, but by 2016, only about half (5.6 million) of unauthorized immigrants were from Mexico and about 5.7 million were from Asia and Central America (PEW 2017). From the 1990s to 2001, fear of foreign terrorists and the anti-Latino and anti-immigrant stance of the U.S. has been exacerbated (Massey and Pren 2012). Thus, undocumented Latino migrants have come to be the most vulnerable population in the U.S.

Leo Chavez, in his book, The Latino Threat (2008), helped me understand how and why Latino migrants have become a sensitive topic for the U.S. politics. Chavez argues that Latino immigrants are different from other immigrant groups in U.S. because they are assumed to be unwilling to assimilate within the Anglo white population, and are further fixed on destroying the American way of life. Chavez states:

“Latinos have been in what is now the United States since the Late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, actually predating English colonies… Latinos are an alleged threat because of this history and social identity, which supposedly make their integration difficult and imbue them, particularly, Mexicans, with a desire to remain socially apart as they prepare for a reconquest of the U.S. Southwest (Chavez 2008:4)”

I agree with Chavez that Latino migrants, especially Mexicans, regardless of their citizenship status, have been “plagued by the mark of illegality” (Chavez 2008). Regardless of whether these Mexican immigrants are ones who came decades ago or are the children of the immigrants who were born in the U.S., if they look Mexican, it is enough to justify the immigrants as illegal aliens. The strongest anti-Latino legislative change came on April 23rd, 2010 when Arizona’s governor Jan Brewer signed the toughest immigration law to date – called SB 1070 – a law that forced immigrants to carry identity documents to legitimize their presence in the U.S., and enforced the police force’s authority to ask for any Latino-looking individual’s legal paperwork (NY Times 2010). The same type of legislation was followed by other states, namely, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Indiana, South Carolina, and Utah (NYtimes 2011, Chavez
The SB1070 legislation did not just exclude undocumented migrants but also put all Latino-looking people under one umbrella of suspicion – that of the “illegal alien.” This legislation gave police the authority to stop-check anybody based on their phenotype, whether a citizen or not, sending a clear message to the Latino community that all Latino people are negatively stereotyped and considered to be a threat to the nation. Following Chavez’s argument, the entire Latino community in Arizona’s 2012 legislation was “plagued by the mark of illegality.”

Under President Obama’s term, undocumented immigrants got some breathing room from the pro-immigration policies from his administration. The legislative bill called the Dream Act (initially proposed in 2001) would have provided a pathway for undocumented migrants to gain U.S. citizenship, but it failed to pass senate approval (NY Times 2007, Politico 2010). In 2012, the Obama Administration proposed an alternative program called Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) that would allow undocumented migrants who came as children to the U.S. temporary legal residence in the U.S., and to obtain work authorization for four-years total (Dept. Homeland Security 2012, CNN 2012). The result of the implementation of DACA has shown a positive economic outcome because it has allowed approximately 800,000 DACA recipients the ability to pursue higher education, start entrepreneurial careers, enter the legal workforce, and buy homes and cars (Wong et. al. 2016). The DACA program initiated legal security and freedom from living in fear for deportation for the undocumented migrants living the U.S. I argue that support from the Obama Administration and the initiation of pro-immigrant legislature from the executive branch of the U.S. government brought a little more flexibility to the lives of undocumented immigrants, especially those of Latino origin since, according to the PEW study (Sept 2017), they were the majority of DACA recipients.

Undocumented migrants have been fighting the battle for legitimacy in the U.S. since the early 1970s (Massey and Pren 2012, Chavez 2008) but failed to win any legal recognition until the Obama Administration. The repeated failure to pass the Dream Act bill in 2001, 2007, and

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2010 showed that the majority of political representatives were not ready to show empathy towards undocumented migrants (NILC 2007, CNN 2010, Ojeda and Takash 2011).

Undocumented migrants were a stateless population stranded between two countries – the country of origin and the U.S. Undocumented migrants could not go back to their country of origin because they had spent the majority of their lives in the U.S., but they also could not live a normal life, which would include pursuing higher education, legal employment, entrepreneurship, the ownership assets etc., in the U.S. Moreover, the plea from the community of undocumented migrants to the U.S. government, via the Dream Act bill, was rejected and the undocumented community’s voice was quieted. Thus, I argue that undocumented migrants in the U.S. had inflexible liminality until the 2012 DACA program. The DACA program provided the legal recognition and temporary flexibility within the liminal condition of undocumented migrants. However, I argue that the temporary flexibility gained with DACA has been revoked under the Trump Administration. Hence, I argue that this is one of the characteristics of the quality of liminality; that the flexibility or inflexibility experienced by a liminal group can change over time.

President Trump’s harsh stance against immigrants in the U.S. has brought a decreased flexibility of liminality to undocumented migrants in the U.S. as well as spread negative stereotypes about the Latinos to the U.S. population. Under the Trump Administration, the DACA program has been brought to a halt since September 2017 – since this time, the Department of Homeland Security has stopped accepting and renewing undocumented migrant’s applications (Dept. Homeland Security 2017, NPR 2017). Moreover, President Trump has used aggressive language against Latino and general immigrant populations in the U.S. During a meeting about the Dream Act in January 2018, President Trump reportedly said, “Why are we having all these people from shithole countries come here?” (PolitiFact 2018). President Trump has been strongly presenting anti-immigrant Executive Orders, like the revocation of Temporary Protection Status, the halting of DACA, issuing Muslim Travel bans, the cutting of the number of
refugee entries, and so on (See Chapter 7). President Trump has been especially against Mexican immigrants, blaming them for crimes in the U.S. and promising U.S. citizens that he would protect them all by the building of a wall on the U.S.-Mexico border (Time 2016). I argue that these are similar types of fears to those that Leo Chavez argued that many U.S. politicians hold against the Latino population; i.e., the notion that Mexican immigrants only destroy the lives created by the Anglo-white Americans. President Trump started his presidential campaign in 2015 by promoting a negative stereotype of Mexican immigrants, stating,

“They are not our friends, believe me. They’re bringing drugs. They’re bringing crime. They’re rapists. And some, I assume are good people.” (President Donald Trump, June 16th, 2015)

The negative stereotype of Latino migrants created by the Trump Administration has caused the flexibility of undocumented immigrants to decline, especially that of undocumented Latino immigrants. The border patrol along the U.S.-Mexico border has been tightened, and the number of undocumented immigrants arrested has grown to its highest number since 2014, among whom many are children separated from their families (See Chapter 7). Within the U.S., verbal abuse and discrimination against the Latino community has increased in the anti-immigrant environment fostered by the Trump Administration (Almeida et. al. 2016, Latino National Survey 2016). The undocumented migrant’s decline in legislative rights and in support from U.S. policy makers has led to a decrease in their ability to maneuver or voice their opinions as unauthorized people in the U.S.

I argue that undocumented migrants in the U.S. are once again the most vulnerable population. Only the DACA program helps a small percent of the population while the rest are on the way to deportation. Despite legal residency in the U.S., I contend that Latino people are still not thought to be part of the U.S. melting pot by many Americans; instead, they are looked upon with contempt and feared as a threat to the American way of life, as argued by Chavez. I argue that anti-Latino propaganda in U.S. politics has decreased the flexibility for the quality of
liminality experiencing by the Latino community in the U.S. Moreover, anti-immigrant policies have made the quality of liminality of undocumented migrants, especially Latino undocumented migrants, incredibly inflexible.

The case of Latino immigrants in the U.S. shows that the quality of liminality, whether flexible or inflexible, can change over time. Changes in the host country’s policies and attitudes towards the liminal group of concern can have a large influence on the quality of liminality experienced by the group. The Latino community in the U.S. had a preconceived stereotype that they were an ethnic group different from other immigrants and the Anglo-white community in the U.S. The fear portrayed by U.S. politicians depicted them as an ethnic group determined to destroy the majority white-American way of life. Thus, despite the citizenship status of the Latino community, they were rendered a liminal group that could not completely be accepted within the U.S. population yet also did not have a legal place to return to in their country of origin.

Additionally, the rise in undocumented immigrants from Mexico placed another hurdle before the Latino community in the U.S. The SB-1070 legislation passed by the Arizona state embodied the stereotypical fear of Latino community. It forced all Latinos, regardless of their citizenship, under the one umbrella of “illegal alien” until individual Latinos could prove their legal status in the U.S. The undocumented Latino community in the U.S. was already a liminal group, in fear due to their unauthorized status, but the attitude of U.S. politicians and the host community worsened their liminal conditions. Thus, undocumented Latinos in the U.S. experienced very inflexible liminality. The undocumented Latino community in the U.S. felt a sense of relief when the Obama Administration supported them. The approval of DACA as proposed by the Obama Administration allowed undocumented migrants to have legal protection and the freedom to live like a legal resident. Pro-immigrant policies under the Obama Administration brought some flexibility to the liminal conditions of undocumented immigrants, especially for the groups originating from Latino countries.
However, this little bit of flexibility was drastically taken away when the Trump Administration replaced the Obama Administration. The anti-immigrant policies passed directly on from Presidential Executive orders to cut down the flexibility of undocumented immigrants. Moreover, President Trump’s obvious dislike for the Latino community, seen both from several of his speeches and his direct attack on Mexican immigrants by pushing for building a wall on U.S.-Mexico border has again tainted the entire Latino community in U.S. with negative stereotypes. Once again, what little room for flexibility in the liminal conditions of both undocumented immigrants and the Latino community in U.S. is being taken away. Thus, under the Trump Administration today, the Latino community and undocumented immigrants are experiencing inflexible liminality. The Latino community in the U.S., including undocumented immigrants, had experienced inflexible liminality, which changed to a more flexible form under Obama Administration, and then changed back to inflexibility under Trump Administration. This trend experienced by the Latino community, and the undocumented immigrant group in the U.S., shows an important characteristic of the quality of liminality; i.e., it can change over time for better or for worse.

Comparing Different Qualities of Liminalities

As I mentioned early in the chapter, we have to compare the Tibetan exile community to other exile groups in order to understand why the cultural practice of flexible liminality seems to work for the Tibetan exile community. Now that we have analyzed two different liminal communities, the Syrian exile group and the Latino community in the U.S., we can see that different groups have different liminal experiences. The Tibetan exile community has proved to be successful in using flexible liminality as a cultural practice because the exile community has control over the way they are othered by the geo-politics that surround them. The Tibetan exile community has complete flexibility in their liminal condition. In comparison, the Syrian exile community has little control over the way they are othered by the geo-politics surrounding them;
therefore, they have inflexible liminality. The Latino community and the undocumented immigrant group in the U.S., by contrast, go through times where these groups have more flexibility and other times of less flexibility or even complete inflexibility. Hence, the Latino community’s quality of liminality shows that the kind of liminality experienced by a group can change over time.

I argue that the same use of flexible liminality theory might increase our understanding of other liminal groups that have to adjust to policies, governments, and institutions. The flexible liminality of any liminal group has a spectrum to maneuver upon within the geopolitical conditions surrounding them. If scholars, refugee service organizations, and governments working with liminal groups look where on the spectrum these groups fit in, it could help them understand the quality of liminality experienced by the such groups. However, it should be noted that the quality of liminality, whether flexible or inflexible, is not a fixed standard for any group. Instead, if groups over time develop more flexibility in their liminal conditions, they can reach out to the geo-polities surrounding them and try to adjust perceptions of themselves over time, just like in the case of the Tibetan exile community.

**Study Gaps and Recommendations for Future Research Work**

This dissertation has only started recognizing characteristics of the quality of liminality and the unique way the Tibetan exile community is using liminality to achieve better life chances. There is still more work to be done regarding liminality theory, and the ethnography of the Tibetan exile community’s own specific liminality. Just as I have used the theory of flexible liminality above to look at the Syrian refugee group and Latinos in the U.S., I recommend using the theory of flexible liminality for future research work to understand the quality of liminality for other marginalized populations. I highly recommend that refugee resettlement agencies and other organizations, like the one I worked for, that are providing services to refugee groups, apply the theory of flexible liminality themselves to better understand each refugee population’s quality
of liminality. By understanding each refugee group’s form of liminality, such agencies could provide better care and services according to each group’s needs.

I have touched on various aspects of the Tibetan exile community’s conditions that express their liminal experiences, but each of these could obviously use more research to better unpack the cultural values of the Tibetan exile community. I have touched on topics like the ‘Free Tibet’ politics, the Tibetan exile government’s well-rounded public services, the Tibetan leader’s tactical supervision of the exile community, Tibetan institutions formed to nurture individuals towards better life chances, and on how a Tibetan individual’s exile identity is linked with nationalist values, cultural pride, and with calling out for human-rights activism. Future research could focus on just one of these topics within the Tibetan exile community; for example, on the topic of Tibetan nationalist values (Tibetan-ness), a researcher could explore how the community is motivating individual Tibetans to have such strong patriotic feelings, even when the Tibetan diaspora is spread all around the world. Lastly, I benefited from relying on social media (like Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, WeChat, Skype etc.) to connect with Tibetan exiles living in Nepal, India, and the U.S. I highly suggest, in future, that researchers focus on the topic of how the Tibetan exile community uses digital technology to keep up with each other in diaspora, and to increase their communal value.
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