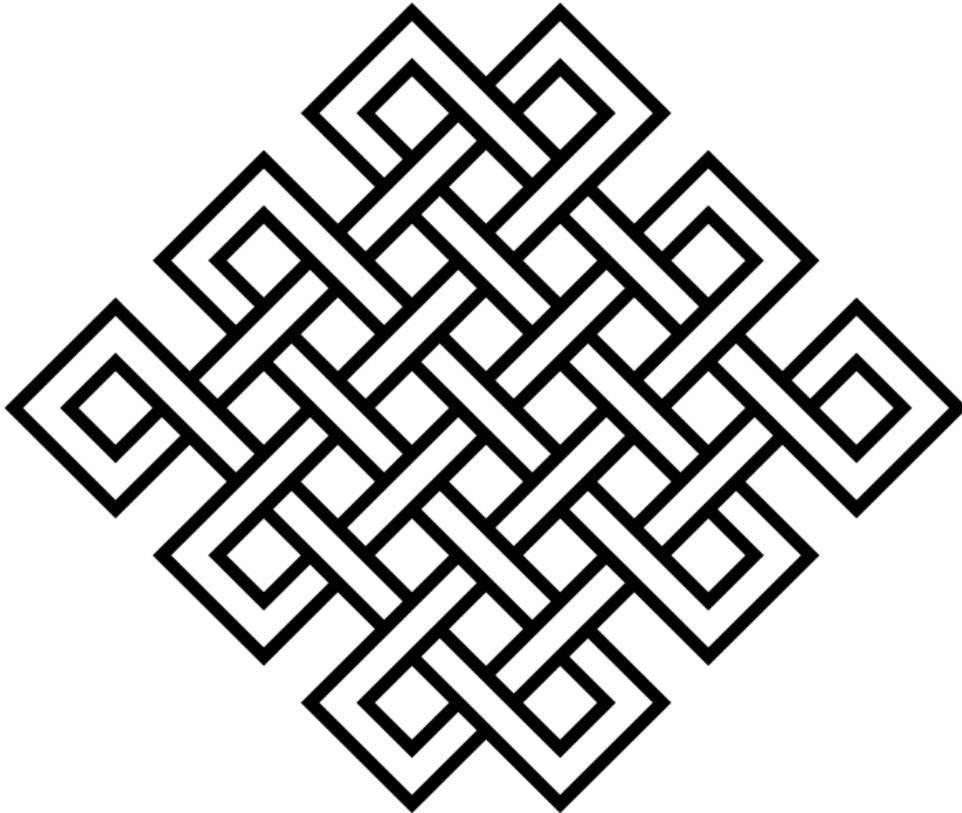


The Endless Knot of Identity

Identity-formation amongst Tibetan Refugees in Nepal



Master-thesis

Hidde Middelweerd

3678423

Multiculturalisme in Vergelijkend Perspectief

Universiteit Utrecht

Supervisor: Sofie Smeets

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Abstract

Tibetan people were forced to scatter over the world when the Chinese People's Liberation Army invaded their home country in the year 1950. Since then, Tibetan refugees have re-settled practically everywhere; from the United States to Nepal, from India to Switzerland. In other words, it has become a vast diasporic community.

Do these different contexts influence the Tibetan identity? And if so, in what ways? In diasporic communities, people often live in a median state, neither completely at one with the new setting, nor fully disencumbered of the old. More often than not, a tension can be identified between change and continuity. The change being generated by the new context, the continuity by the heritage that survived from the past.

This thesis argues that diasporic communities indeed live in a median state, but offers a new, somewhat altered, somewhat more elaborate explanation on what it means to live in a median state. Identity amongst diasporic communities can indeed be influenced by past and present contexts, but it doesn't stop there. Within the concepts of 'past' and 'present' a lot of different forces are at work. For instance, the way diasporic communities are treated by the governments of their respective host-countries also plays a huge roll in identity-formation. On top of that, the influence of the West is a force that should not be underestimated.

This thesis focuses on the younger generation living in Parjorling Tibetan Settlement, a small Tibetan refugee settlement in Pokhara, Nepal, to illustrate these arguments.

Keywords: Tibet, Nepal, diaspora, refugees, identity, change, continuity.

Introduction

"It's hard, you know", says Tenzin, a 24-year old Tibetan refugee who lives in Nepal, when I ask him what life is like as a Tibetan refugee. We are sitting on the doorstep of a vacant building in Parjorling Tibetan Settlement, a small Tibetan settlement in the heart of Pokhara, a semi-big city in the heart of Nepal. We are sitting in the shade, because the temperature is well over 30 degrees today. Tenzin pads one of the goats that live in the settlement and seem to have no fear of human beings whatsoever, while he stares at nothing in particular. Strictly speaking, Tenzin is not a refugee; he was born in Nepal and, thus, has never fled his 'home-country.' However, he does have refugee status and, consequently, is treated that way by the Nepali government.

"We can't do anything. We can't get a job, we can't obtain a driver's license, we can't travel... We are treated unfairly, because we are Tibetan. But what can we do? Some of us don't even exist!" The Nepali government discontinued the practice of issuing Refugee Cards to Tibetan refugees in 1989. Tibetans who were born after this decision was made, therefore, don't exist on paper; Officially, they are identity less. "We try to be good citizens, good Tibetans, but it's hard when your future is so uncertain."

Diasporic and/or exilic communities often live in 'a median state, neither completely at one with the new setting, nor fully disencumbered of the old' (Said 1994: 48-49). New contexts influence the shaping and reshaping of identity within diasporic communities and can cause changes in identity and cultural practices, while the cultural heritage of such communities provides continuity of their identity and culture. Halleh Ghorashi (2002) states something identical; that identity is a process of change. However, it is a situated change, that always involves certain elements of continuity.

The interplay between past and present forces, between change and continuity, forms the *habitus* of a person or community. Pierre Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* is basically a set of preferred schemata obtained through time, an embodied history. It is not, however, a fixed (!) set of preferred schemata and can obtain new

forms in new settings, but it does offer a certain amount of continuity. The interaction between this embodied history (a product of the past) and the present setting sets the stage for identity formation (Pels 1989, Ghorashi 2002). Identity, in this sense, is a negotiation between the past and the present.

With these statements in mind I traveled to Pokhara, Nepal. More specifically, I traveled to Parjorling Tibetan Settlement, a small Tibetan refugee camp that is home to about 390 Tibetans. Here, I asked myself the following question: *'How do new contexts influence the ways in which Tibetan, diasporic people in Pokhara, Nepal shape and reshape their identity as a Tibetan refugee and do they indeed live in a median state?'*

My focus in answering this question lies in the younger generation of Tibetans in the camp, however not solely on the younger generation; after three months, I've found myself able to answer this research question in a more general sense also.

At first sight, the younger generation in Parjorling Tibetan Settlement is not that involved with their Tibetan heritage, culture and religion. They say they're Buddhists, but don't practice it on a regular basis. They don't participate in most of the ceremonies and traditions and they are mostly interested in Western culture, soccer, their mobile phones and their Western, stylish clothing.

When asked about their Tibetan heritage and their Tibetan identity, they always come back to one thing: the discrimination they face in Nepal because they are Tibetan. On paper, the majority of them does not exist; no Nepali passport, no Tibetan passport, no Refugee Card, nothing: "We all have a big stamp on our forehead, it says: Refugee."

Even though it may seem at first sight that their Tibetan heritage doesn't mean much to them, this is not exactly the case. Deep down they feel Tibetan, are proud to be Tibetan and are well informed and committed to the Tibetan situation. Their dire situation in Nepal, however, seems to push their Tibetaness to the background. This is a peculiar development, because many researchers have argued that diasporic communities, when faced with discrimination, tend to fall back on their heritage and culture related to their homecountry. One might say, in the case of Tibetan

refugees in Nepal, that survival (i.e. ensuring oneself of a good future) takes priority over issues regarding identity.

Because of the discrimination by the Nepali government, the Tibetan youngsters are unable to work, unable to travel and unable to get a driver's license. Being Tibetan, thus, forms a huge obstacle for them. When they think about being Tibetan, they think about discrimination and less opportunities to fulfill their dreams.

The context in which these Tibetan youngsters live, even though they're all born here, thus forms a huge obstacle in their lives. Even more so, the fact that they are Tibetan forms a huge obstacle in their lives. That being said, we can ask ourselves the question: Do they indeed live in the 'median state' of which I spoke earlier? Not completely at one with new setting, nor fully disencumbered of the old? The answer seems to be 'yes', but not exactly in the way that Said meant it. On the one hand, these Tibetan youngsters are not completely at one with the context they live in, because the Nepali government doesn't allow them to. On the other hand, they're not fully disencumbered of their Tibetan heritage, because they're constantly reminded of it through the limitations it presents them in their opportunities in life. On top of that, they don't want to be disencumbered of their Tibetan heritage, because deep down they're proud to be Tibetan and are committed to their people.

So, how do new contexts influence the ways in which Tibetan, diasporic people in Pokhara, Nepal shape and reshape their identity as a Tibetan refugee? Briefly put, it creates doubt and an inner struggle. On the one hand, when asked, the youngsters say their Tibetan heritage is important, and to a certain extent it very much is, even though they have trouble explaining why. On the other hand, they're Tibetan identity is nothing more than an obstacle in creating a life for themselves and they would take a Nepali passport within an instant.

This thesis will examine the above further. What makes these youngsters Tibetan? What are the obstacles they face in the process of identity-formation? What does this mean for their identity? Do they indeed live in the median state that many researchers on diasporic communities speak of? If so, in what way(s)? What are the consequences of this? And, taking all of the above in account, what

does the process of identity-formation look like for Tibetan youngsters in Pokhara, Nepal?

In this thesis I argue that the most important elements of this process of identity-formation can be explained using the endless knot that adorns the cover. For example, follow the lines of the endless knot and you will find that it is never-ending, much like the process of identity-formation never ends; identity is not a fixed 'thing', it is fluid and ever-transforming.

Before we examine this further, however, I will finish this introduction by first outlining the main concepts on identity, diasporic and/or exilic communities and the combination of the two, that are important to this thesis. After that I will shed light on the methodology used in this research. Finally, I will outline and briefly elaborate on the chapters to come.

Main concepts

In this section I will briefly outline the main concepts that this thesis is concerned with. First, I will outline the academic discussions concerned with identity that are important to this thesis. After that I will briefly describe the concept of diaspora. Lastly, I will discuss the important concepts regarding identity when studied in diasporic communities.

Identity

When we approach identity from an essentialist point of view it is seen as a static and fixed concept. In other words, culture and identity are things that people 'have' and that will stay the same over time (Ghorashi 2002). The constructionist approach rejects this notion and states that identity is a changing process. This means that individuals are not captured within their social and cultural settings, but are consciously able to construct their identities. Seen from this point of view, identity becomes fluid, negotiable and variable over time. This point of view is the same point of view that this thesis will employ.

Identity, from the constructionist point of view, should be seen as a process of change. Halleh Ghorashi (2002) states that identity should indeed be seen as a process of change, but that it

is a situated change that involves certain elements of continuity. I agree with this statement, as this thesis will show. Identity, thus, is an interaction between continuity and change, an interaction between the past and the present context. In other words, an identity that has been formed in the past can transform when in interaction with present, new contexts. In this particular case, the Tibetan heritage can be regarded as the context from the past and/or the element of continuity. The present context and/or element of change, of course, is Nepal.

Another point of discussion important to this thesis is the multiplicity of identity. What this entails is that individuals are able to have multiple identities, be it political, religious, gender-based or something else. Hedetoft & Hjort state that people 'may feel they have several belongings, several places and cultures they belong to that determine their identity as multiple, nested, situational or fluid' (Hedetoft & Hjort 2002:ix). Elaborating on this subject, they state that hybrid identities and multiple attachments are a fact of life. Multiple identities can be seen chronologically (as changing over time) and/or can be present simultaneously.

The process of identity-formation, in this sense, is about having different selves, whilst still being able to see the self as a coherent whole. Arnold Leonard Epstein (1978) says, regarding this matter, that identity 'represents the process in which an individual seeks to integrate his/her various roles into a coherent image of self.' When we apply this concept to Tibetan refugees in Nepal, we can ask ourselves the question if they too have multiple attachments and, consequently, multiple identities/different selves. As this thesis will show, the answer is 'yes'. The concept of multiple identities, thus, shows us that the process of identity-formation doesn't necessarily have to involve a question of 'or', but can be a process of 'and'. More specifically, Tibetan refugees in Nepal thus don't have either a Tibetan identity or a Nepali identity; they can have elements of both. Also, other forces can be at work in the process of identity-formation. For instance, and applicable to Tibetans in Nepal, the influence of the West.

To sum up, this thesis states that present contexts can influence and/or transform identities gained over time. More

specifically; living in Nepal can influence and/or transform the Tibetan identity of Tibetan refugees. Also, identity isn't a singular concept and it's possible for an individual to have multiple identities, either over time or simultaneously.

Diaspora

This thesis will employ William Safran's (1991:83-84) definition of diasporic communities, which is as follows: 'Diasporic communities are expatriate communities (1) that are dispersed from their original center to at least two peripheral places; (2) that maintain a memory, vision or myth about their original homeland; (3) that believe they are not - and perhaps cannot be - fully accepted by their host country; (4) that see the ancestral home as a place of eventual return, when the time is right; (5) that are committed to the maintenance or restoration of this homeland; and (6) of which the group's consciousness and solidarity are importantly defined by this continuing relationship with the homeland.'

However, no group of people can be expected to live up to every feature described above, but when a community meets a certain combination of these features, they can be seen as diasporic communities. What this means is that 'diaspora' is by no means a fixed or static concept that you either are or aren't part of; many different variations are possible. Also, not every group with a history of immigration and travel can be considered diasporic. African American cultures, for instance, are not considered diasporic, because they only show some of the features presented in the above. Tibetan refugee communities, on the other hand, do qualify as diasporic communities because they basically meet every feature described above.

When we parallel the above definition of diasporic communities to Tibetans in Nepal, every criteria applies. They are indeed dispersed from their original center, maintain a strong vision, memory or (in the case of the younger generation) myth of their homeland, are not fully accepted in their host-country (discrimination of Tibetans is very much existent in Nepal), hope to return to Tibet one day, are actively involved in achieving this

goal and remain loyal and committed to Tibet and the 'brothers and sisters' in their homeland.

This definition of diasporic communities also applies to the main concepts of identity and the 'median state' described earlier. Precisely because diasporic communities maintain memories of their homeland, are not fully accepted in their host-country and hope to return to their homeland one day, they never fully integrate in the society of their host-country, hence remaining in the median state between past and present.

Diasporic identity

Certain elements of being part of a diasporic community can be huge influences on the process of identity-formation. Because diasporic communities live in a median state, belonging can constitute an important element of identity (Hedetoft & Hjort 2002). Often, this sense of belonging is sought in a sense of attachment to the home country and native culture. That is why belonging often 'turns into a question of longing-to-be... at home' (Hedetoft & Hjort 2002:viii). Diasporas often cling to the idea that one day they will return to their home country (in this case, Tibet). This longing for a return can serve as a substitute for the sense of belonging they sometimes can't find in their host-countries. Diasporas, correspondingly, tend to cling to images and memories of their homeland, hoping that one day they can/will return.

This same statement could also be made with regards to the research population of this thesis in Pokhara, Nepal, where the Tibetan culture has, at least to some extent, remained intact, through keeping certain traditions and habits from the homeland alive. These images and memories of diasporic communities, however, do not always correlate with the contemporary reality in their homeland (Hedetoft & Hjort 2002). Everything changes, as does the situation in the homelands of diasporas. In this sense, a 'myth of return' is created, because diasporas will never be able to return to the home that lives on in their memories, the home that once was.'

Another concept that is important to this thesis is Malkki's 'mythico-history.' In a nutshell, this concept means that the image

people have of their homeland (i.e. their history) is flawed, because they've been away so long that life in their home country has changed. This concept can also be adequately illustrated by the Tibetan diasporic case in Nepal. Tibetan youths in the settlement learn about their homeland through the memories of their parents and the things they learn in school, claim it as their own and build their Tibetan identity around it. These memories, however, are often of an 'idealized pre-1959 Tibet' (Yeh 2005:661). This idea of Tibet is, correspondingly, uninfluenced by the reality of the oppression in Tibet in the last half a century.

Both the concept of 'myth of return' and the concept of 'mythico-history' can be identified amongst the younger generation in Parjorling Tibetan Settlement and serve as good indicators on how the Tibetan identity among young Tibetans is formed and what 'being Tibetan' means to them.

Methodology

In order to make this research a success, I've lived in Parjorling Tibetan Settlement for the vast majority of three months; from February till May in 2013. I slept in the house of the cook of the Shang Gaden Choekhorling monastery. In these three months I have lived in the settlement, participated in (and observed) rituals, festivities, ceremonies and daily undertakings of the younger generation. Because I lived in the settlement full-time, I was able to get a good and detailed picture of day-to-day life in the settlement.

Also, because I was there almost every day, I was able to get to know the people in the camp and build rapport, especially with the younger generation, through a lot of informal conversations and several structured interviews.

However, I have not limited myself to the younger generation. I've conducted a lot of interviews with Tibetans from an older generation as well. About their lives, Tibetan culture, Tibetan identity and their views on the younger generation. Also, I've spend a lot of time in the monastery to get to know monastic life in the camp.

On a final note, I've deliberately chosen to keep the real names of my informants a secret. The situation for Tibetans in Nepal is far from perfect and discrimination on a governmental level is very much existent. Even though the younger generation didn't have a problem with me using their real names, several older Tibetans stressed the fact that I'd have to keep their identity a secret. For this reason, I've chosen to use fake names all around, including the names of the younger generation.

Chapters

As stated before, this thesis will investigate the different forces at work in identity-formation amongst diasporic communities and, in particular, Tibetan refugees. Before we get to this, however, it is important, as a reader, to be well-informed about the research-location and its population, to be able to get a picture of what life is like for the Tibetan refugees. Also, external factors play a big part in the process of identity-formation. Therefore, chapter 1 will serve as an introduction to Nepal, Pokhara, Parjorling Tibetan Settlement, its inhabitants and, even more specifically, the younger generation, who form my main research-population.

As stated before, the median state that diasporic communities supposedly live in, is a state between past and present. Chapter 2 will focus on the past. In this chapter, the focus thus lies on Tibetan culture, Tibetan heritage and Tibetan identity and in what ways, and to what degree, it exists and is practiced in Parjorling Tibetan Settlement and, more specifically, amongst the younger inhabitants. In other words, this chapter will focus on the influence of Tibetan culture and heritage on the process of identity formation amongst Tibetan youngsters.

Chapter 3 will focus on the other end of the median state; the present context. This chapter therefore sheds light on the influence of living in Nepal on the process of identity-formation amongst the younger generation of Tibetans.

In Chapter 4 the influence of the West on identity-formation amongst Tibetan young adults will be investigated.

Chapter 5 re-focuses on the median state that diasporic communities live in, if that is indeed the case with the Tibetan

youngster in Parjorling Tibetan Settlement, if so, in what ways and what that means for their identity and the process of identity-formation.

Chapter 1 - Ballgames, Buddhism and boredom

Priviti Chowk; a dusty road in Pokhara, Nepal. It's rush hour. Scooters, motorcycles, cars and busses create an organized chaos while using their horns abundantly. A cow, that decided to lie down in the middle of the road, makes the chaos on the road complete. The cow, however, seems oblivious to the bustle around him, or he just doesn't care. A westerner wouldn't survive two minutes driving a car here, but surprisingly no accidents happen.

The sidewalks are marked by dozens of Nepali shops selling the usual stuff like Coca Cola, mineral water, cigarettes, chips and bananas. Children walking to school, all wearing their blue school uniforms and carrying backpacks on their backs, are laughing and having fun with each other. "Baglung Chowk! Lakesideeee!", yells a young guy, who is responsible for getting one of the buses that are lined up on the side of the road, as full as possible.

Along Priviti Chowk, crammed in between two shops, is a green gate, no more than four meters wide. A small banner, also green, above the door says: 'Pokhara Lodrik Parjorling Tibetan Settlement.' The Endless Knot, one of the eight lucky signs in Tibetan Buddhism, is painted on both doors. Stepping through this gate is like stepping into another dimension; from the total chaos that is Priviti Chowk, to the complete calmness that is life in Parjorling Tibetan Settlement. The young Tibetans in the settlement have another word for that calmness though: "Boring!"

Parjorling Tibetan Settlement is a dry, dusty terrain and home to about 390 Tibetan refugees of all ages. It's one of five Tibetan refugee settlements in and around the city of Pokhara. Three of these settlements are founded by Tibetan guerilla-fighters, called Lodrik, who fought on the Tibetan-Nepali border after China had invaded Tibet. The other two settlements were founded later on.

This chapter will, for the most part, be a descriptive one. This thesis is written from the perspective that the process of identity-formation is, to a large extent, influenced by outside forces. For instance, in the case of the Tibetan refugees in Parjorling Tibetan Settlement, the Tibetan culture and Nepal (i.e. the present context) play an important role. Therefore, it's

important, as a reader, to have a good picture of what life is like for the Tibetan refugees in question. Firstly, I will provide a short history of the Tibetan diasporic story. Secondly, I will provide some information on Tibetan refugees in Nepal. Thirdly, I will shortly describe the Tibetan settlements in Pokhara, which form the Tibetan community in Pokhara of which Parjorling Tibetan Settlement is a part. Fourthly, I will describe Parjorling Tibetan settlement in detail. Fifthly, I will describe and outline the lives of the younger generation in the settlement.

The Tibetan diasporic story

In the name of unifying the motherland, the Chinese government ordered tens of thousands of troops from the People's Liberation Army (PLA) to occupy Tibet in 1949. The PLA took over and started to systematically change the lives of the Tibetan people. Practicing religion, seen as an obstacle in the process of unification, was criminalized and speaking the Chinese language became mandatory. As a direct result of the Chinese occupation, over a million innocent Tibetans have been killed so far (Houston & Wright 2003, Hess 2006).

After a failed uprising in march 1959, Tenzin Gyatso, the thirteenth Dalai Lama, was forced to flee to India. Here, he and his followers were given refuge in a small, deserted hill-town in North-India: McLeod Ganj. In McLeod Ganj, the Dalai Lama started a Tibetan government in exile of which he was, for a long time, the head of state. The birth of the Tibetan government in exile basically marks the beginning of the story of the Tibetan diaspora.

After the Dalai Lama fled his homeland, at least 130,000 refugees followed him in the decades to come (Houston & Wright 2003). Many Tibetans left their homeland to settle in countries like Nepal, Bhutan, Switzerland, Canada and (primarily) India (Hess 2006). Later on, in the early 90s, the United States also became a destination for several thousand Tibetan refugees.

Tibetan refugees in Nepal

It is estimated that about 20,000 Tibetan refugees live in Nepal at the moment (Hess 2006), although the accuracy of these numbers is questionable. Due to changes in the political treatment of Tibetan

refugees, many are unable to get a passport or Refugee Card and therefore remain unregistered. The vast majority of this number (approximately 11,000) lives in the capital of Nepal, Kathmandu (Houston & Wright 2003). In Pokhara, about 5 percent of the total Tibetan population in Nepal resides (Chhetri 1990).

Tibetan refugees in Pokhara

As stated before, Parjorling Tibetan Settlement is one of five Tibetan refugee settlements in Pokhara (population: 200,000), Nepal. In the 1970's three of them were founded by Tibetan guerilla-fighters who had been forced to lay down their arms and settle in Nepal. After the Chinese invasion of Tibet in 1960, two-thousand Tibetan volunteers stayed at the Tibetan-Nepali border to fight the Chinese occupation of Tibet. They were guerilla-fighters, situated in the Mustang region in the Northern part of Nepal. They called themselves Lodrik, Mustang Voluntary Force and/or Volunteer Frontier Force and, from 1960 to 1974, were actively engaged in a war to free Tibet. Many of them died because of food shortage or were killed by the Chinese People's Liberation Army.

However, in 1974 they were told by the Central Tibetan Administration in Dharamsala to peacefully lay down their arms and surrender. The guerilla fighters did not comply. After a personal message from the Dalai Lama, however, they eventually did comply. After they laid down their arms, the Nepali government provided the guerilla fighters with several pieces of land for them to settle. These pieces of land were located in and around Pokhara. Conditions were very bad and cumbersome, but with the help of the Central Tibetan Administration and several NGO's, it got better. Tibetans over forty years old were relocated to a refugee camp in South-India and many Tibetans under forty enlisted in the Indian Special Frontier Force or worked in road-construction.

In the end, 350 guerilla-fighters stayed in Pokhara and founded three settlements; Tsjambaling, Parjorling and Tashi Gang. Their income consisted of foreign donations, small agricultural ventures and selling souvenirs in the tourist district of Pokhara.

Tsjambaling and Tashi Gang are located several miles outside the city of Pokhara, whereas Parjorling is located in the heart of

the city. Tsjambaling is the biggest settlement of the three and has population of about 1200 Tibetans. Parjorling is the second biggest settlement with about 390 inhabitants and Tashi Gang is the smallest one, counting only 66 inhabitants.

In the 1980's a new inflow of Tibetan refugees caused the establishment of two more Tibetan refugee settlements, unrelated to the guerrilla-history that the other three camps are affiliated with. Tashi Ling, founded in 1984, counts approximately 550 inhabitants and is also situated in the heart of Pokhara. Because it is located close to tourist-attractions like Devi's Falls and the Pagoda of World Peace, it's a quite prosperous settlement compared to the other ones. It has a thriving carpet-weaving business and several souvenir-shops.

The biggest Tibetan settlement in and around Pokhara is Tashi Palkhel, which is located several miles outside the city and has about 1400 inhabitants.

The different settlements in and around Pokhara collaborate with each other on different levels. For instance, the three settlements that are affiliated with the guerilla-history have an overarching office/organization that takes care of financial and organizational matters. Every couple of years, a director is appointed. Also, several informants told me that they have many family members and friends in the other settlements. The inhabitants of the different settlements are on good terms with each other. Whenever there is a ceremony, festivity or another kind of gathering in one of the settlements, people from other settlements come to visit and participate in whatever is going on. For instance, on an annual basis, a soccer tournament is organized in Tashi Palkhel, in which every settlement participates. And whenever a high lama visits one of the settlements, Tibetans from all settlements go to the settlement in question to welcome him.

Parjorling Tibetan Settlement

As said before, Parjorling Tibetan Settlement is home to about 390 Tibetan refugees and counts about 96 households. When one enters the gate of the settlement (which closes at eight o'clock in the evening), the first thing one sees is a Stupa with the Gomba

(Tibetan monastery) behind it. Straight ahead is a carpet weaving centre, which used to be a source of income but is closed nowadays. On the wall of the carpet weaving centre hangs a poster, entitled 'Tibet is burning.' Beneath the title is a list of names; names of the monks who have immolated themselves since march, 2009 as a form of protest against the Chinese occupation of Tibet. The list, however, only runs to 87 and, therefore, is not complete. At the beginning of February the 100th monk immolated himself in Kathmandu.

Also, the settlement has a shop selling basic necessities, a meeting room, a health centre, a prayer-room for the elderly, several offices, a kindergarten, a pre-school and a pretty worn out basketball court. In front of the carpet weaving centre is a big patch of land that serves as a soccer field for the younger Tibetans in the camp, full of holes and with rocks scattered everywhere. Every side of the compound is marked by rows of houses which, at the same time, serve as a wall around the settlement. For a map of the settlement, see appendix 1.

The houses in the settlement are nothing special. They are made of bricks, on top of which metal plates serve as a roof. Big rocks lie upon the metal plates to keep them from moving. The vast majority of the houses consist of a single room. Some of the more wealthy Tibetans have a house consisting of two rooms, but still it's nothing special. The interior only contains necessities like beds, a small stove, a small table and some storage space. When it comes to decorations, a Tibetan flag and the occasional picture of family-members or the Dalai Lama seems to suffice. Every house has electricity, but in Nepal the electricity only comes on for several hours a day. In the far-right corner of the settlement, several toilets are located that are used by everyone in the settlement. Also, the settlement has five showers, producing ice-cold water.

The primary school in the camp has a total of 82 students. The vast majority of the students lives in the camp, but about 30 percent of the students come from other Tibetan settlements. The kids go to school six days a week, from Sunday to Friday. School starts at eight o'clock and ends at 15:30 hours. Except for Friday, that's a half day and school ends at one o'clock. After five years of primary school, the kids go to secondary school, which also lasts

five years. Parjorling Tibetan Settlement doesn't have a secondary school, so students go to another village, Tashi Ling, by bus to go to secondary school.

The pride and joy of the settlement is definitely the Shang Gaden Chöckhorling monastery; a beautiful yellow and red building that is home to 28 Tibetan monks. Religion plays a major role in the settlement. Prayer wheels ('Mani' in Tibetan) adorn the sides of the walls and many villagers visit the Gomba on a daily basis to either walk around the building in a clockwise manner to spin the prayer-wheels, light a butter lamp or perform other Buddhist rituals. The Gomba has a long history, going all the way back to Tibet. It was founded in 1642 in Tibet and started with around 500 monks. In 1958, at the time of the Chinese invasion, the monastery was home to about 1000 monks. However, the Chinese destroyed the monastery in its totality and the process of rebuilding it in Tibet is still going on.

Some of the monks decided to disrobe and join the Tibetan guerilla-army in the Mustang-area, Lodrik, to fight against the Chinese oppressors. This was the same army of Tibetans that settled in Pokhara after they laid down their arms. About thirty of the monks who fought against the Chinese, received the right to use a piece of land, in the middle of Parjorling Tibetan Settlement, to build a new monastery and a new future.

Both the Gomba and the settlement rely, for a great part, on donations when it comes to income.

Some Tibetan refugees have Nepali citizenship, either obtained through marriage with a Nepali wife or husband or obtained illegally and, thus, are able to work. However, the vast majority has a Refugee Card or isn't even registered at all, which causes a lot of trouble regarding income and work-opportunities. Logically, unemployment is a big problem in the settlement.

The older women in the camp go to Lakeside (the tourist part of Pokhara) on a daily basis to sell their handicrafts, which produces some income. Some adults have their own businesses; a yak-wool factory or a watch-repair shop, for instance. Some have found a job in the administration of this or another Tibetan settlement. Overall, however, the income of the camp is very low.

The different generations (elderly, adults, adolescents and children) and groups in the settlement get along well with each other. Adults play soccer with the adolescents, adolescents help out and sit and chat with the elderly and the kids play with everyone who is willing. There doesn't seem to be any form of animosity between different generations. The exception to this, however, is the way the adults think about the adolescents. Some of them said that they would like to see the younger generation get more involved with their Tibetan heritage and 'stop wasting their time with their mobile-phones'. The monks in the settlement are well-respected for devoting their life to Buddhism, but they don't live separately from the rest of the village. On the contrary, they mingle with the rest of the settlement and, every now and then, even play a game of soccer with the adolescents.

The young ones

The main research population of this thesis is a group of about twenty young Tibetans, ages varying from 17 to 25 years old, who were all born in Parjorling Tibetan Settlement, hence born in Nepal. They speak the Tibetan and Nepali language fluently, but amongst each other they solely speak Tibetan. However, some Nepali words have already entered their vocabulary. One of the guys is married and has a son, but the rest of them still live with their parents. One reason for this is because they don't have money to get their own place. Another reason is because there are barely any vacant houses in the settlement.

On paper, many of these young guys don't exist. They have no Nepali passport, no Tibetan passport, no Refugee Card, nothing. This brings forth a lot of problems. They've all studied, or are still studying. Primary school, secondary school (which combined amounts to ten years of study) and, often, college also. However, because they aren't registered they can't get a job. They work at a noodle factory in the settlement sometimes, but that's it. It's a poorly paying job and not a full-time job either. This leaves them with a lot of time on their hands. Time with which they often don't know what to do. Most of the time they just sit around, in the camp or just outside the camp; looking at passersby, talking amongst each

other or smoking cigarettes (almost all of them smoke). "It's very boring", Lobsang says, a twenty-one year old guy, with a stylish haircut. "What can we do? There's nothing here for us. But at least we're bored with each other."

Because they aren't registered on paper or only have a Refugee Card, they aren't allowed to travel. Besides that, they barely have any money for it anyway. Still, sometimes they go to India, in the back of a truck, crossing the border illegally. "For hanky panky", Kelsang says with a smile, who happens to be the one who's married, hinting to sex. Because they are so bored, they really want to leave and are very interested in the West. "Have you ever been to New York?" "What's life like in The Netherlands?" "Do you have a big house?"

Their interest in the West does not limit itself to asking a lot of questions about it. Their style of clothing is Western as well; Nike shoes, tight jeans, sunglasses, earrings and stylish haircuts with a lot of gel in it. The music they listen to is Western as well; their mobile-phones are filled with songs that are in the charts at the moment. Occasionally they go to the tourist part of Pokhara to party and have a few drinks. Their biggest wish is to leave someday; to go to the West and make a lot of money, something I will elaborate on further in chapter 4.

Late in the afternoon, when the heat of the sun has somewhat diminished, they engage in the activity they look forward to all day: a game of soccer. They play on an uneven, ramshackle field, full of holes, bumps and rocks. It doesn't seem to matter to them though. Soccer means the world to them and they play it passionately. Moreover, they don't just play for fun. They train. Because every so often a soccer tournament is organized between teams from the different Tibetan camps in and around Pokhara. They haven't won a tournament yet, but they are hell bend on winning this year. "Never give up", Tenzin says. "Practice, practice, practice." Every so often, single matches are organized as well. Tenzin proudly tells me that in their latest match they've made history; they'd won a match for the first time.

Life in the settlement, in opposition to playing soccer, does not seem to interest them. At first sight, they are not involved in

much, except for doing the laundry every now and then. Tibetan culture and religion also doesn't seem that important to them. Even though they say they're Buddhists, they don't practice their religion. They admit that they almost never pray, visit the Gomba or perform rituals. For instance, during the three months that I was in the settlement I never saw them spinning a single prayer-wheel. They also barely participate in ceremonies and festivities. However, looks can be deceiving. As this thesis will show, they do feel Tibetan, they're proud to be Tibetan and their Tibetan identity is very important to them.

Chapter 2 - A Tibetan heart

Lakeside is the tourist part of Pokhara; a long, broad street, right next to Pewa lake, filled with restaurants, bars, hotels, souvenir-shops, supermarkets, clothing-stores and whatever else a tourist could need. Every now and then, the young guys from Parjorling Tibetan Settlement come here, to have a party. A party in Pokhara means going to a bar where a cover-band plays quite mediocre tunes. At 11 o'clock the music stops and the party is over.

It's a Friday night and we (Tenzin, Lobsang, Kalsang and I) are at the Busy Bee, one of the better and quite crowded bars in town. The band plays 'Smoke on the water' by Deep Purple and the singer hits a bad note for the third time in a row. We sit down at one of the tables and order some drinks. The guys all order whiskey, I decide to go for an Everest beer.

After a while, me and Tenzin end up on the dance floor. The night is coming to an end and the band starts playing louder and 'rouger' songs than at the beginning of the evening. The dance floor is filled with about forty people, who are all having a great time, dancing, sweating and drinking. Tenzin and me also dance. He is a bit shy at first, but after his third whiskey he is dancing, having fun and talking to girls.

"Alrightttt!", the singer of the band screams into his microphone. "This is our last song!" The guitarist plays the first notes of 'Killing in the name of' by Rage Against the Machine, a local favorite that cover bands in Pokhara play everywhere and every night. The crowd goes wild.

When the song reaches its conclusion, the singer says to the crowd: "Ok, for this next part, I want you all to put your middle finger up in the air and sing a long!" The whole crowd follows his example and puts their middle fingers up in the air. "Fuck you, I won't do what you tell me!", the singer screams. The crowd sings along: "Fuck you, I won't do what you tell me! Fuck you, I won't do what you tell me!"

Tenzin taps me on the shoulder and says: "This is not the Tibetan way. I'll show them how it's done!" He proceeds to put his pointer finger and middle finger in the air to make a peace sign. He

doesn't sing along to the lyrics. "Love and compassion, man!", he yells in my ear. "That's what it's all about."

Generally, in diasporic communities, maintaining and/or holding on to the identity and culture associated to the home country is an essential part of life, both on an individual level and on a community-level. However, it is almost unavoidable that, in diasporic communities (as in any other community for that matter), the identity of an individual will change over time. Barry Stein (Stein in Malkki 1995: 11) states this quite straight-forward when he says: 'All refugees will confront the loss of their culture, their identity, their habits'. As stated in the introduction, present contexts (i.e. host-countries) are indeed bound to change aspects of identity and culture within diasporic or exilic communities.

More often than not, as several researchers have shown (Hess 2006, Houston & Wright 2003), this change of identity and culture isn't necessarily a desirable development, both on an individual level and on the level of diasporic communities as a whole. In the case of Tibetan refugees, on an individual level, Tibetan culture and heritage can provide something to hold on to, a safe haven if you will. In other words, it can create a sense of home and belonging, which can make the present situation a lot easier to deal with

It is important for diasporic communities to create a feeling of home, because it can occur that the host country does not provide this (which is also the case for the Tibetan in Parjorling Tibetan Settlement, as this thesis will show). The recreation of the home country in the host country through traditions, customs and religious practices, for instance, can serve as a safe haven that provides them with a feeling of comfort and security. For many diasporic communities, their nation provides them with a sense of home and they feel connected to it, whether they are scattered around the world (as is this case for Tibetans) or live together: 'For diasporas, it's possible to regard their nation as a home, even though they don't live there' (Basch, Glick Schiller & Szanton Blanc 1994).

This means that diasporic communities tend to associate themselves more with their home country and built their identities around that fact. Home-making, in this sense, can be regarded as an important part of identity-formation.

On the level of the Tibetan exilic community as a whole, the loss of identity isn't a welcome development either. The preservation of Tibetan culture strengthens the community as an inclusive social entity in an alienating situation (Diehl 2002), which is necessary in their ongoing struggle for independence.

Since 1959, the year when the exodus of Tibetans from their homeland began, one of the primary concerns of the Tibetan government in exile was to 'preserve the rich cultural heritage of Tibet' (Diehl 2002: 65). The reasons for this were the threat of 'disappearance of Tibetan culture in the homeland under Chinese rule and the disappearance of exiled Tibetans into their host-countries' (Diehl 2002: 65-66). To stop this from happening, the Tibetan government in exile emphasizes the importance of so called *identity markers*, such as language, food, clothing, dance, rituals, etc.. In order to remain an inclusive social identity, Tibetans born in exile, second and third generations who have actually never been in Tibet, must be taught this 'Tibetaness'. As this chapter will show, history plays an important part in this process and often a 'mythico-history' (Malkki 1995) is created.

The need to preserve Tibetan culture on the level of the entire exilic community, as this chapter will show, has a direct effect on the progress of identity-formation amongst Tibetan youngsters on an individual level. Many Tibetan youngsters expressed that they see it as their duty to carry on certain Tibetan traditions, because they've been taught that this is important. However, this can also be considered a burden to them and can even cause certain feelings of shame when they don't live up to this.

The fact that the Tibetan community as a whole created an overarching narrative on what 'being Tibetan' actually means, raises the question: What makes someone Tibetan? Even within the Tibetan community itself, opinions about this differ. For instance, those who live in Dharamsala, considered the capital of the Tibetan

nation in exile, consider themselves 'more Tibetan and culturally purer than others' (Diehl 2002:64).

When Tibetans came into exile, they were forced to present themselves as 'one people', in order to preserve their culture and present a unified front against the Chinese oppressors. However, prior to the Chinese occupation, the Tibetan identity as we know it now didn't even exist. In other words, Tibetan nationalism is a transnational phenomenon. And with that, the 'Tibetan identity' is a post-exilic phenomenon. True, Tibetans exiles share a lot of common ground, like a shared history, a common literary language and aspects of genealogy, myth and folkloric notions. On top of that, Buddhism ensures that Tibetans are already organized around a common ideal. But this doesn't change the fact that prior to 1949, inhabitants of Tibet based their identity on regional and religious sectarian affiliations and didn't see Tibet as a unified whole (Houston & Wright 2003).

Add to this the difference, and even animosity, between groups of Tibetans who left their home-country at different times (for instance the difference between those who left Tibet in the 1950's together with the Dalai Lama and those who left in the 1980's) and it's almost impossible to say who is Tibetan and who isn't, or what makes someone Tibetan and what doesn't. Regarding this, Hedetoft and Hjørt (2002:xii) state that frequently 'homogeneity amounts to little more than official discourse, a thin veneer of common identity covering up the coexistence of a multiplicity of cultures.'

This also seems to be the case in the Tibetan diasporic community, where the official discourse of the Tibetan government in exile indeed seems to be a thin veneer of common identity, but where a lot of difference in culture actually exists in different contexts. In the words of Steward Hall (1993:226): 'Cultural identity is not a fixed origin to which we can make some final and absolute return.' Identity is fluid and ever-transforming, therefore 'Tibetaness' can entail different things for different people.

Returning to the 'median state' that was discussed earlier, this chapter focuses on one end, one extreme if you will, of the two forces (past and present) that diasporic communities supposedly are in between: their heritage, their 'original' culture, their past. In

this chapter, I will first briefly describe how 'Tibetaness' is practiced and which identity markers exist in Parjorling Tibetan Settlement and, more specifically, amongst the younger generation. After that, I will emphasize the importance of history in this matter and outline the way in which a 'mythico-history' (Malkki 1995) exists amongst the younger generation in the settlement. Then I will shed light on what the Tibetan identity means to the younger generation, if it is important to them and in what ways.

Traditional Tuesday

'On Tuesdays, those of us who want to, wear traditional Tibetan clothing.' Tsering is a 38-year old inhabitant of Parjorling Tibetan Settlement and is wearing a blue *chuba*, which is a long robe with elongated sleeves. Because it's Tuesday. 'The climate in Nepal is so different from the climate in Tibet. It's much warmer here, so we simply can't always wear traditional clothing. That's why we chose one day a week to wear traditional clothing', he says, after I asked him why they don't wear traditional clothing all the time. 'It's important, I think', he continues. 'When people see us wearing this, they ask about it. This gives us a chance to tell people about our history and heritage. It creates a ripple-effect.'

Wearing traditional clothing is just one example of the ways in which Tibetan culture is maintained and performed in Parjorling Tibetan Settlement. Tibetan holidays like Losar (Tibetan New year) are celebrated every year. The only board-game that is played in the settlement is *Sho*, a simple dice-game that originated and remained within Tibetan borders for hundreds of years. Within the settlement, everybody speaks Tibetan. When it comes to food and drinks, the Tibetan traditions are also maintained. For breakfast, people eat *Tsampa*, a certain flour-powder that, when mixed with butter-tea and a little bit of sugar, forms a ball of dough that people eat with their hands. For dinner, people eat Thukpa; a Tibetan noodle-soup. Tibetan Buddhism is practiced and performed on a daily basis as well, either by spinning prayer-wheels, chanting prayers or making certain offerings to Buddhist deities. Students who go to school start their school-day by singing the Tibetan, national anthem and,

if they are interested, can enroll into a traditional Tibetan dance-class.

All of the above can be considered identity-markers and ways in which Tibetaness is maintained and performed towards the outside world. Judging from the above, we can conclude that the Tibetan culture is still well maintained and very much existent in exile. And to a certain degree, this is indeed the case. In this sense, the situation in Parjorling Tibetan Settlement seems to coincide with nearly all accounts of Tibetans living in exile. Accounts that 'recognize the remarkable extent to which they have been able to maintain their traditional culture against all odds' (Diehl 2006:64-65). However, I partly disagree with these statements. There are two objections I would like to make.

First of all, even though Tibetan identity-markers are indeed maintained, customs from the context they're currently living in have also entered the lives of Tibetan refugees. Even though some Tibetans wear traditional clothes on Tuesdays, they wear 'normal' clothing for the rest of the week. Even though everyone speaks Tibetan, they also speak Nepali. "A lot of Nepali words have entered the Tibetan language, so to speak", says Chophel, a 40 year old inhabitant of the settlement who is very much involved with the preservation of Tibetan culture. "I couldn't give you an example now, actually. Maybe that's because these words are already so normal for us. Trust me, there are a lot." Even though everyone eats Tibetan food on a daily basis, they also eat Nepali food on a daily basis; Dal-Bhat, the main Nepali dish, is a standard component of people's daily nutrition.

The second objection to the statement that Tibetan culture is well maintained in exile is about the generational difference in the settlement. As stated before, the younger generation seems less involved with their Tibetan heritage and seems less interested in their Tibetan identity. They have trouble admitting this, because they don't live up to the expectations of the older generation and the Tibetan community as a whole to carry on Tibetan traditions, but it does seem to be the case. The following excerpt from one of my conversations with Tenzin illustrates this very well.

H: Are you Buddhist?

T: Yes, I am Buddhist. Everyone here is. All the young people, in the different camps around Pokhara, are Buddhists.

H: Is that something that was taught to you when you were young?

T: Yes, in primary school, every day we had to pray. And sometimes a high lama came here, to give speeches about Buddhist philosophy; what it means, what you must do. Stuff like that.

H: So do you practice Buddhism in daily live now?

T: Sometimes, but not like in school in the past. I can read Tibetan, so I can pray. I used to pray every day, for an hour. In primary school and in secondary school. But when we go to college, we go to a Nepali college. So I forget to pray. I don't have the time, you know. In the evening, friends come, so I'm so busy. So sometimes I pray, but not always. I do know how to do it, though.

What this excerpt shows is that even though the young Tibetans say they are Buddhist, they don't really practice it, which Tenzin admitted to when I asked a little more questions. They say they are Buddhist, because, to a certain degree, it's expected of them, but in reality they don't really care about it.

For reasons that will become clear in the chapters to come, the younger generation seems less involved with their Tibetan heritage than older generations; the way and amount of time they 'practice' Buddhism are examples of that. Especially when you compare it to the practice of Buddhism in the older generation of the settlement, where several hours of praying a day is still quite normal. The younger generation's loss of interest in Tibetan Buddhism is just one example of what seems to be a gradually diminishing interest in Tibetan heritage and culture altogether. For instance, the young Tibetans of the settlement never participate in ceremonies and/or festivities, in contrast to the rest of the inhabitants of the

settlement. Also, they never wear traditional clothing on Tuesdays. "Ahh, that's just boring", Tenzin says, partly joking but quite serious at the same time.

However, again, there is a flipside to this coin. Even though certain aspects of Tibetan tradition, heritage and identity seem to be of no interest to the younger generation, other aspects of their Tibetan background, political activism in particular, are very important to them.

'Our Tibetan brothers and sisters'

"I've been to jail, you know", says Kalsang, while he attentively rubs his hand through his hair to make sure it's looking good.

"Sometimes, we go to Kathmandu by bus and protest there, in front of the Chinese embassy. But in a peace way! Because the Dalai Lama, our leader, emphasizes the peaceful approach. We make some signs and hang it around our neck. 'We need human rights!' 'Stop genocide in Tibet.' 'Stop discrimination in Tibet.' That's the things we write." "And still you get arrested?", I ask. "Yes, yes. Here in Nepal you get arrested and you go to jail if you protest, but not for a long time. Our brothers and sisters in Tibet, if they protest, go to jail for many years or even for life, I think. They leave their family behind. That's a big sacrifice. That's why I feel I should do my little piece also."

Where Buddhism is boring to the younger ones in the settlement, political activism is not. It is exciting even, because they can travel to Kathmandu or even India; it's an adventure. But that's not the only reason for the fact that they care about political activism. They actually genuinely care about the political situation in Tibet and are well-informed about it too. Tenzin, for instance, has thought about the Tibetan situation a lot, even comparing it to other historical events: "India became independent from Great Britain after 150 years or something. Tibet is under control of China for almost 50 years now. If we wait for another 100 years, Tibetan people will vanish. I'm very afraid of this." The young guys spent many hours discussing the Tibetan situation and following the news on the internet. And, when they can, they protest, of course in a peaceful way.

Protesting in a peaceful way is important, because it signifies probably the most important identity-marker of Tibetan culture and heritage. Everyone I've talked to stressed two main aspects of Tibetan culture that distinguishes them from others: Love and compassion. The younger generation also stressed this as one of the main aspects of their Tibetaness, as the story at the beginning of this chapter shows, and tries hard to incorporate this in daily life. A conversation with a secondary-school teacher named Ludup, illustrates the meaning of love and compassion well, but at the same time illustrates doubt about the role love and compassion plays in Tibetan culture nowadays.

L: "The Tibetan culture has a really warm, rich heart. Willing to share. Willing to help. My father used to tell me stories of when he traveled in India, you know, such a huge country, so many people; the first thing he would do is look for a Tibetan guy. If he saw someone, he asked: "Are you Tibetan?" Then that person would help; being Tibetan is a certificate for honesty. He would leave his bags with us and arrange a ticket for us."

H: Is that still the case today?

L: It's definitely changing. Now, if I meet a Tibetan guy in the railway station, I would not leave my bags with him, because I wouldn't know if I could trust him. We seem to be slowly losing our Tibetan heart. It's a great loss, not only for Tibetan people but for the whole of humanity. These values can make us happy, can make this world a better place to live. Without a compassionate attitude, a caring attitude, this world cannot be a peaceful place.

H: When you look at the younger generation of Tibetans, do you also see them losing their Tibetan heart?

L: Yes and no. Deep down in their heart they are very Tibetan. They have love for the culture, love for the country, love for the people. Love for all people, for that matter. But I can also sense that there are a lot of things around them that

they get distracted by.

So, when one looks at all these aspects of Tibetan culture, we can see that the younger generation has made certain choices regarding their Tibetaness. On the one hand, they definitely embody Tibetaness and, indeed, are Tibetan in a very real way. Their interest in political activism and constant attempts to be as compassionate as possible, are proof of that. On the other hand, they've neglected certain other aspects of Tibetan culture, like religion, which seems to drive them away from their Tibetaness. Why is that? The reason for this, I argue, can be found in their past and, more specifically, in their upbringing and education.

A guerilla-infused history

As discussed earlier, in the strictest sense of the word, the members of the younger generation in Parjorling Tibetan Settlement aren't refugees, because they've never fled their home-country. Therefore, their Tibetaness had to be taught, by their parents, their teachers and their fellow inhabitants of the settlement. An important part of this 'teaching' is history; the history of the Tibetan people, to be more exact. Anthropologists often stress that 'history is not a product of the past but a response to requirements of the present' (Eriksen 1994:85). Therefore, often, historical accounts are used as tools in the contemporary creation of identities and in politics, both on an individual level and in the education of the younger generation. However, as Levi-Strauss (in Eriksen 1994) has argued, historical accounts include only a minute fraction of all the events that have taken place in a certain time-span, and they necessarily involve interpretation and selection. In this sense, we aren't necessarily 'looking at the past, but present-day constructions of the past' (Eriksen 1994: 86).

Liisa Malkki (1995) takes this process of thought one step further. In her account on Hutu-history amongst Hutu-refugees, she states that historical records amongst Hutu-refugees 'aren't only a description of the past, nor even merely an evaluation of the past, but a fundamentally subversive recasting and reinterpretation of it in fundamentally moral terms' (Malkki 1995: 54). For this reason,

historical accounts cannot be described as either history or myth. Therefore, Malkki offers the term *mythico-history* to describe this phenomenon.

The mythical part of historical narratives amongst diasporic communities does not necessarily 'lie in their truth or falsity, but in the fact that they are concerned with order in a fundamental, cosmological sense' (Malkki 1995: 55). These historical accounts serve as tools to order and reorder social and political categories, to define the self in distinction to others and to teach younger generations the things about their heritage that are deemed important. As Malkki puts it: 'The mythico-history serves as a pragmatic model and interpretive device for giving meaning to and acting upon the socio-political present of the refugee-camp' (Malkki 1995: 105).

When we look at Tibetan, diasporic communities in exile, a certain mythico-history can also be detected. For the majority of refugees, Tibet is an imagined and dreamed-of place, an idea of a home-country but not an actual home-country. It is, however, of vital importance for the Tibetan community as a whole that the Tibetan culture is passed on to future generations, as to stay unified and preserve the culture. Therefore, second and third generation refugees are necessarily taught to 'remember' their culture, history and heritage from others. This is something that Diehl (2002) calls a 'tutored mindfulness', which is a sort of collective autobiography that everyone should be taught and be aware of, so that 'if someday a window of opportunity opens for Tibetans to return, someone will care enough to recognize and take advantage' (Diehl 2002:66).

The information Tibetans of a second or third generation have gathered of their home-country and their heritage, however, is unavoidably filtered, by their parents, their teachers and their government in exile. As said before, history necessarily involves interpretation and selection. This brings us back to the question raised earlier; why does the young generation in Parjorling Tibetan Settlement neglect certain aspects of Tibetan culture, while being very involved in others?

As mentioned earlier, it has to do with their upbringing and education. Because Parjorling Tibetan Settlement is a settlement founded by ex-guerilla fighters, the Chinese invasion and the injustice that was done to Tibetans were major pillars in the education of children. Many, if not all, of the members of the older generation in the settlement have fought for the liberation of Tibet. Some of them even used to be monks, but chose to disrobe in order to fight against the Chinese oppressors. Logically, the political situation of Tibet was and is very important to them, maybe even more important than for other Tibetans who didn't fought a guerilla-war. This shows, both in the education of children and certain characteristics of the settlement; exactly because the inhabitants of Parjorling Tibetan Settlement fought in the guerilla war, the political situation in Tibet remains of vital importance to them.

Shades of political activism can be spotted everywhere in the settlement. On the wall of the carpet weaving centre hangs a poster titled 'Tibet is burning.' Beneath the title is a list of names; names of the monks who have immolated themselves since march 2009, as a form of protest against the Chinese occupation of Tibet. A similar list hangs on the announcement board of the settlement, only this one is more up-to-date. Another announcement on the board is an open letter from Dr. Lobsang Sangay, the Sikyong (similar to Prime Minister) of the Tibetan community. In the letter, Sangay calls for refraining from celebrating Losar (Tibetan new year) this year, because of the self-immolations: "Only customary rituals like visiting temples and making offers should be performed." Also Sangay calls for 'more political action and lobbying.' And indeed, Losar wasn't celebrated in a big way in Parjorling Tibetan Settlement. In Tashi Palkhel, the biggest settlement in Pokhara and, not unimportant, a settlement that doesn't have a guerilla-history, Losar was celebrated; with performances of traditional Lama-dances and other festivities.

From birth, the children are taught about the story of how Tibet was invaded by the Chinese Liberation Army, how their 'Tibetan brothers and sisters' came into exile and how some of them are still being suppressed by the Chinese in Tibet. The reason they call the

people in Tibet their 'brothers and sisters' is simple; this has also been taught to them from birth. Tenzin told me about the ways in which they were taught about the Tibetan history.

H: So where does your passion for political activism come from, you think? You were born here in Nepal, right? So you have never been to Tibet...

T: When I was small, my father used to tell me all the time about Tibet. My father is an ex-guerilla, almost everyone here in the camp is. They are Lodrik. 'Lo' means Mustang (from where they fought), 'drik' means army.

H: So your father is the reason for your passion and interest in the Tibetan, political cause?

T: Yes. My father, he's passed away now, used to tell me all the time about how the Chinese government captured Tibet. Also, the office of the settlement used to show tape-recordings of the Chinese army beating, shooting and killing Tibetan monks. After that, our minds change, you know. Automatically, we feel attachment to our country. The Chinese are very bad. But I don't mean the Chinese people, but the Chinese government. At the top, you know.

In their upbringing, the younger generation in Parjorling Tibetan Settlement learns about the aspects of Tibetan culture and history that their parents and elders find most important. Parjorling Tibetan Settlement is a settlement that was founded by guerilla-fighters; people who fought against the injustice that was done to them by the Chinese. Logically, this is the aspect of Tibetan history that they deem most important, hence that is the aspect that was laid emphasis on when teaching their kids about Tibetan culture and history. Hence, this is the main aspect of Tibetan culture that the younger generation is interested in and cares about, exactly because it has been taught to them since they were kids.

Education of compassion

The other main aspect of Tibetan culture that the younger generation is interested in, love and compassion, has been taught to them through their education. Several teachers I've talked to stressed the importance of love and compassion in their school-curriculum. Nyima, the headmaster of the primary school in the settlement, explained it as follows.

H: Why do you incorporate love and compassion in your school curriculum?

N: Because Tibetans values are also universal values. Everybody needs this. Even my enemy needs this, we can't live without this. Without this compassion, friendliness, caring, the human society cannot be peaceful.

So, from time to time, teachers will speak on different topics regarding good nature. Once a week, we organize speeches on morality. We try to make them good human beings. We are all human beings and it's good to be a good human being. Since we are Tibetan, we emphasize on this.

Tibetan in a real way

So, when taking all of the above into account, what can we conclude about the 'Tibetaness' of the younger generation in Parjorling Tibetan settlement? On the one hand, they seem to have distanced themselves from their Tibetan heritage. Tibetan Buddhism, considered as one of the backbones of Tibetan culture, doesn't interest them. The same goes for a lot of traditions and ceremonies; they just don't feel the need to participate. On the other hand, they are very Tibetan in the sense that they genuinely care about the political situation of Tibet and try to practice love and compassion on a regular basis, both infused by their upbringing and education.

On the one hand, thus, the youngsters neglect certain parts of their Tibetan heritage. In this sense, they don't necessarily live up to the wishes of the Tibetan community as a whole, to preserve the Tibetan culture and present themselves as 'one' people. However, this doesn't mean that they are somehow 'less' Tibetan than others.

As said before: 'homogeneity amounts to little more than official discourse, a thin veneer of common identity covering up the coexistence of a multiplicity of cultures' (Hedetoft en Hjort 2002:xii). This statement can also be applied to the Tibetan diasporic community as a whole; even though they present themselves as one people, there are a lot of differences between Tibetans in different countries.

In this sense, the youngsters in Parjorling Tibetan Settlement may choose to not be involved in certain aspects of being Tibetan, but that doesn't mean they feel less Tibetan than others. While some members of the older generations sometimes look at the younger generation with a certain amount of disdain, the youngsters themselves feel Tibetan in a very real way, even though they admit to some disinterest in certain Tibetan traditions. To recap the words of Steward Hall (1993:226): 'Cultural identity is not a fixed origin to which we can make some final and absolute return.' Identity is fluid and ever-transforming, therefore 'Tibetaness' can entail different things for different people.

The young Tibetans in Parjorling Tibetan Settlement are, to a certain extent, aware of the uniqueness and importance of their heritage. Also, they seem to realize that practicing Tibetaness can serve as a way of affirming one's identity, of 'reassuring the self that it will not disappear or dissolve in exile' (Naficy in Diehl 2002:66). However, as the next chapters will show, this is not as easy as it sounds. Their present context (i.e. Nepal) is an obstacle for them, while the West serves as a 'distraction'.

Chapter 3 - Obstacles, struggles and discrimination

"If you look on the surface, everything is quiet and calm. But underneath this peaceful surface, which is quite deceptive, lies an undercurrent of tensions and anxieties", says Ludup, after I asked him about the situation for Tibetans and Nepal. "Being Tibetan is a weakness. Everybody could harm you or extract money from you. I'll give you an example, ok?"

"It was about four years ago. A friend and me were on the motorbike and the police drove past. My friend, even though he has a drivers license, is not a very good driver. He lost his control and we fell down. The police van stopped when we fell down. They came to us and I said: "Sorry, sir. We fell down, it won't happen again." They didn't listen, instead they asked me where I lived and I said: "I'm from the Tibetan camp." That was my mistake. I could've said I was from Lakeside or somewhere else. They said: "Ok, come to the police station." I said: "What? Why? We just fell down!"

We went to the police station and they fabricated charges against us. They said the bike ran into the police van, that the backlight was broken and that it was an expensive, Japanese van and that it was going to cost us 10.000 rupees. I just couldn't understand this. We were there all day. There was this young police officer and I explained to him: "Why is this happening to us? We didn't do anything. The local people can verify, we just fell down!" That was really our only mistake and, in fact, it was not a mistake. These things happen in life. Also, the place where we fell down and the place where they stopped their van were at least 12 feet apart. How can we hit their van?! My goodness.

We showed the bike; nothing was wrong with it. If there was a collision there would've been something wrong. But they wouldn't hear it and we had to leave the bike at the police station. They said: "We'll call you later." A couple of days later, we were ordered back there and again they said: "You have to pay us." I was really angry. I said: "You're a human being. I'm a human being. What you're doing is against the law of this country. You know I'm a Tibetan refugee and you are taking advantage of this."

In the end, we had to pay 7000 rupees. We went to another police officer to pay, he said: "8000 rupees." This is how they

hassle us. I took out my wallet and said: "Here, this is all we have." Then I asked for a receipt, but they wouldn't give it. This is what happens and it happens all the time. There are even some Tibetans here, in Pokhara, who had to spend a year in prison for a crime they didn't commit. They catch you and ask you: "Where are you from?" If you say 'Tibetan camp', you have a problem."

Where chapter 2 focused on one end/extreme of the two forces that diasporic communities are supposedly in between of, this chapter focuses on the other end/extreme of the median state: the present context. The situation in Nepal for Tibetan refugees is a harsh one. They are being discriminated against in numerous ways, making it hard for them to create a life for themselves. Eriksen states that immigrants are often 'ostracized by the majority and denied full civil rights by the government' (Eriksen 2007:93). This is definitely the case for Tibetan refugees in Nepal, who are, as this chapter will show, victims of ethnic segregation in numerous ways. This chapter focuses on the effects of the present context (i.e. Nepal) on the process of identity-formation amongst the younger generation in Parjorling Tibetan Settlement. First I will briefly outline the political situation for Tibetan refugees in Nepal. After that, I will describe the effect it has on the younger generation and how they deal with. Finally, I will outline the effects of the present context on the process of identity formation.

Political situation in Nepal

The way Tibetan refugees are treated by the Nepali government can be labeled as discrimination, as the following will show. Research (Tibet Justice Center 2002) indicates that the reason the Nepali government is cracking down on Tibetan refugees has to do with certain treaties the Nepali and the Chinese government signed. These treaties, as is admitted by Nepali politicians, still influence Nepali politics today.

In general, Nepal's foreign policy has 'emphasized the theme of friendship and peaceful coexistence with all countries within the framework of nonalignment and neutrality. In 1966, Nepal and China signed a treaty that reflects this theme. Both governments affirmed

the "five principles of friendly relations" (Tibet Justice Center 2002:28-29): 1. Mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty; 2. Mutual non-aggression; 3. Non-interference in each other's internal affairs for any reasons of an economic, political or ideological nature; 4. Equality and mutual benefit; and 5. Peaceful coexistence. This treaty basically disables the Nepali government to take a stance against the Chinese occupation of Tibet. However, it doesn't influence the way the Nepali government can treat Tibetans within their own borders.

In 1986, however, Nepal and China signed a new treaty that did effect the way Tibetans were treated in Nepal. This particular treaty significantly restricted the ability of Tibetans to travel through or into Nepal. Soon after the treaty was signed, the Chinese government suppressed a series of pro-Tibetan independence demonstrations in Lhasa. This led to a resurgence in the number of Tibetans fleeing into exile. In 1989, pressure from 'the Chinese government and the growing number of new arrivals led Nepal to initiate a strict border-control policy. The Nepalese government made clear that it would henceforth refuse to accept or recognize new Tibetan refugees' (Tibet Justice Center 2002: 38-39).

From that point on, the Nepali government has, slowly but steadily, increased the pressure on Tibetan refugees; not only on the new arrivals, but also the ones that were already there.

Before that was the case, however, Nepal was a safe haven for Tibetan refugees ever since the Chinese People's Liberation Army invaded Tibet in 1959. When that happened, Nepal opened their doors and gave refuge to about 20,000 Tibetan refugees. However, as stated before, the Tibetan situation in Nepal is not without problems nowadays. Far from it, actually. In the following section I will give a brief overview of the current situation of Tibetan refugees in Nepal and the problems they have to cope with. As stated in a Memorandum by the Tibetan Refugee Welfare Office, submitted to the deputy prime minister and home minister of Nepal Bijaya Kumar Gachhadar on the 11th of november 2011, Tibetan refugees as of to date face harassment, difficulties and discrimination in Nepal.

Due to the lack of a proper refugee law, administrative difficulties are some of the biggest problems Tibetan refugees in

Nepal nowadays have to face. For instance, about 50 percent of the Tibetan refugees in Nepal do not have a refugee card: The Nepali government discontinued the practice of issuing Refugee cards in 1989. There isn't a specific reason for why the government stopped doing this at this point in time.

Children who were born after 1989 and refugees who could not get a refugee card before that time, are undocumented people and, thus, are unable to produce any form of identification in government departments. For this reason, they are unable to obtain necessities like a drivers license and travel documents. Also, only adding to this problem, registration of birth, marriage and death is not allowed for Tibetan refugees.

Those who do have a refugee card are also very restricted in their way of life: They are denied rights to participate in local social activities or contribute to the wellbeing of the society. For instance, Tibetan refugees are not legally permitted to own a shop or set up any other form of a business venture. Logically, this leads to unemployment, one of the major issues within the Tibetan refugee community.

Restrictions regarding education are among the main reasons for the unemployment problem that exists today. After secondary school, the only option for refugees when it comes to seeking admission to higher level institutions, is through foreign student's quota. Even when they do obtain this, refugees are barred from sitting in on the exams of the Nepal Medical Council and are, thus, unable to obtain a license to practice. The same goes for obtaining a teachers license; refugees are unable to do so.

Also, as of late, drivers licenses are no longer provided to those who have refugee status. Those who do have a drivers license are unable to renew their license when it expires. Henceforth, Tibetan refugees are unable, for instance, to be a taxi driver, which only adds to the already existing unemployment problem.

Furthermore, because they are denied Nepali citizenship, they are very restricted when it comes to traveling. Tibetans often need to go to India for medical reasons, pilgrimage or study-related reasons, but their current status as a refugee, and the rights that are attached to this status, do not allow them to do so.

Apart from administrative difficulties, Tibetan refugees also face problems in other parts of life: For a long time, Tibetan Refugees have been allowed to organize and celebrate religious festivals and carry out cultural traditions without obstructions. However, during the past few years many restrictions have been imposed on even simple religious festivals.

As of today, Tibetans still flee for the Nepali border to seek refuge. These refugees are often subjected to looting, mental tension or even rape.

The reasons why the Nepali government is cracking down on Tibetan refugees have to do with certain treaties the Nepali government and the Chinese government signed. The refugees themselves are also convinced it has to do with the Chinese government. Chophel, the 40-year old inhabitant of Parjorling Tibetan Settlement that was introduced earlier, has a Nepali father and is, therefore, able to live a life without problems in Nepal. He runs a successful meditation-centre in the tourist part of Pokhara. Still, he is very frustrated with the way Tibetan refugees are treated. He also knows why the Nepali government does the things it does: "Moneyyy! Millions of dollars are involved. China wants control and power. It's just a few people at the top who are power-crazy, but apparently that's all it takes."

This doesn't seem to be too far from the truth. In 2010, Wikileaks published a report that stated that China 'rewards [Nepalese forces] by providing financial incentives to officers who hand over Tibetans attempting to exit China.' It also stated that 'Beijing has asked Kathmandu to step up patrols and make it more difficult for Tibetans to enter Nepal.'

On top of that, Tibetans are restricted in numerous ways, as shown in the above, in exchange for financial incentives provided by the Chinese government. I quote from an article, published in the *New Yorker* on the 28th of December, 2011: 'With an annual per capita income of \$645 - less than two dollars a day - Nepal is desperate for whatever alms China offers, never mind the strings attached. In 2009, Beijing promised to promote tourism to Nepal, invest in major Nepalese hydropower projects, and increase its financial assistance by approximately eighteen million dollars annually. In return,

Kathmandu pledged to endorse Beijing's "one-China policy" (which decrees that both Taiwan and Tibet are "inalienable parts of Chinese territory") and to prohibit "anti-Chinese activities" within Nepal. Activities deemed unacceptable include gathering for prayers on the birthday of the Dalai Lama and displaying the Tibetan flag. On November 10th, after a Buddhist monk in Kathmandu doused his robes with kerosene and ignited himself to protest Chinese thuggery, a spokesman for Nepal's Home Ministry declared that the government was considering revoking "all the rights granted to Tibetans residing in Nepal," despite the fact that Nepal's constitution guarantees such rights as freedom of expression and peaceful assembly to all persons, and Nepal's Supreme Court has ruled that restricting Tibetans' civil rights is illegal.'

Now that the situation in Nepal for Tibetan refugees is sketched out, two questions logically follow: How, and in what ways, does this situation affect the Tibetan refugees in Nepal? And how, and in what ways, do Tibetan refugees respond to this situation?

Keeping a low profile

Eriksen (1994) states that minorities may respond to state domination in three main ways: loyalty, voice and exit. On a practical level, this creates three strategies of responding: assimilation, resistance and leaving the country. For Tibetan refugees in Nepal, however, two of these options are already made impossible by the Nepali government. Assimilation is out of the question, because the Nepali government doesn't provide citizenship to Tibetan refugees, hence making it impossible for them to ever fully become part of the Nepali society. Leaving the country also isn't an option, because Tibetan refugees aren't allowed to travel; the Nepali government does not provide travel documents to Tibetan refugees. Also, because it's getting harder and harder for Tibetan refugees to get a job, they don't have the means to travel to begin with.

This, logically, leaves Tibetans with the option of resistance, but this also poses problems. The problems Tibetans face are with the Nepali government, but not the citizens. Indeed, the relationship between Tibetan refugees and Nepali citizens is quite

good and peaceful. "We are reluctant to demonstrate, because we don't want to lose the sympathy of the Nepali people. That's why we don't demonstrate over our situation in Nepal", says Chophel.

"Because if we are constantly demonstrating, the Nepali people might get agitated, afraid, or angry. That we don't want. We keep quiet and be humble, so we keep the sympathy from Nepali citizens. Once we lose that, it might get really dangerous for us."

Because of this, Tibetans like to keep a low profile and try to keep good relationships with the Nepali citizens. Their housing situation in this regard, however, does not work in their favor. Tibetan refugees live in a 'closed space' instead of an 'open space', which means they live in so-called urban enclaves which stumps the amount of contact with the outside world (Hanafi, Chaaban & Seyfert 2012). The result is that the relationship between Nepali citizens and Tibetan refugees today is indeed without problems, but, at the same time, isn't that strong either. Tibetan refugees keep to themselves, as do Nepali citizens.

This doesn't, however, solve the problems that Tibetans have to face. Problems of which the Nepali government is the source. What it comes down to is that they are not socially included. Social inclusion implies a state responsibility to 'provide basic rights and services to the populations living within its border' (Beneduce 2008:41). The Nepali government, obviously, doesn't do this. Charles Taylor (1994) states that fair treatment of migrants by the nation-state consists of equal dignity and/or equal respect. Equal dignity focuses on what people have in common and, ideally, is therefore gender-blind, colour-blind and so on. Equal respect, on the other hand, is based on 'an understanding that difference is also important in conceptualizing and institutionalizing equal relations between individuals' (Modood 2007:51). But again, Tibetan refugees in Nepal have neither. They aren't being treated equally, while, at the same time, their difference also isn't recognized.

Here, in my opinion, lies the main problem for Tibetan refugees in Nepal; they aren't recognized. The denigration, distortion or denial of a group identity, the pretence that a group does not exist, is a form of oppression that threatens every form of equality (Modood 2007). On top of that, the fact that the vast majority of

Tibetans in Nepal do not have citizenship, nips every chance for equality in the butt beforehand. As Modood states: 'The realization of multicultural equality is not possible in a society in which the distribution of opportunities are restricted by 'difference', for central to it is a citizenship and the right to make a claim on the national identity' (Modood 2007:129).

Therefore, almost every refugee I've talked to would take a Nepali passport, just to be able to better their lives. Chopel put it as follows: "Everyone of us would take a Nepali passport in an instant, no questions asked. This doesn't change a thing about our Tibetan identity though. A passport is just a piece of paper, in our hearts we remain Tibetan."

In the following part, I focus on the effects of the political situation on the daily lives of Tibetan refugees and the consequences regarding identity-formation.

A hard and boring life

The main consequence of the restrictions that are being put on Tibetan refugees is simple: Life is hard. This is especially the case for the younger generations, because in the last decades the restrictions have become more strict and the amount of restrictions has increased. Also, the younger generation is less able to deal with the hardships they have to face. "I, and others, have been here for a long time. We know how to handle these situations, because of our past situations and we've handled many of such problems in life," says Ludup. "But the younger generations, who have been born and brought up in Nepal, can't handle these frustrations. I have experienced many hardships in my life. Humiliations, discriminations.. It has really toughened me. I'm mentally prepared to face these problems, it's part of my life. But the younger ones don't know." In a nutshell, it is hard for the younger generation to get a good education, it is hard to get a job, it is hard to travel and, hence, hard to create a life for themselves.

These hardships have a direct effect on the lives of the young ones in Parjorling Tibetan Settlement. They are unable to do what they want, which, in most cases, is escape the life they are currently living. Because of this, boredom is a big part of everyday

life. Talking about this, Chöcklung lets out a big sigh. "There's nothing to do here! All we have is soccer, but we have to wait till late in the afternoon before we can play, because it's too hot to play during the day." For the remainder of the day, they usually just sit around, smoke cigarettes and play with their mobile phones. "We have a big stamp on our foreheads", Chöcklung adds. "It says: Refugee! And because of that, we are limited in our options in life. It's so unfair."

The boredom that the Tibetan youngsters have to cope with, has a direct effect on their lives and process of identity-formation. Before we get to that, however, I want to shed some light on what it means to be in the stage of life that's called 'youth'.

Comaroff & Comaroff (2005) state that youth, as a social category, can be viewed in terms of the 'transformation from child to adult and, therefore, has a peculiar relationship with notions of progress'. In other words, youth can be seen as a stage in life that's characterized by transformation, evolution, growth and progress. In the case of the Tibetan youngster however, and in the case of environments of economic scarcity in general, these features are missing from their lives. This is comparable to what Victor Turner calls the 'liminal state'. In Turner's definition, liminality is a transitional period from one state to another. The liminal, in the words of Turner, is 'ambiguous, neither here nor there, betwixt and between all fixed points of classification'.

Mains (2007), in his research on Ethiopian, unemployed youngsters (who, I feel inclined to add, are not diaspora like my Tibetan research population, but still live in Ethiopia), detected that this lack of progress is often accompanied by feelings of frustrations. He used the comparison of 'living like chickens', which implied that 'life lacked meaning, that one simply moved from here to there without any purpose besides filling one's stomach' (Mains 2007:660). In essence, Tibetan youngsters are in the same boat; they live their lives, without progress or even having the prospect of progress. Their lives, thus, are afflicted with the absence of change; days pass, but their position in life remains the same.

On top of that, they have to deal with having too much unstructured time on their hands, without knowing what to do with it. This also is a source of unease. The inability to experience progress, Mains states, causes 'time to expand rather than contract' (Mains 2007:664-665). Also, 'time becomes something to be 'passed' or 'killed'' (Mains 2007:664-665). The problem with this is that it often leads to introspective thinking and feelings of stress. This sentiment can also be detected amongst the youngster generation in Parjorling Tibetan Settlement. In the many conversations I had with them, their current situation and their inability to change it always was the main topic.

Boredom, thus, is 'the feeling that one not only has too much time but also that this time is not meaningful, because it is not spent in the progressive manner that one has come to expect' (Goodstein 2005). In Mains' research, he found out that the young Ethiopians believed that their problems could be solved through the spatial solution of migration, preferably to the United States or Europe. The reaction amongst Tibetan youngsters in Parjorling Tibetan Settlement is exactly the same, something I will elaborate on further in the following chapter.

Falling back on Tibetaness?

Researchers have argued that migrants or minorities, when faced with discrimination in their respective host countries, respond by 'devising both local and transnational strategies strengthening the coherence of their local community and networks' (Eriksen 2007: 93). In other words, minorities tend to do everything in their power to 'revive the customs and traditions that their parents and grandparents followed' (Eriksen 1994:156). Basically, they practice this form of identity-politics, because they aren't accepted in their host country. Therefore, migrants often tend to fall back on their heritage in search of an identity.

To a certain extent, this also seems to be the case amongst the younger generation in Parjorling Tibetan Settlement. As mentioned before, political activism and compassion are important Tibetan features in their lives. However, other features of their Tibetan heritage are almost completely neglected. In the case of the young

ones in Parjorling Tibetan Settlement, the West seems to serve as a substitute for that part of their Tibetan heritage that they are hesitant to fall back on in the process of identity formation, regarding the discriminative situation they have to face on a daily basis. Because their situation in Nepal is quite dire, the West, for them, is the escape-route or, better yet, the promised land. The next chapter will discuss this in more detail.

Chapter 4 - 'Have you ever been to NYC?'

Wangu, 28 years old, is visiting his brother in Parjorling Tibetan Settlement, where he also was born. Nowadays, however, Wangu lives in New York City, where he works in customer service. "It was a good time for me to come back to Nepal", he says in flawless English, while he rolls up his left trouser leg to show me his prosthetic leg. "I had a motorcycle accident. But, you know, it is what it is. I'm just happy to be alive. I'm here for three months to recover."

For many young Tibetans in the camp, Wangu is an example. He made it. He achieved the dream, which is moving to the West. When I tell him this, he can understand that sentiment: "There are opportunities there, brother. Better healthcare, better education... In the States you have a chance to make money, make a future and provide for your family in Nepal." Still, Wangu's life is far from dreamlike in the United States; He lives in a small one-room apartment, where he shares the kitchen and bathroom with three others. On top of that, his job provides him with little future perspectives. He doesn't seem to mind though; all in all, life is better in the West for him.

Just like the younger generation in Parjorling Tibetan Settlement, he really wanted to leave when he was young. "Here in Nepal they are so limited. They can't do anything. America is the land of opportunities, man", he says with a smile. "In my day though, it was very easy to go. For them, it's next to impossible. You must have a Nepali passport, which you can't get legally; You can get a fake one, but that costs money. Or you can hire a coyote. They take you to Mexico and smuggle you across the border. I have met some Tibetans in NY who did that. They said it was a big, risky investment, but it paid off. The investment is really, really big though, it will cost you about 30 to 40 G's."

The attractive power of the West is enormous amongst the younger generation in Parjorling Tibetan Settlement. Through their mobile-phones, the internet, tourists and television, they have been able to get to know the West and for them it's almost a wondrous place. Almost all of them, when discussing their future-plans, want to go

there, to create a better future for themselves and flee from their 'boring lives'.

But how does this attraction to the West fit in with the theory that diasporic communities live in a median state? The concept of the median state, in a nutshell, states that diasporic communities live in a median state between past and present or, when applied to this particular research, between Tibetan heritage and present context (i.e. Nepal). However, as this chapter will show, the West also plays a major role in the process of identity formation amongst the Tibetan youngsters that this research is concerned with. Therefore, I argue that the West should be incorporated in the concept of the median state and that the concept, therefore, should be adjusted and/or expanded. I will elaborate further on this in the fifth and final chapter.

This chapter, however, focuses on the reasons why the West is so attractive to them, in what ways they incorporate their future plans to go to the West in the process of identity-formation and what this means for their identity as a Tibetan refugee.

Safety and opportunities

So, why the West? What is so attractive about it? Before we get to the answers on those questions, asking another question is in order; How come the Tibetan youngsters in Parjorling Tibetan Settlement are so well-informed about the West? The answer to this question has to do with globalization. Globalization, in the words of Eriksen (2007:82), involves a 'heightened awareness of the world as an interconnected place.' Today's generation is way more educated and well-informed about the world, they know what's out there, because of the process of globalization. With this knowledge, logically, comes desire. This is especially the case when present lives are unfulfilling and even unpleasant, which is the case for the vast majority of Tibetan youngsters in Parjorling Tibetan Settlement, as was described in the previous chapter.

Through television, the world wide web, movies and tourism, the Tibetan youngsters have been able to get to know the West, or, more accurately, have been able to create a mental picture for themselves of what the West is like. As said before, for them it's a magical

place, a land of opportunities, a place that is the complete opposite of the dire situation that they're stuck in at the moment.

They show their affinity with the West in numerous ways. Their haircuts, for example, are, through the usage of a lot of hair product, done in Western-style fashion. The way they dress, also, is very Western: Stylish jeans, t-shirts made by famous manufacturers, Nike shoes, etc.. Their taste in music also shows a lot of affinity with the West. Their mobile-phones are stocked with modern, Western pop-songs and even the occasional rock-classic from the seventies.

Even though they have a pretty clear picture in their minds of what the West is like, leaving the question if this picture is accurate or not aside for the moment, they are still very curious about it and anxious to know more. A lot of times, I was answering their questions instead of the other way around. "Have you ever been to NYC?" "What is Amsterdam like?" "Do you party a lot in the West?" "How expensive is a beer in the West?" The curious and interesting thing about their line of questioning was that they regard 'the West' as one place. Even though they knew I live in the Netherlands, for them, I was a person that came from the West and because of that I was interesting.

What makes the West so interesting for them, then? In a nutshell, it is an escape-route. Going to the West, for them, means leaving their troubles behind, having opportunities to create a life for themselves and a guarantee for safety. Tobgyal, a 24-year old inhabitant of Parjorling Tibetan Settlement who has been unemployed for two years now, explained the attractiveness of the West to me, but also explained that the chances of going there are very small.

H: *Why would you like to go to the USA?*

T: It is much safer, first of all. Second one, if I can get a job there, I can make lots of money, unlike here in Nepal. The money you make in Nepal, compared to the living expenses, is very bad. Also, if we stay for five years in the USA, they will give us citizenship. We would actually have rights. That way, we can apply for a visa and go to Tibet. We could actually see our home-country! If we stay in Nepal we can never go, even though we know our country is Tibet. We can

speaking Tibetan, we know the culture, but we haven't seen it. Only on TV.

H: Do you think it will happen; you going abroad?

T: I don't know, it's up to luck. We can apply to go there. But the Nepali government doesn't give us an exit permit, so we can't leave. It's hard. I think it would be the best option for us to leave though. The political situation here in Nepal is very bad and I think it will only get worse.

The main reasons for wanting to go to the West, thus, seem to be money (i.e. creating a better future for themselves), personal safety (i.e. no more discrimination in their lives) and their Tibetan heritage (i.e. visiting their home-country). Julia Hess (2006:93) reaches a similar conclusion in her research on Tibetan refugees living in the USA, stating that 'people's motivation for coming to the United States is not simply to improve their economic prospects, but also to provide a measure of power and security that will enable them, as transnational agents, to improve the lives of their families at home.' Wangu also told me that improving the lives of his mother and father served as a huge motivation for him to stay in the USA: "I'm able to send them money on a monthly basis, making their lives just a little easier. That makes me happy."

Even though the Tibetan youngsters didn't admit to it themselves, I feel compelled to add another reason for wanting to go to the West; the Western lifestyle. As said earlier, their haircuts, clothing and taste in music are all pretty Westernized. In other words, they see the lifestyle of the West, or at least their picture of what life in the West is like, as a lifestyle they would like to experience for themselves.

The older generation in Parjorling Tibetan Settlement identifies this as well. In a conversation with Ludup, he expressed his annoyance on this matter: "Almost all of them have family in America who show them the fancy stuff that they possess", he says, while shaking his head. "They want that too, of course, and pursue that, but it drives them away from their Tibetaness. Those influences change their minds and that's, in my opinion a big part

of Tibetan culture: the mind." On the other hand though, Ludup also recognizes the other reasons for wanting to go to the West and understands them. "They don't aspire to be a doctor or an engineer, because they know that doesn't belong to the possibilities here. They blocked those options psychologically", he says. "Nepali people already have very few options here in Pokhara. They go to Malaysia, China and other surrounding countries to find work. Imagine what it's like for Tibetans. A: If Nepali people have very few options here, Tibetans have even less. B: We are very limited in traveling abroad, either because of funds or political status. That's why the younger generation dreams of going to the West, because they think that that's where the opportunities lie."

Starting fresh

As discussed earlier, in his research, Mains (2007) described the situation of Ethiopian, unemployed youngsters; a situation that was quite comparable to the situation of the Tibetan youngsters in Parjorling Tibetan Settlement. The comparison, however, doesn't stop there. The way they and the Tibetan youngsters addressed their problems, also shows overlap. Mains (2007:668) states that 'their temporal problems were addressed with the spatial solution of migration, preferably to the United States or Europe'. In other words, the problems they face in daily life, caused by their current context, could, in their opinion, be solved by migrating to another, new context; a context where progress would be a part of daily life again. This, of course, is exactly what the West promises, being the land of opportunities. Migrating there would solve the problem of not experiencing any progress in life.

The Tibetan youngsters in Parjorling Tibetan Settlement have a similar thought-pattern. One of the main reasons for wanting to go to the West, is so they can get a job and make a life for themselves (i.e. experience progress again). It doesn't stop there though. When it comes to the process of identity-formation, migration also seems necessary to them. Because they live in Nepal and because of the way they're treated by the Nepali government, an identity, to a certain extent, is forced upon them. In other words, they are being labeled. It's like Chöcklung said: "We have a big stamp on our foreheads:

Refugee!" In this sense, they are forced into an identity by the Nepali government, whether they want to or not. Going to the West, in this sense, serves as an escape route, to start fresh, to be able to fully take control of their lives and identity.

Again, a parallel can be drawn with the research of Mains on Ethiopian youngsters: 'Youth narratives often constructed migration as facilitating a transformation of identity' (2007:668). The exact same thing seems to be the case amongst Tibetan youngster. The notion that migration and the appropriation of stylistic practices (as discussed earlier) may allow a recreation of one's identity has also been explored in other studies (De Boeck 1999; Friedman 1994; Gondola 1999).

The curious thing here, is that the youngsters in Parjorling Tibetan Settlement chose the West to serve as an 'escape' from their current situation, while, in diasporic communities, it is common that the home country (in this case Tibet) serves that purpose. 'We can detect a tendency (in the academic world) to think that the homeland forms the basis for collective memory, ethno communal solidarity and consciousness, that molds cultural, social, political and economic lives in the diaspora' (Abdelhady 2008: 53). In other words, diasporic communities are more likely to use elements of their home country to create a life than elements of the host country.

It is true that the youngsters in Parjorling Tibetan Settlement regard Tibet as their original home country, however, they only partly find a 'sense of home' in that. But, as Yen Le Espiritu (2003:10) states, home is not necessarily 'a physical place but also a concept and a desire - a place that can be visited through the imagination'. Taking this into account, a sense of home and a feeling of comfort, can also be found in the dream of going to the West. This is the reason, it seems, the young Tibetans dream of going to the West; they find a sense of comfort in that. This, in turn, reflects itself in their identities, in their sense of who they are and the ways in which they present themselves.

However, one does not necessarily exclude the other. It seems possible for diasporas to identify with several homes and switch between them whenever it's convenient. Halleh Ghorashi (2004)

illustrates this well in her research on Iranian woman living in Europe and the United States: 'Iranian women in Los Angeles have two spaces to interact with, the Iranian and the American one. For these women the availability of two types of social resources offers opportunities, and they can use both spaces interchangeably' (Ghorashi 2004: 198). Buitelaar & Stock (in Moghissi & Ghorashi 2010) state something similar when they talk about a 'double bind'. They describe the case of a Muslim woman in the Netherlands, who simultaneously feels she's a Dutch citizen and a devout Muslim (which is related to her country of origin). She is able to find a sense of home in both identities.

The same thing can be said about the Tibetan youngster in Parjorling Tibetan Settlement. They find a sense of home in certain aspects of their Tibetan heritage, but, at the same time, find a sense of home and comfort in their desire to go to the West. Henceforth, it can be stated that they have multiple 'homes' that they identify themselves with, which provides them with multiple identities.

The influence of the West

In conclusion, there are several reasons for Tibetan youngsters to want to go to the West. Money, safety, excitement and a different lifestyle are the more tangible reasons that make them dream of the West. The dream to go to the West, however, is also infused by reasons having to do with identity and identity-formation. The West serves as an escape-route; a way to take full control of who they are, unburdened by outside influences. Tibetan youngsters in Parjorling Tibetan Settlement believe that migrating to the West enables them to start fresh. Add to this the image they have of the Western lifestyle and the affinity they have with it and moving to the West becomes a logical dream.

However, the dream to migrate to the West, also has to do with their Tibetan identity. They believe that gaining American citizenship will enable them to go to Tibet, see their home country for themselves and, thus, strengthen their Tibetan identity in some way. Also, in Nepal, they associate being Tibetan with discrimination and fewer chances in life. They believe moving to the

West will unburden them from this, so that they can explore their Tibetaness more freely and fully.

In the previous chapters I have outlined the main forces at work in the process of identity formation amongst Tibetan youngsters. In the following chapter I will shed light on the outcome, so to speak, of these forces when it comes to identity.

Chapter 5 - The West, the past and the present

It has been a week since I've last been in Parjorling Tibetan Settlement; the Himalaya-region, of which Pokhara is basically the doorstep, had been calling me for such a long time that I couldn't resist her call any longer.

When I walk into the settlement, I run into Tenzin. He seems different. His hairdo is not shaped in its usual Western-style model, but looks kind of classy. The same goes for his clothing; He's wearing a nice blouse, a grey pantalon and black, leather shoes. "You look fancy, man", I say to him. "Yeah, I got a job", he responds with a smile. He tells me that in another Tibetan camp, Tashi Ling, he got a job in accounting. "Six days a week, from 9 till 6." "Congratulations!", I exclaim, knowing how hard it is for his generation to create a future. "Thank you", he says enthusiastically. He seems relieved and happy.

It was quite hard for him to get the job, he tells me: "I had to apply at the Central Tibetan Administration in Dharamsala. Then I had to go to Kathmandu to take five exams, together with 35 other Tibetan applicants. After that, I had two more interviews and I finally got the job!" "So you knocked off 35 others, huh!?" I respond. "Yes! I'm quite proud!", he says, his smile growing ever bigger.

"Now I go to my room here", he says, lifting up the bag he's been carrying with him. In it are two framed pictures of the Dalai Lama. "I'm going to hang these up on the wall."

Of course, it could be just a coincidence, but the fact that Tenzin's future has the prospect of progress again and the fact that he took the time to buy and frame the pictures of the Dalai Lama for his room, could very well be interrelated. Living in Nepal is hard and exactly because this is the case, it's one of the main things that occupies the minds of the younger generation in Parjorling Tibetan Settlement. Questions like 'How to move forward in life?', 'How to better my future?' and 'How to escape this boring life without prospect?' recur on a daily basis. This leaves little room for exploring who they are and what's important to them.

In Tenzin's case, by getting a job, he experiences progress in life again and has some peace of mind, hence leaving him with the opportunity to explore and spent more time on, for instance, his Tibetan identity.

This concluding chapter focuses on and outlines the interplay between the different forces at work in identity-formation amongst young, Tibetan refugees, as described in previous chapters. Firstly, I will put the concept of 'median state' under the microscope once more and give my own definition of what this 'median state' means. Also, I will position this thesis in the scientific debate about identity and identity-formation. Furthermore, I will conclude this chapter by outlining the process and outcome of identity-formation amongst Tibetan refugees in Parjorling Tibetan Settlement and position it in the wider, scientific debate on identity-formation amongst diasporas and refugees.

A palette of identities

As the previous chapters have shown, many forces are at work and are important in the process of identity-formation. The Tibetan youngster in Pokhara were taught by their parents and teachers about their Tibetan heritage and the importance of it, but at the same time they get discriminated for being Tibetan by the Nepali government. They live in a small, walled village where the Tibetan culture is still very much alive, but once they set foot outside of the gate, they are surrounded by a completely different culture. On top of that, the internet, television, tourists and other people who have been there, constantly remind them of this far-away place, where everything is supposedly better, where there's no discrimination, where they can built a future and where they can be who they want to be: the West.

In the process of identity-formation, the process of deciding who and what you are and who and what you want to be, these Tibetan youngsters have to deal with all these influences, pulling at them from every direction. From one direction, the Tibetan community tells them that it's important to be Tibetan and perform that Tibetaness, as to contribute to the quest of the Tibetan community to keep the Tibetan culture alive in exile. From another direction,

the Nepali government tells them a completely different story, by discriminating them and treating them unfair: that being Tibetan is somehow wrong and is a weakness. From another direction, they are inevitably influenced by the Nepali culture, that literally and figuratively surrounds them. From yet another direction, the West advertises a land where a bright future lies in wait and where you can be who you want to be.

As described earlier, all of these influences have a direct effect on who they are: They are Tibetan, predominantly through the practice of compassion and political activism, but the Nepali government makes it hard for them to fully express this part of themselves. Exactly because the Nepali government cracks down on Tibetan refugees, the youngsters have a desire to go to the West, which predominantly reflects itself in their style of clothing and their taste in music.

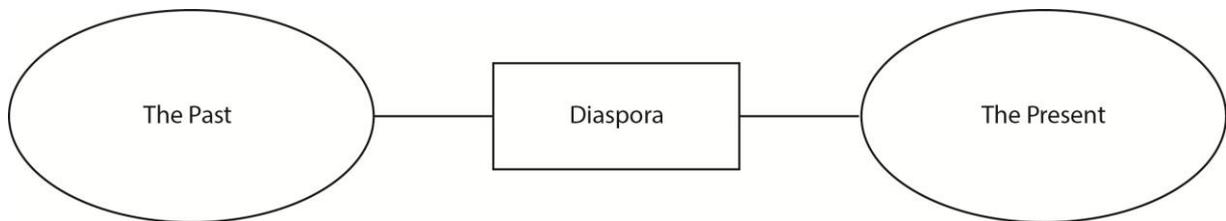
For the Tibetan youngsters, this is a hard situation to deal with. Metaphorically speaking, they find themselves in front of a blank canvas, that represents themselves, holding a vast and complex palette in hand, complete with Tibetan, Nepali and Western influences; they are faced with the task to make sense of that palette and start to make a painting that represents who they are (i.e. their identities).

During my stay in Parjorling Tibetan Settlement, I've found that the Tibetan youngsters struggled with the painting they were making, because of all the forces pulling at them from every direction; many options to choose from, but not belonging fully to anyone of them. Such a situation is comparable to what Victor Turner (1967) calls the 'liminal state'. In Turner's definition, liminality is a transitional period from one state to another. The liminal, in the words of Turner, is 'ambiguous, neither here nor there, betwixt and between all fixed points of classification' (Turner 1967). I state that the Tibetan youngsters in Parjorling Tibetan Settlement are in a similar situation, but with a twist. In Turner's definition, liminality is a transitional period from one state to another, insinuating that there are two fixed 'states' and that the person in question is leaving one state and is on his/her way to

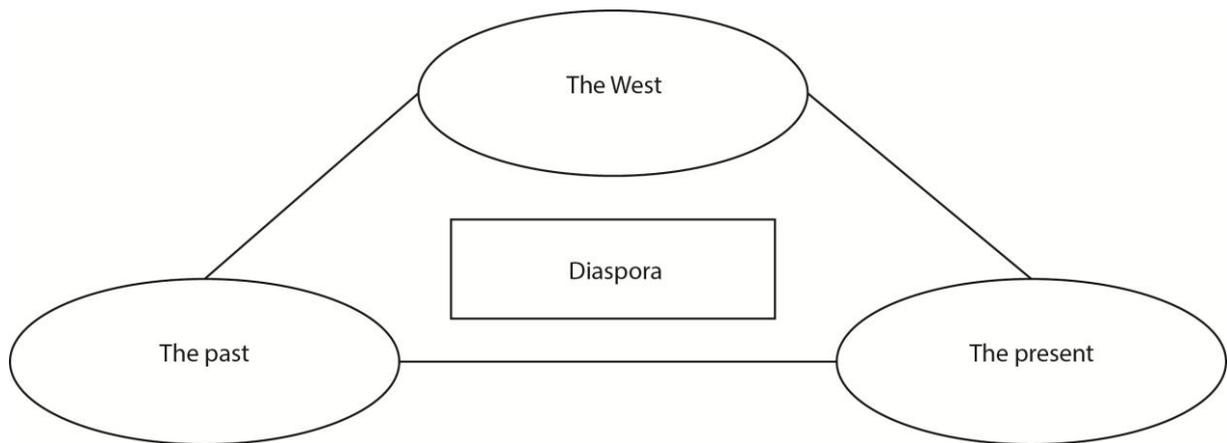
another. In the case of the Tibetan youngsters, however, they don't seem to be moving to any one state in particular.

The fact that they are not moving to any one place in particular resonates more with Edward Said's concept of the 'median state'. Said's concept is comparable to Turner's concept of liminality: 'The exile exists in a median state, neither completely at one with the new setting nor fully disencumbered of the old, beset with half-involvements and half-detachments'. However, Said's concept of the median state differs from Turner's concept of liminality in the sense that, in the case of exilic communities, 'the exile cannot go back to some earlier and perhaps more stable condition of being at home and can never fully arrive at, and be at one with, his/her new home or situation'. In other words, the exile is 'trapped' in the liminal state forever. As stated earlier, this also seems to be the case with the Tibetan youngsters in Parjorling Tibetan Settlement. However, again, there's a twist. To illustrate and explain this properly I've chosen to make use of diagrams.

Said's concept of the median state can be portrayed as follows:

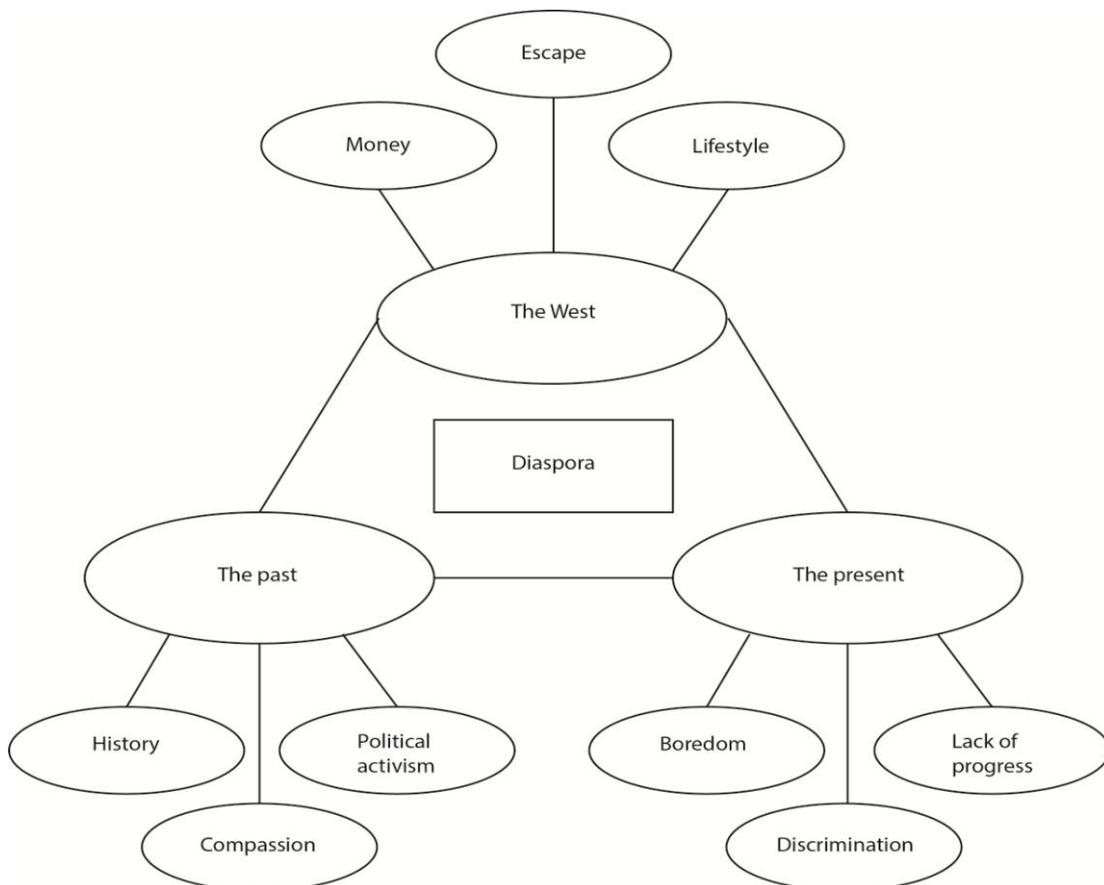


The exile, in this case, lives in a constant state of liminality, between the past (i.e. their heritage, their homeland, their 'original' culture) and the present (i.e. their current place of residence), making the process of identity-formation a difficult task. As said before, however, in the case of the Tibetan youngsters, there is a twist. Where Said states that the exile is trapped between the past and the present, I state that it's possible for the exile to be trapped between more than just those two forces. In the case of the Tibetan youngsters for instance, the West is just as strong a force that is present in the process of identity-formation, making the diagram look more like this:



The Tibetan youngsters, thus, find themselves in between the past, the present and the West, all influencing and contributing to the process of identity-formation. Returning to the metaphor from earlier, these three forces seem to be the three basic colors with which the Tibetan youngsters have to paint their identity on that blank canvas.

However, these basic colors all have several gradations, or sub-colors if you will. The three main forces that have an impact on the process of identity-formation all consist of several parts, which leads to expanding the diagram once more:



The past, the present and the West all offer means to give substance to one's identity or, on the contrary, present one with obstacles in the process of identity-formation. For instance, the past (i.e. their Tibetan heritage) offers things like religion, political activism, a shared history, traditions and many other things that the Tibetan youngsters can use to give meaning to who they are. But at the same time it can be a burden, because of the fact that the Tibetan community as a whole expects Tibetans to 'live up' to their Tibetan identity, to preserve the culture and keep the struggle against the Chinese alive. The present mainly provides them with obstacles in the process of identity-formation: Boredom, discrimination and lack of progress. The West, in turn, offers a way out, adventure, a different lifestyle, money and the opportunity to be Tibetan without being discriminated.

In summary, I agree with Said that exilic communities often live in a median state. This, at least, seemed to be the case with the Tibetan youngsters living in Parjorling Tibetan Settlement. However, I have argued that the median state is more extensive and more complex than the median state that Said proposes.

One final question remains: living in this median state, how do the Tibetan youngsters give substance to their identity? Or in other words: standing before that blank canvas, palette in hand, what is the painting they create?

The endless knot

In Tibetan Buddhism, there are eight auspicious signs/symbols. One of them being the endless or eternal knot (In Tibetan: Dpal be'u). When one follows the lines that form the knot (of which an image is on the cover of this thesis), one will find that it never ends; you can trace the lines forever with your finger, never reaching a conclusion or endpoint. This signifies the flowing of time and movement within the eternal. In other words, it signifies that existence is bound by time and change, yet ultimately rests in the eternal. Through time, people have developed many other interpretations of what the endless knot might mean; things like eternal love, Samsara (the endless cycle of death and birth) and the intertwinement of wisdom and compassion. I would like to add another

interpretation; one in relation to identity and the process of identity-formation. In order to do that, I will first quickly recap what, in my opinion, identity exactly is.

Stewart Hall (1993) states that identity 'is a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being'. It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. Identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialized past, they are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power' (Hall 1993:223). Identity, in this sense, is never complete, it never reaches its destination, much like the lines that form the endless knot never reach a destination. In other words, identity is not a fixed 'thing' that someone has, rather, it is a constant process of transformation, influenced by different forces.

These forces, as said before, can cause problems and can make the process of identity-formation a difficult endeavor. This element of identity-formation can also be explained using the endless knot. In the Netherlands we have a saying: 'Ergens in de knoop mee zitten'. 'Knoop' means 'knot' and the sentence means something along the lines of 'to have trouble dealing with...' Especially in diasporic communities, identity-formation often indeed is a difficult process; a process, even, that someone can get stuck in. The endless knot, thus, signifies that the process of identity-formation is never-ending, but also that someone can get lost in that knot; forever searching for an exit, but never finding it.

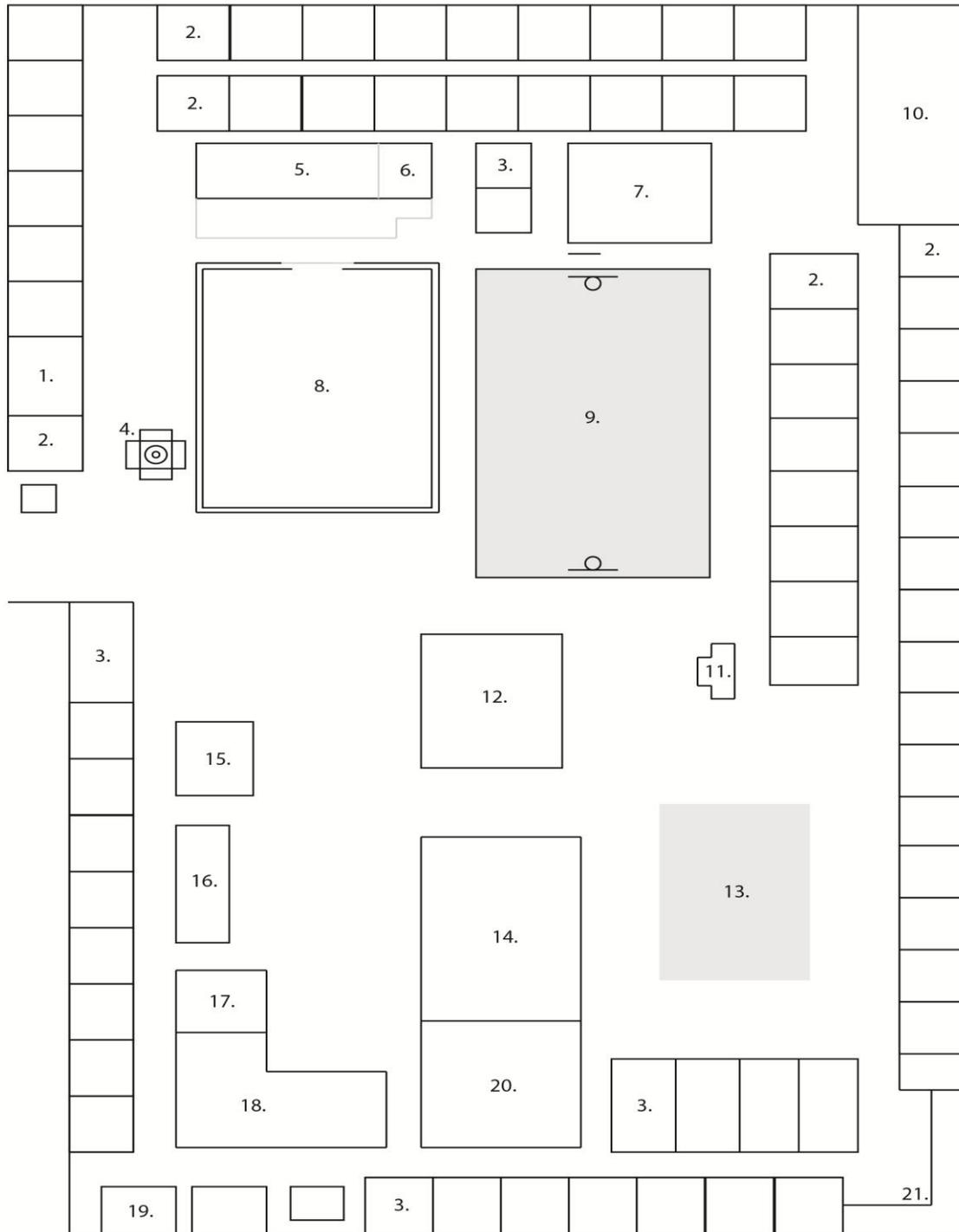
The endless knot is very applicable to the situation that the Tibetan youngsters in Parjorling Tibetan Settlement find themselves in. Their process of identity-formation seems to be a never-ending process as well and, because of the different forces pulling at them from every direction, they often feel lost in this process.

In the end, all the different forces and influences at work in the lives of the younger generation, unavoidably reflect themselves in the identities of the Tibetan youngsters; they are not solely and purely Tibetan, they are not solely Nepali and they are not Western.

Rather, their identities are a mix of the above; they are hybrid identities.

Standing in front of the blank canvas that I spoke of earlier, some of them will create a painting that is dominated by Tibetan influences. Others will create a painting that is dominated by Nepali or Western influences. For others, their painting will be what it already is; a mix of the different forces that influence their lives. But for all them, most likely, the painting will never be finished.

Appendix 1: Map of the settlement



- | | | |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. Office | 8. The Gomba | 15. Watering place 2 |
| 2. Rows of houses (two story) | 9. Basketball court | 16. Showers |
| 3. Rows of houses (one story) | 10. Primary school | 17. Prayer-room |
| 4. Stupa | 11. Watering place | 18. Thukpa-factory |
| 5. Kindergarten | 12. Carpet weaving centre | 19. Cook's house |
| 6. Medical post | 13. Playground for kids | 20. Meeting room/office |
| 7. Gathering hall | 14. Store | 21. Toilets |

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