Roots and Routes: Locating Tibetan identities in Diaspora

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DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

Signature:_____ Date:_____

ABSTRACT

Cognisant of a legacy of exotification of Tibet and Tibetans, Tibetan studies scholars have argued for a certain instrumental internalisation of romantic Western portrayals by Tibetans. Exemplifying this perspective, Lopez worries that Tibetans have been forced to perpetuate limiting orientalist fantasies about themselves for political expediency. In reproducing Tibet as some hyper-real Shangri-la, it is turned into a floating signifier that loses its historical, nationalist, and political specificity. While I do not deny the relevance of such claims, I suggest that Lopez's formulation is problematic for how it risks implying that identity performed or articulated for an audience is likely to be less complex, less flexible, and to leave less room for personal innovation, socio-historical complexity and multivocality. In judging some self-representations as instrumental, the existence of a more genuine, entrenched, tacit Tibetan-ness behind such staged performances is presupposed. Seeking to problematise this position, I take as my entry-point the idea of instrumentality, and, sketching a rough trajectory of academic writing about Tibet, probe some of the dominant discourses and implicit strategies that emerge in the literature. I draw upon two months of ethnographic fieldwork where I interacted closely with the 'Office of Tibet' of South Africa (a representative organ of the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA)) and the three Tibetan families associated in various capacities with it. As a heuristic strategy, I attempt to locate 'Tibetan-ness' as it emerges (and fades from view) in a variety of contexts. Shifting from strategic and public performances of Tibetan-ness, to everyday gestures and habitus, and back again, I show how convenient distinctions between the public and the private, the local and the global, the political and the religious or cultural, are ultimately unsettled in the face of complex and contingent expressions of ethnic identity that take place in the midst of extensive transnational networks and audiences. As an alternative to a recourse to 'instrumentality,' I propose a rethinking of cultural identity as 'skilful'. Drawing on the Buddhist notion of *upāya[kauśalya]* ('skilful means'), I suggest that the notion of cultural identity as skilful avoids the trap of false consciousness, denying the possibility of an ultimately locatable Tibetan-ness behind representations that would render such representations somehow compromised or diversionary. Equally, such a model does not reduce the force or significance of such representations merely by recognising their constructed-ness or contingency. Through its close association with ideas of the non-ultimacy of identity, *upāya* offers a springboard for comparing Western and Buddhist discourses and strategies of critical identity deconstruction. It suggests a Tibetan-ness that in its interdependent, contingent emergence is shifting and empty, but still powerfully capable of generating effects in the world. Examining notions of place, displacement, roots and routes, I call attention to the multiple pathways and trajectories of an aspirational Tibetan-ness that is less a set of characteristics informing a core identity and more the stuff of identifications and becomings. I show how re-evaluating cultural identities thus promises an escape from the 'critical barbarism' which Latour (2004) sees as hamstringing contemporary social critique.

KEYWORDS: Tibet, Tibetans, cultural identity, diaspora, writing culture, instrumentality, *upāya*

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To the homophobic policewomen who arrested me on my birthday, only a few days into my fieldwork, for doing nothing more than kissing a man in a car outside my house and refusing to apologise or feel ashamed for it: you (and the two days in prison) did indeed 'teach me a lesson', but fortunately it was not the one you intended. Thank you for showing me so strenuously what precious and rare commodities tolerance and compassion are, and for reminding me how worthwhile it can sometimes be to choose principle over expedience, despite the consequences. I hope that you can make peace with a world clearly too diverse and vital for your comfort.

To my lecturers, who in very different but equally appreciated and significant ways have contributed to my intellectual and personal development, and hence to this thesis. You startled and moved me with your fierce support and willingness to go beyond professional obligation during my arrest saga. To Helen (this should by now go without saying, but I will say it anyway): you have been an unfailing source of guidance and encouragement; for keeping me grounded, focused and motivated, I am greatly in your debt.

Let anyone left out not feel that way, and if there is any merit in this dissertation at all, let it go to the Tibetan people, and their new horizons.

Ben Joffe, Cape Town

(February 2010)

CHAPTER ONE

"You have asked us many hard questions; now it is our turn to ask you." Lobsang-la[1] *laughed softly, in the restrained if earnest fashion with which, over time, I had come to associate him. Afternoon sunlight filled Lobsang-la's office, combining agreeably with the smell of incense that had infused the small working space unfailingly for the duration of my stay. I sipped the cup of sweet, milky tea Nyima-la had made, and, looking from Lobsang-la's smile to hers, chuckled in reply. "Has your Tibetan improved? Everyday I have only heard you saying 'Tashi Delek' in the morning and 'Sang-nyin jel yong'*[2] *when you leave in the afternoon," Lobsang-la continued, eyebrows arching enquiringly. I explained to my two hosts that adjusting to office hours and protracted early morning public transportation, along with the other demands of a new schedule, had, in fact pushed my language studies to the back-burner. We spoke some more around the topic and my ultimate desire to become as fluent as possible in Tibetan, until Lobsang-la posed the question I both expected and dreaded: "We would like to know what you have learned, in your six or seven weeks with us?" I found myself glancing upwards, as I had done many times before, to meet the gaze of the large framed photograph-portrait of Tenzin Gyatso, the 14th Dalai Lama, spiritual and temporal leader of Tibetans in exile. Draped with a white silk scarf offering, the picture hung at the highest point on the wall behind the desk at which Lobsang-la was now sitting. Hands raised to his chest in an iconic gesture of prayer, the bespectacled Lama looked back at me, beaming beatifically, inscrutable. Hard questions,*

[1] In Tibetan, the suffix –la (Tib. *-lags)* marks the speaker's respect for a denominated individual. I dispense with its use in what follows, but include it throughout this opening vignette to indicate the high regard in which I hold those described. Notwithstanding the strong public profile of many of the informants in this study, I have used pseudonyms for all research participants.

[2] 'Hello' and 'See you tomorrow' respectively (Tib. *Bkra-shis-bde-legs, sang-nyin mjal yong*)

indeed. I returned to Nyima's encouraging and Lobsang's steady gaze. I began, carefully: "Well, I have certainly learned much more about the complexities of Tibetan history and Tibet's political situation. I understand a lot better now how the Office works, the kind of work that the two of you do..." I paused, and thought of how severely and insensitively my questions to Lobsang-la about what he understood the value and usefulness of the South African Office of Tibet to be had come across during our recorded interviews. "And, yes" I said, sheepishly, "I can definitely say that the Office fulfils a significant function in the country". "I've also spent a lot of time with Tashi (Nyima's youngest child)," I said, changing focus. "I've learned a lot from him about what it is like for young Tibetans in exile, learning about their Tibetan-ness."

Lobsang-la asked me if I had seen the news report posted on the Central Tibetan Administration website concerning the Kalon Tripa, or Tibetan Prime Minister in exile, Samdhong Rinpoche's address to a group of Tibetan students living abroad, who had come to visit the centre of the Tibetan government in exile in Dharamsala. I had indeed seen the article. It was titled 'Always Remember You Are Tibetan'. "These students were on what one could say was a 'sabbatical,'" Lobsang-la elaborated. "In this article, Kalon Tripa Samdhong Rinpoche stresses that it is important to remember one's Tibetan-ness, even if you are living elsewhere, perhaps in the United States, Switzerland, Canada. The children asked many questions, and this was what the Kalon Tripa emphasised, 'always remember you are a Tibetan'. This is a very strong statement."

I could not help but agree. Lobsang-la continued: "There was a story that ran over a series of weeks in the Tibetan newspaper from India. You would not have read it, it was in Tibetan. The story was written by a Tibetan father living in Canada with his two children. This man had written to the newspaper seeking help – his children had been born and had gone to school in Canada, and he wanted to show them a DVD, a film that he had about the life of Milarepa, so they could learn about

Tibetan history, about their Tibetan-ness". "Uhuh?" I murmured expectantly. "But when this man's son and daughter watched the movie, they turned to the father and asked: "'Why Milarepa's uncle was abusing him?'" Lobsang-la stopped and leaned back. I waited for him to go on, musing at what struck me as the Indian-English-ness of his phrasing of the children's question. But no – as Nyima-la emitted a hearty laugh, I realised in an instant that I had missed the punch-line.

Certainly, I knew the story of Milarepa[3]. Tales relating to the exploits of the 11th century layman turned yogi are a favourite amongst Tibetans; the saint-ascetic is renowned widely for his dedication to spiritual practice and for having achieved liberation in one lifetime. I knew that Milarepa's uncle had stolen Milarepa and Milarepa's mother's inheritance following the death of Milarepa's father, and I knew that he had beaten Milarepa, Milarepa's mother and sister and kept them on as slaves in their rightful home, to suffer a life of poverty and abuse. I knew that Milarepa's mother was so humiliated that she charged her son to learn black magic to wreak revenge on her late husband's brother and his family. Knowing this, I failed to understand why the children's question was quaint, or at all unreasonable. But Lobsang-la helped me along, and called attention to the specific words that the children had used. He explained that these children, having grown up in exile, surrounded by a culture of universal human rights, did not recognise that there was no such legal entity as 'child abuse' in 11th century Tibet. The children, as far as the father was concerned, had missed the point. They, like me, had failed to appreciate the punch-line. What made Nyima-la laugh and Lobsang-la chuckle, I realised, was that in the very moment that the Canadian father tried to instil some Tibetan values into his 'Westernised' children, the jarring un-Tibetan-ness of their perspective emerged most strongly. "So, what was the conclusion? How did the father resolve his problem?" I asked when things were clearer. "I don't know," Lobsang-la shrugged, "the article is an ongoing column, you will have to wait for the next edition!" This time all three of us laughed.

[3] For a full account, see Lhalungpa (1979)

The anecdote lodged in my thoughts provocatively, circulating unresolved throughout the rest of our farewell tea and conversation that afternoon. It arose pointedly when I later unwrapped the gift which Lobsang-la and Nyima-la had given me, two new editions of publications from the Tibetan government in exile, or Central Tibetan Administration (CTA), 'Tibet: Proving Truth From Facts' and 'Tibetan People's Right Of Self-Determination: Brief Summary,' literature chock-full of legalistic and human rights rhetoric. It remained when Lobsang-la and Nyima-la placed a customary white scarf over my shoulders and offered me their blessings before I made my way out of the Office for the last time. And it remains with me still.

This is a dissertation about being Tibetan. It is also, as the opening vignette intimates and the chapters to follow will make clear, a dissertation about *writing* about being Tibetan. Like the anecdote above, it revolves around a variety of exchanges: of gifts, scarves, jokes, anecdotes and gazes that are all differently implicated in a convoluted field of identity politics. It is a dissertation equally about the expectations, conjunctures and disjunctures between academics and diplomats, between children and parents, between the emancipatory promise and rhetoric of liberal, democratic human rights and the 'traditional' vocabulary of Buddhist soteriology. It is an essay, too, about movements: about complex trajectories and passages criss-crossing backwards and forwards through times and spaces, about the ongoing waltz between categories of the political and the cultural or religious. In its pages, I hope to say something about 'cultural' identity and its place both in Tibetan nationalist political discourse and everyday lives in all their messiness. But more than this, I hope to assess critically some of the prevailing methodologies and theories for writing and evaluating cultural identities in Tibetan studies and anthropology more generally, and offer a fresh angle on some of the background assumptions and seemingly foregone conclusions, which these trends and approaches present.

Drawing upon two months of ethnographic fieldwork during which time I interacted regularly and closely with the 'Office of Tibet' of South Africa (a representative organ of the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA), or Tibetan government in exile) and the three Tibetan families associated in various capacities with it, I detail some of the contexts in and audiences for which informants' Tibetan-ness came to be articulated. I touch upon as part of this research the diverse and complex networks of pro-Tibet activists and Tibetan Buddhist practitioners, which critically intersect with the Office as field site. The smallness of my primary research population presents a distinct methodological opportunity. While I cannot hope to draw unequivocal conclusions or extrapolate theories about Tibetan identity from the experiences of three families alone, focussing on a limited sample of informants allows me instead to develop in-depth a distinctive approach to writing about identity. By highlighting the complex multi-dimensionality, divergences and tensions inhering in even these few Tibetans' lives and identities, I can persuasively cross-examine theories of identity and my own attempts to translate such data into theory in a highly direct fashion. I thus offer my thesis as a kind of 'thought experiment', weaving together two levels of ethnography that speak to and against each other. Paying close attention to the nuances and shifting multiplicity of articulations of Tibetan-ness in individual lives, I investigate at the same time my own grappling with and contribution to the literature of a specialised field (whether Tibetan Studies or anthropology).

Following a brief description in Chapter Two of the particulars of my field site and some of my expectations about it and my informants, I sketch in Chapter Three a rough trajectory of academic writing about Tibet, Tibetans and cultural identities, and probe some of the dominant discourses and implicit strategies that emerge in the literature. Setting up a general theoretical framework and methodological agenda with this review, I proceed in the following chapters to consider the rich details of specific lives in exile, which provide a 'testing-ground' through which to reflect upon and problematise modes of academic writing. I adopt a 'second-guessing' approach that, as the subsequent chapters unfold, is especially suited to conjuring forth the complexities of the kind of

identity politics and contingent encounters which I seek to describe. Phrased in a thoroughly subjunctive mood, my thesis thus aims to sustain a self-reflexive and critical flavour, while staying as close as possible to divergent, lived experiences as communicated by informants.

Chapters Four and Five experiment with different emphases and 'sitings' of identity suggested by the literature, allowing me to unravel the complexities of my data by reflecting on the kinds of arguments that could be made based on the implicit 'logic' of instrumentality[4]. Shifting from obviously strategic and public performances of Tibetan-ness, to everyday gestures and habitus, and back again, I show how convenient distinctions between the public and the private, the local and the global, and the political and the religious or cultural upon which notions of instrumentality typically depend, are ultimately unsettled in the face of complex and contingent expressions of ethnic identity that take place in the midst of extensive transnational networks and audiences. Given that instrumental self-representations are frequently cast as public, political, international and strategic in focus, I turn in Chapter Four to public assertions of Tibetan-ness from my fieldwork as a convenient point of entry. I maintain that the interpretative divisions implied by the concept of instrumentality are in actuality not so easily or categorically defined. To demonstrate this, I concentrate in particular on assumed distinctions between categories of the political and religious (and the 'traditional'/local and 'modern'/global dichotomies these encourage) in Tibetan representations and subjectivities. Playing with and undermining these divisions in Chapter Four usefully prepares the ground in Chapter Five for a concomitant cross-examination of the feasibility of another kind of Tibetan-ness, one conjectured to go beyond the terms of strategically mobilised representations for an audience. Chapter Five's deliberations in turn lead me to formulate a model of cultural identity that better fits with my own data and reflections.

[4] My thanks to Lesley Green, whose 2008 article demonstrated the usefulness of this kind of 'thought experiment' approach.

As an alternative to a recourse to 'instrumentality' and the problems attendant upon it, I wrap up my study by proposing a rethinking of cultural identity as 'skilful'. Drawing on the Buddhist notion of *upāya[kauśalya],* ('skilful means' or 'expedience'), I suggest that the notion of cultural identity as skilful avoids the trap of false consciousness, denying the possibility of an ultimately locatable Tibetan-ness behind representations that would render such representations somehow compromised or diversionary. At the same time, such a model does not reduce the force or significance of such representations merely by recognising their constructed-ness or contingency. Through its close association with ideas of the non-ultimacy of identity, *upāya* offers a springboard for comparing Western and Buddhist discourses and strategies of critical identity deconstruction, and points towards a way beyond the problematic impasses of Western critical theory. It suggests a Tibetan-ness that in its interdependent, contingent emergence is shifting and empty, but still powerfully capable of generating effects in the world. In putting aside the quest to disclose a 'final' Tibetan or a 'core' or 'real' Tibetan-ness, we learn to abide with the heteroglossia, multiple trajectories and disjunctions in individual Tibetan lives, factors not to be resolved, or sorted into ultimate categories, but which point to a different kind of cultural identity. Examining notions of place, displacement, roots and routes, I call attention to the multiple pathways and trajectories of an aspirational Tibetan-ness that is less a set of characteristics informing a core identity and more the stuff of identifications and becomings. I show how re-evaluating cultural identities thus offers an escape from the 'critical barbarism' which Latour (2004) sees as hamstringing contemporary social critique.

CHAPTER TWO

The Office of Tibet, South Africa

Primary fieldwork took place over a seven week period, beginning in early June 2009. During this time, I was present on a daily basis throughout the working week in the 'Office of Tibet of South Africa' (OTSA), located in Centurion, Pretoria. The Office (the local incarnation of a number of such institutions dotted around the globe) formed part of a larger, walled, suburban property which doubled up as the living space of the Office's representatives, a spokesman, secretary and their respective families. The Office was inaugurated in 1996, the same year that the Dalai Lama first visited the country. While popular legend from many involved in local Tibetan Support Groups (TSGs) had it that the property had been donated to the CTA by Nelson Mandela himself (whom the Dalai Lama formally met in 1996 in an act of a highly publicised diplomacy), I later learned that the premises had formerly been the residence of a female Tibetan Buddhist practitioner and activist who offered the house for the purposes of setting up an Office after relocating abroad. Tibetan Buddhism as well as pro-Tibet activism had already made significant in-roads into South Africa by the early 1970s, despite the nationalist government's largely wholesale ill-feeling and suspicion towards any religious expressions other than more familiar manifestations of Judeo-Christianity. Sister Palmo, the first Western woman to become a Tibetan Buddhist nun (and who, hailing from an affluent British family, went on to spend much of her life engaged in humanitarian efforts amongst Tibetan refugee communities in India) was instrumental through early visits to South Africa, in furthering the development of Tibetan Buddhism in the country[5]. Primary activities of some of the early Tibetan

[5] 'Mrs Bedi' before taking vows with the 16th Karmapa, spiritual head of the Karma Kagyu sect of Tibetan Buddhism, Sister Palmo first visited Cape Town and Port Elizabeth in 1972, having established contact with the

support groups included sending money and gifts to refugees in India and Nepal, maintaining correspondence and friendships with Tibetan pen-pals, bringing goods back from India and Nepal for sale to generate funds and interest, and establishing Tibetan Buddhist study and meditation groups.[6]

The two Office representatives currently employed began their new positions in South Africa in 2007. Lobsang, the Office spokesman, lived with his wife in the main house, which looked out to the road, and contained multiple rooms, including a sizeable kitchen, dining room and living area. At the time of conducting this research, Lobsang was 51 years old. He was the only Tibetan amongst my informants to have been born in Tibet, although his family fled the country in 1959, to resettle in India only one year after his birth. A paragon of diplomatic deliberation and eloquence, Lobsang was a restrained and retiring man, who, seemingly small-talk-proof, seemed most forthcoming and at ease when engaging in his official capacity as spokesperson. A senior official, he had worked for the CTA most of his life. Aside from serving for prolonged periods of time as a liaison in more than one Tibetan settlement in India, he had also worked as official representative of the Dalai Lama in parts

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founders of one of the first TSGs in South Africa (the so-called 'Tibetan Friendship Group' of Cape Town), see Laue (1999) for more details.

[6] My contacts with Tibetan Buddhist and activist networks in South Africa were an important part of this research. Apart from my interactions with such groups and individuals through my work with the Office, I also conducted lengthy life history interviews with three prominent long-standing local activist/practitioners, as well as with the first South African to be ordained as a Tibetan Buddhist monk. In addition, starting from late last year, I attended entry level and more advanced teachings, talks and meditation sessions offered by Tibetan Buddhist constituencies in Cape Town. Of the five principal Tibetan religious 'schools' (Nyingmapa, Kagyupa, Sakyapa, Gelugpa and, more recently, Bonpo), only the Kagyu and Gelug sects are represented in South Africa to any noteworthy extent. As Sopa (1983) reminds us:

> *It is to be noted that the Tibetan religious sects unlike their western counterparts do not have their genesis in schismatic or splinter groups separating from a parent body by way of disagreement on matters of doctrine. They represent rather the different facets of Indian Buddhist tradition mastered by a given individual, their founder, and subsequently transmitted by lines of disciples in Tibet. These lines of transmission are of interest mainly to monks, scholars, etc. and Tibetan laymen at large do not identify themselves as members of a particular sect or denominational system.* (143).

See Powers (1995) for more information on these, and an accessible introduction to Tibetan Buddhism more broadly.

of Eastern Europe, and performed important translation work around the Tibetan constitution for the administration. His wife Drolkar, not employed by the CTA, did not have work in South Africa, and was away on holiday visiting family for the entire seven week period that I was at the Office. Lobsang and Drolkar's three sons all lived in India.

Nyima, the forty-seven year old Office secretary, lived in a single-story granny flat behind the main property, with her youngest child, a nine year old son named Tashi[7]. Nyima's husband Karma had been living there with them since Nyima's arrival in South Africa, but had left just a few weeks before my coming to seek employment in America. While Tashi could have stayed in India and received schooling and board from the TCV, Nyima and Karma decided that it was better he be with them and be schooled in South Africa. Concerned with his initially rudimentary English, Nyima had enrolled Tashi at a nearby, expensive private Montessouri primary school. More than half of Nyima's total salary per month was spent on Tashi's school fees alone. While Nyima's other two children were significantly catered for by the TCV, managing the family on a single-income became untenable. Karma, too, it seemed, had become despondent and edgy in South Africa; increasingly bored and frustrated, and prone to argument, relations between the two families had soured. The period of my fieldwork was thus an unusual one, which saw both Nyima and Lobsang living without their spouses. Nyima found herself having to focus an uncharacteristically large amount of her attention on Tashi now that Karma (who had doted on him, playing chess and more boisterous games with him for hours, and as Nyima put it, "letting him do whatever – and I am the one shouting!") was gone, and Tashi, accordingly, found himself dramatically less occupied and entertained. Perhaps unsurprisingly then, but nonetheless unexpectedly, I found myself taking on a 'paternal' role with Tashi, something that Nyima made clear she appreciated.

[7] Nyima and her husband had two other children, a son, 14, and a daughter, 18. Both were at Tibetan Children's Village (TCV) boarding schools in India, and had been since the start of their school careers. For a perhaps romantic, but useful, synopsis of the TCV educational system, see Wieder (1999); for a discussion on the connection between state-run curricula and ethnic identity formation in Tibetan schools in India, see Maslak (2008).

The third 'Tibetan' family living in the country at the time comprised thirty year old Tsering, a second-generation Swiss Tibetan whose parents and grandparents had been part of the first wave of refugees from India to permanently resettle in Switzerland, her slightly older non-Tibetan Swiss husband Michael, and their fifteen month old daughter Chokyi. The family had been living in South Africa for just short of two years when I met them. As part of Michael's longstanding dream to set up sustainable industries in Africa, the couple had left Switzerland to seek prospects on the continent, and before moving to South Africa, had lived for prolonged periods in the DRC and Mozambique. The existence of another Tibetan in South Africa (just around the corner, in Johannesburg, moreover) came as a welcome shock when Tsering and Michael, having heard of the Office, arrived unannounced for a visit. From that time on the couple often frequented the Office for tea, attended events organised by the Office, Tibetan support groups and Buddhist organisations, and had dinner and lunches with Nyima, Lobsang and their families. During my time in Gauteng, I thus had fairly regular contact with them, had dinner at their home in Johannesburg, and babysat Chokyi with Nyima at the Office one afternoon. With their vastly different engagements and background to the Indian Tibetans they provided fascinating and welcome points of comparison for discussion and contemplation. Indeed, the mere fact that Nyima and Lobsang remained officially stateless, while Tsering possessed both Swiss and French citizenship[8], suggests something of the significant differences in lived experience as Tibetan exiles between Tsering and the Office representatives.

Two rooms and a small balcony overlooking the large front garden and street made up the Office. Nyima and I had desks in the first and larger of the rooms. The second, smaller room served as Lobsang's personal office. Whereas Lobsang was expected to engage with the public and media as an official representative on a regular basis, Nyima's job was principally administrative. That said, Office book-keeping and document-editing aside, answering calls, sending emails, running errands to the bank, post office and supermarket, liaising with computer technicians, caterers and government

[8] Tsering's biological father was a French national.

officials, meant that Nyima's work was nonetheless ambassadorial, if only on a less formal level than her 'boss'. Observing the daily running of the Office over the weeks made it clear that Nyima and Lobsang had many overlapping responsibilities; having both spent most of their lives working in various capacities and wings of the CTA, it was Nyima's limited proficiency in English and the extent of her post-high school education that principally distinguished them[9].

As for my own work in the Office, this varied. Following a long and many-staged commute from the central suburbs of Pretoria, I would arrive, if all went well, outside the Office and stretch out a finger arthritic with cold to ring the doorbell a little before official opening time at eight o'clock. On most days, I would leave the office at about four thirty in the afternoon in time to catch taxis and buses home. A principal and abiding concern of Nyima and Lobsang was that "I would get bored," and there would be very little for me to do, or even observe at the Office. Needless to say, their concerns were unfounded, but I did my best to convince them that anthropology need not be as racy as they were perhaps imagining. In the end, I did everything from folding monthly newsletters to put in envelopes to be sent to local embassies, to translating Afrikaans newspaper articles connected to Tibet that had found their way onto Lobsang's desk, helping assemble gazebos, attaching prayer flags, washing plastic lawn furniture for guests, and helping Nyima cut the Office cat's fur and the dog's nails. I would keep the official CTA website, as well as one of the most popular sites for the

[9] Lobsang had gone on to study History at an American university after being awarded a scholarship by the CTA, and had subsequently performed a range of significantly 'academic' services (translation, research etc.) for the administration. Nyima, conversely, who, like Lobsang, had completed high school through the exile Tibetan schooling system in India, was fond of pointing out how she 'didn't know much'. Nyima had, however, undergone para-military training through the Indian army after school, during which time she met her husband, a fellow cadet. Aside from formal training in book-keeping, she had also completed a number of short skills-based courses sponsored by the CTA and foreign organisations, centring around project co-ordination and management, and computer skills. Though one could read the differences between Lobsang and Nyima through a 'gendered' lens, it should be noted that Nyima's predecessor was male, and that women have featured and do feature prominently at high levels of the CTA.

Tibetan diaspora[10], running on my desktop each day, and, besides sheer informative value, current reports, stories and reader responses proved useful in generating conversation in the Office.

The bulk of my activity, however, involved helping Nyima with Tashi and his schoolwork. Looking over my field notes, I am struck by how readily Nyima made me welcome and useful in her and Tashi's lives. Right from day one, I tagged along on shopping trips and visits to the library, and ate lunch each day (which Nyima often graciously provided) with Nyima in her home[11]. I puzzled over grade four arithmetic and maths problems, got covered in flour trying to pass on what little I knew about papier maché model-building, designed project cover pages, corrected English sentences, and trawled the internet for images and easily digestible facts about everything from home-made musical instruments to Tibetan politics. Sometimes Tashi would claim some pressing school-related need and urge me to come down from the Office with my laptop, only to direct me to Youtube and videos catering to his favourite subject of war-making and military vehicles and artillery, or some preferred exotic animal of the week. In comparison, my sustained interactions with Lobsang were largely limited to our seven or so hours of interviews[12], and discussions we had intermittently in his office about my assignments for him. In fact, in striking contrast to my relationship with Tashi and Nyima, I was only in his house on one occasion, when, following the function the Office staged to mark the Dalai Lama's 74th birthday, he invited Nyima, Tsering, Michael, Tashi, Chokyi and me inside to eat the left over catering, drink some celebratory wine and reflect on the day's proceedings.

[10] www.tibet.net and www.phayul.com, respectively.

[11] I later discovered that I was not the first researcher whom Nyima had so accommodated. On two separate occasions while living in Dharamsala, Nyima had played host to a different female American undergraduate anthropology student. As part of a Tibetan studies exchange programme, the students lived for one month with a host family in Dharamsala, attending classes and activities during the day and coming home for dinner in the evenings.

[12] Lobsang seemed most comfortable and forthcoming when engaging with me in this context. Nyima, conversely, opted not to have me formally interview and record her.

Second-guessing[13]*, and looking for enlightenment in all the wrong places: Reflexivity, Meta-models, and Narrating the Other*

My expectations and largely unexamined preconceptions of the Tibetans in South Africa confronted me constantly throughout my research. On a number of levels, and often without realising it as I did, I found myself seeking to ascertain the extent of the Tibetans' (and especially Tashi's,) 'Buddhist-ness'. I felt uneasy when Tashi (who aspired to be fighter jet pilot for the US navy) so often spoke with relish about his interest in things military, and when he would narrate his elaborate drawings of warring armies to me and offer commentary replete with explosion-noises, mimed gunfire and the imagined cries of the injured. "But you don't really want to kill people, do you?" I found myself asking more than once, as I forcibly reminded myself that boys (Tibetan or otherwise) would be boys. From day one, what were tempting to think of as incongruities emerged. The following from my field notes is instructive:

> *"What's the biggest flower you can think of?" Tashi asks, picking up on and adapting the 'what's your favourite' game he struck up earlier. I pause to consider as we wander through the colourful aisles of fresh fruits and vegetables, tailing Nyima. "I'm not sure, there's a big flower that smells of rotten meat in the Amazon. It attracts flies instead of bees!" I offer. "A proteas* [sic]*, and a lotus," Tashi continues unaffected by this new information. "Lotuses are cool," I say. "Lotus is my surname. My first name Tashi means 'holder of Buddhist teachings.' Maybe one day I'll be a monk." I shoot a glance at Nyima. "How does the mom feel about that?" She laughs, rolls her eyes and says nothing. "Would you like to be a monk?" I venture. "No. I want to be in the army - they train you to use a gun and shoot people!" He mimes*

[13] In employing this term, I appeal chiefly to the word's proposed etymology: **second-guess** (v.) 1941, back-formation from second-guesser (1937), Amer.Eng., originally baseball slang for a fan who loudly questions decisions by players, managers, etc.; perhaps from guesser in the baseball slang sense of "umpire." ("second guess". Dictionary.com. *Online Etymology Dictionary*. Douglas Harper, Historian. http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/second guess; accessed: October 06, 2009).

holding a machine gun, and sprays invisible bullets through his teeth with obvious glee in the direction of some unsuspecting nectarines. "Shooting people is bad, though," I say lamely, and after a moment, Tashi adds the disclaimer: "I don't want to shoot bullets direct at people, I just want to learn to shoot". I am relieved.

On another occasion, I caught myself in the post-office watching to see how Tashi would go about removing a tiny flying insect from his arm (he flicked it off with force but without killing it, cooing to himself and it in a way that seemed to indicate that the bug would enjoy the adventure). Later, visiting Tashi at home after he arrived back from school one afternoon, I was amused to find him watching with relish as WWE wrestlers 'brought the pain' and broke folding chairs over each other, on a TV onto which a home-made sticker with the bold phrase 'May peace prevail on earth' was attached. If these moments tickled or unsettled me, however, it was only because I held particular preconceptions or preferences about the kind of Tibetan that Tashi ought to be.

Through such reflections I recognise my need or desire as a researcher to establish some sort of ultimate, 'master-narrative' by means of which to connect divergent moments of self-expression, multiple and contradictory performances and priorities of identity, avowals, behaviours; in short, the differentially-weighted discourses with which I was confronted. This language is telling, for it is that of far from neutral encounter, unsettling opposition demanding an assertive response, redress even. Throughout the fieldwork period, I found myself looking for a way to turn 'contradictory' into 'seemingly contradictory' – and felt the need for some final coherence or integration, the resolution of messy and undomesticated data. For this, I found myself turning to a personal appreciation of Vajrayana (i.e. Tibetan Tantric) Buddhism: Vajrayana, as a unique vehicle of Buddhism, singularly capable of subsuming the paradoxes between levels of reality, the absolute and the relative, the extraordinary and everyday, the contradiction of things as they appear versus 'how they really are', under one grand and nuanced philosophy, or meta-narrative. But I am forced to admit that this is my

need and my interpretation, and perhaps not that of my hosts in the field. Certainly, I doubt that they felt the same urgency to create continuity between these moments of self-expression as I did.

Still, if I adopt a self-reflexive style in exploring issues of representation, it is not merely out of some commitment to a post-modern anthropology, where the obligation to prove ethnographic complicity and power-problematics overcomes all else; nor am I advocating excessive navel-gazing where any chance of hard conclusion is hijacked in a fever of autobiography. Rather, it is because when commentators claim that particular strategies and forms of representation do a disservice to the Tibetan political project (whatever that may be), I take them very seriously. If versions of 'Tibetan-ness' or Tibetan 'culture' are critiqued as dangerous or misrepresentative, I certainly want to know why, and what it is that is being misrepresented. I take all this very seriously, too, because as a very clumsy Buddhist, I am aware of the 'karmic' charge of my own academic representations and the contributions of even this act of ethnography. With these comments as preamble then, I extend this second-guessing to a more in-depth assessment of modes of academic writing in Tibetan studies and anthropology.

CHAPTER THREE

Tibetan History, Cultural Anthropology and Tibetan Studies: three (scanty) histories

It goes without saying that the events leading up to and following the 1950 communist Chinese occupation of Tibet, and the unsuccessful Tibetan uprising and flight of the current Dalai Lama and thousands of Tibetans from the country into South Asia and elsewhere in the world in 1959, form an essential background to this research – indeed, there is no way they could not. While I do not have the scope in this thesis to do these issues justice, and while a thorough examination of various histories of Tibet is not my primary aim, I offer the following cursory treatment as an entry-point[14].

In 1950, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) of the newly established People's Republic of China (PRC) began sending large numbers of troops into Tibet's eastern province, as part of a promised effort to 'liberate Tibet' and 'return it to the Chinese motherland'. Initially disciplined and respectful troops encountered little resistance, and the PLA, advancing rapidly from the east and south, quashed any opposition that Tibetans did muster, to set up military lines along the Yantze River. At this point, the PLA contacted the Tibetan government in the Tibetan capital of Lhasa to send a delegation to Beijing to negotiate 'the peaceful liberation of Tibet'. The Tibetan government refused

[14] Shakya (1999) provides a meticulous and comprehensive survey of Tibet's political situation from 1947 to the present; Laird (2006) drawing on extensive interviews with the Dalai Lama crafts a less academic, admirably readable account. Shakabpa (1967); Richardson (1984) and Goldstein (1989) also offer essential reading. A succinct representation of the CTA position can be found in the above-mentioned *Tibet: Proving Truth From Facts* (Department of Information and International Relations, CTA, Dharamsala, 2006), see also www.tibet.net; for characteristic Chinese responses see http://entibet.328.cn. Assessing these, Smith (2008) plays devil's advocate.

to do so, and instead made an urgent appeal to the United Nations (UN), where they expressed their concern that China's actions were putting 'Tibetan independence' under threat.

What are we to make of this? What is at stake is a crucial difference of opinion, one that involves divergent understandings of history and identity, and one that has ultimately resulted in destruction, loss of life and dignity on a massive scale, and the ongoing exodus of thousands of Tibetans from their country of origin. At the risk of severe over-simplification, the divergence could be characterised as follows. On the one hand, the PRC argues that Tibet has for centuries been a part of China. Tibetans were only able to internalise the delusion of their own independence and uniqueness so powerfully because of China's previous inability to return Tibet to its rightful place as part of the Motherland, owing to political turmoil and instability within central China and ongoing interventions by foreign, capitalist imperialists who sought to estrange Tibet from China for their own purposes. One significant result of this interference and China's own weakness, says the PRC, was that a nightmarish, feudal theocracy, characterised by the wholesale oppression and exploitation of serfs, was able to flourish and entrench itself in Tibet. The PRC thus justifies its military incursion into Tibet as part of a benevolent effort to liberate these serfs from a cruel and backward regime, so that Tibetans could join the modernising path of enlightened communism. Tibetans, on the other hand, forcibly repudiate these claims. They remained adamant in 1950 (and remain so virtually unanimously today) that, even despite having at times been the nominal subjects of other empires, they have always functioned as a de facto independent state, and had no desire to be 'liberated' by China or anyone else.

Questions around Tibetan political history, over the last sixty years, if not for centuries, have naturally been highly contentious. Even as a researcher trying to look at these multiple positions, it is surprisingly easy to slip subtly in and out of fairly polarised stances uncritically. Even the choice to use a word like 'incursion', as opposed to 'invasion', in describing China's entry into Tibet in 1949/1950, has its consequences. We are forcibly reminded how history in general and the 'politics

of memory' it entails is a contested process of constructing identities, that almost invariably says more about present interests and politics than any alleged to have existed formerly (Rappaport, 1990).

Just as the convoluted and contentious twists and turns of Tibetan history form an essential, taken-for-granted backdrop for developing my thesis, so too do broader historical and theoretical developments around 'culture' in the discipline of anthropology[15]. Over the last few decades, terms such as 'culture', 'tradition', 'ethnicity' and 'community' have been increasingly problematised by scholars. Anthropologists have counselled the move from a concern with distinct and bounded 'cultures', understood as organic and homogenous 'wholes' coterminous with the geographical and political demarcations of nation-states, to a more realistic notion of cultures as fluid and cultural identities as historically contingent. Post-modern developments have disabused anthropologists of overly glib structural-functionalist appeals to coherent 'tradition' and inherent 'cultural logics' belonging to specific regions and people, and theorists have come to re-imagine contemporary culture as part of ongoing and contested processes of meaning-making, within and between groups. A focus on cultural processes, practices and production over reified entities called 'cultures' has alerted scholars to the politicization of culture and its mobilisation by marginalised groups across the globe (Wright, 1998). As anthropologists have become more and more happy to disown 'old ideas of culture' as demoded and misrepresentative, they have been forced to admit the appeal of such theoretical dinosaurs for many of the groups they study, whose often complex and sophisticated 'strategic essentialisms' demand careful and sensitive explanation (Comarof and Comarof, 2009).

Many of the anthropological developments alluded to above have come only recently to impact on Tibetan studies. For much of its history, the field of Tibetan Studies has been disproportionately represented by linguists, historians and historians of religions, and it is only of late that any

[15] Clifford and Marcus' landmark text (1986) is useful here; Ortner (1984) provides a helpful overview of changing theoretical trends in the discipline since the sixties.

significant anthropological dimension has emerged in the discipline (Childs, 2005). To a certain extent, Tibetan Studies has suffered from a 'salvage mentality' that prioritizes the preservation and reconstruction of culture, identity, tradition and history (frequently deemed to be on the verge of extinction) over their production and innovative re-formation (Anand, 2003). While much has been written over the last half-century about contemporary Tibetans both living in the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR) of the PRC and in exile, there remains a conspicuous dearth of material that considers more directly Tibetans' own opinions, self-imaginings and meaning-making (Korom, 1999).

Prisoners of Shangri-La: Orientalism, Instrumentalism and Agency

> *Occidental scholars, orientalists, and cultural anthropologists alike, don't seem to realize – or realize with reluctance only – that their zeal, their 'scientific' interests, are not necessarily shared by their informants. For the Tibetans at least, it is the Sanskrit-cum-Buddhist tradition which gives them the only lasting satisfaction and all the prestige they think worth while…Although it is perfectly justifiable for the cultural anthropologist to be interested in a cultural milieu, in a tradition without reference to its literary background, in the case of Tibet he is not likely to get much co-operation from his informants, unless they have been confronted with occidental scholars and exposed to western learning for a long time. In this manner the Tibetan attitude is accidental grist for the occidental Buddhologist mill: just as Tibetan* per se *is no object of linguistic study except as a feeder-service to the missing Sanskrit originals, to the western Buddhologist, the Tibetan monk-scholar feels exactly the same way and hardly regards Tibetan as an important object of study apart from Buddhist interest.*
>
> (Bharati, 1970: 59)

We can discern a certain trajectory in the history of the writing of Tibet and Tibetans that is worth considering. Prior to the 20th century, when it wasn't represented by the mostly fantastical and heavily biased travelogues and personal testimonies of a motley array of European explorers[16], literature surrounding Tibet was largely confined to the realm of highly specialised academic interests, catering to Orientalist pursuits prioritising the translation, preservation and exegesis of ancient and overwhelmingly religious texts. As Bharati's comments above demonstrate, even well into the 1990s Tibetan studies remained thoroughly religious, historical and textual in emphasis, with linguistic study of Tibetan forming a mere supplement to more mainstream Sanskrit scholarship. Notwithstanding Bharati's (1970) dim assessment of the discipline and of Tibetans' interests in cultural anthropological ventures in general, from the latter half of the 20th century onwards, Tibetan studies gained new legitimacy and vigour "in large part because of the effects of the Chinese invasion and occupation of Tibet...precipitating the apparently urgent task of preserving traditional Tibetan culture, and what is regarded as its most precious legacy, Tibetan Buddhism, before its 'loss'," (Lopez, 1995: 251). In the last twenty years or so, the burgeoning discipline has in a decisively self-reflexive turn, grown more and more concerned with investigating critically its own orientalising discourses.

So far, then, the picture looks like this. First, Tibet is a feeder service: Tibetan informants are a means to an end, useful for shedding light on ultimately 'non-indigenous' religious traditions; 'secular knowledge' and 'culture' are of secondary importance. Then, there is invasion - suddenly culture, custom and social life appear crucial in the face of potential extinction and diasporic dispersion, and new and urgent efforts towards salvage emerge. Subsequently, we witness a fresh deconstructive turn, where naive representations of Tibet and Tibetan-ness are blown apart and

[16] Bishop (1989, 1993); Lopez (1995, 1998); Procida (1996) and Anand (2007) offer just a few of many examples.

problematised. Yet, despite these catabolic tendencies, salvage remains: only now the quest is to save Tibetans from constraining identities, dominating tropes and suffocating stereotypes[17].

Perhaps one of the best-known commentators in this regard is Buddhologist and anthropologist Donald Lopez Jr, who has applied, not without some controversy, the critique of orientalism as first developed by Said (1979) to the question of contemporary Tibetan identity and nationalism. Pointing to the intensity and persistence with which Tibet has captured the Western imagination, Lopez (1998) traces how the 'Tibet' so constituted, refers far less to a distinct country, with its own socio-cultural profile and history, than to a mythic construction, a hyper-real foil for Western self-imagining. Strange irony exists, says Lopez in this history of othering – in plotting outsiders' evaluations of so-called 'Lamaism' (1996), he worries that Tibet, following Chinese absorption, was effaced from the map before it could ever really put itself there, on its own terms. Wary of claims of any unambiguous or uncontested, unified Tibetan nationalist identity pre-exile, Lopez pictures Tibetans as rudely emerging onto the world-stage only to fall irresistibly into the trap of reproducing Western orientalist fantasies about themselves in staking out their claim to a unique nationality and identity:

> *Introduced by Western supporters to the notion of culture, Tibetan refugees could look back at what Tibet had been. But this gaze, at least as it was represented to the West, saw the Land of Snows only as it was reflected in the elaborately framed mirror of Western fantasies about Tibet. It was only through this mirror, this process of doubling, that a Tibetan nation could be represented as unified, complete and*

[17] In some ways (and as Kolas, 1996, partly suggests) representations of the present Dalai Lama mirror this rough trajectory: in pre-1950 accounts he embodies the fascination of an otherworldly landscape that seems a vestige of the past, a living fossil of interest to audiences whose own 'civilisations' have long forsaken theocracy and magic; come 1950/59 he is in the main a beleaguered spiritual leader representing a whole threatened culture and people; then, following the award of his Nobel Peace prize, focus turns to his role as a transnational diplomat having to make difficult and potentially dangerous decisions in representing himself and his people as part of a complex and ambiguous backward-and-forward between multiple subjectivities and loyalties. For a similar trajectory, albeit one with a slightly different ending, see Lopez (1995: 284).

coherent. It was as if a double of Tibet had long haunted the West, and the Tibetans, coming out of Tibet, were now confronted with this double.

(Lopez, 1998: 200)

For Lopez, Tibet itself risks being deracinated, becoming a free-floating signifier or mass-projection. If we follow Anderson (1983), where *all* communities and nations are imagined, then Lopez's concern here is not with the 'what' but with the 'how': how Tibet and Tibetans are being imagined, and crucially, how pre-existing unequal relations of power constrain the playing-field for Tibetan agency and self-expression. Stereotypical language, Lopez (1998: 10) tells us, "not only creates knowledge about Tibet, in many ways it creates Tibet, a Tibet that Tibetans in exile have come to appropriate and deploy in an effort to gain both standing in exile and independence for their country."

However over-stated such claims may be, we cannot ignore the tensions generated by the Dalai Lama's hugely influential global campaign. Echoing Lopez (1996, 1998), Bob (2002) notes that a certain trade-off exists for oppressed groups seeking foreign attention and assistance in the modern global 'morality market': in order to translate their situation into terms understandable to relevant outside audiences, groups must brand themselves and their circumstances in frequently polarised, universalised and 'flattened' ways[18]. While in the short term it appears as a strategy for rallying much needed international sympathy and support, in the long term it is a move which heavily jeopardizes the cause, and dangerously circumscribes Tibetans' avenues for self-representation; possibilities for acknowledging and acting out a broader range of experiences, sentiments, and political strategies are precluded. The universalisation of Tibetan culture risks rendering Tibet itself

[18] Ornenstein (2002) likewise cites Lopez's misgivings regarding the universalisation of Tibetan culture, especially for Western audiences, in considering presentations of Tibetan 'traditional' art-forms to potential foreign benefactors.

somehow unnecessary, free-floating, if not absent entirely. The ongoing evolution and potential commodification of Tibetan culture in the midst of intercultural dialogue and exchange thus raises tough questions concerning the relationship between cultural authenticity, survival, change and self-governance and autonomy.

Indeed, a number of scholars have demonstrated the potential violence entailed by hegemonic or narrow representations of Tibetan-ness. Comparing modern Lhasa to karaoke performance, Adams (1996a) teases out the various 'scripts' for modernity available to Tibetans in the capital, as they are defined both by Western and Chinese 'outsiders' and manoeuvred by Tibetans themselves. By means of such scripts, at least for Westerners, the pre-eminently 'true' Tibetan becomes one that is both visibly oppressed and religious. Equally, MacGranahan (2005) describes how seeking to cement national unity and stability in exile, the Tibetan government in exile itself has prepared its own scripts, and kept a tight reign on history, offering simplified and homogenised official versions and attempting to minimise the full disclosure of alternative positions that speak to powerful internal divisions and differences in the exile population. MacGranahan demonstrates how the unifying presence of the Dalai Lama is central in this kind of negotiation. She points out the need to examine more carefully what she dubs 'arrested histories', powerful, parallel narratives of national history that remain buried and half-spoken until 'the time is right' and they can be voiced with impunity. Such sanctioned scripts and histories form the bread and butter of Tibetan nationalism and identity[19].

[19] MacGranahan's observations dovetail nicely with those of Brow (1990), who goes to lengths to emphasise the processual, ongoing negotiations implicit in hegemony, where hegemony is not so much synonymous with an explicit dominant ideology, but exists far more in a total social field of everyday activity and implicit social knowledge. Cohen (1996) reminds us, in the context of Scottish nationalism, of the importance of examining the personalised nature of the construction and interpretation of the nation and the rights so implied, a recommendation that, too, pushes us towards a consideration of implicit, day-to-day and common-sensical realities, circumscribed by authoritative representational regimes.

Such analyses as Lopez's go a long way in making sense of how so many individuals, upon hearing about my work with Tibetans, could come out with such blithe assessments as "Wow - they are such amazing people", "they're so peaceful" or " they're so spiritual", even though they had never met a Tibetan before, or how, when I mentioned that I was spending time with South Africa's few Tibetans, people could ask without skipping a beat whether "I was staying at the monastery with them?".The currency of such orientalist imaginings is readily seen in the promotional pamphlet for a film festival that was screened in Cape Town just as I returned from fieldwork, called, provocatively, 'Dreaming the Himalayas'. Beneath the bold lettering of the event's title (above a monochrome photograph of snow-capped peaks obscured by dense cloud) we read, "exploring the magic and mystery of Tibet", and beneath this, the following description: *"Fascinating landscapes, culture, philosophies, buddhas, yogis, saints and demons, living nuns and monks, monasteries ancient and modern, holistic medicine and magnificent Everest - Shrouded in mystery and situated at the roof of the world"*.

Significantly, the mysterious culture of Tibet is conflated with its landscape - the inscrutable heights of 'magnificent Everest' become a synecdoche for Tibet and Tibetans, who, like the mountain, are a largely undisclosed zone to be conquered for inestimable rewards - somehow timeless, exceptional, betokening extraordinary achievement, extremity and contradiction. Although the author of the pamphlet felt it necessary to qualify 'nuns and monks' with 'living' and add that Tibet includes monasteries both ancient and modern, even those films focussing on the experiences of contemporary Tibetans remained most interested in those aspects of life which seemed to resist the eroding power of history, and, committed to the allegedly timeless and spiritual, gave precedence to all that could be shown to have endured from an idealised pre-invasion Tibet.

Dreyfus (2005), however, while in accord with Lopez's broader claims, disputes in particular his totalising treatment of the orientalist presence in contemporary Tibetan cultural representation and politics. For Dreyfus, Lopez's claim that the current Dalai Lama is merely reproducing familiar Western orientalist discourse through a romanticisation of Tibet for foreign audiences is hard to swallow. Dreyfus details how the Dalai Lama's political philosophy is a hybridised creation that draws far more on endemic Tibetan Buddhist notions, as well as South-East Asian models of modernity and democracy than on Western sources. Equally, Cabezón (1996), giving a brief summary of the Buddhist principles and precedents both implicit and explicit in the Dalai Lama's liberation movement, hazards a comparison between the Dalai Lama's approach and that of Christian Liberation Theology proponents more broadly, to conclude that the Dalai Lama's methods are continuous with, if at times re-interpretative of Tibetan Buddhist ideals. The Dalai Lama's philosophy emerges as thoroughly infused with fundamental Buddhist principles, but equally it is a newly evolved animal, powerfully incorporating both Gandhian *satyagraha* and Western human rights and liberal democracy discourse. In addition, Dreyfus shows the ways in which at least a 'proto-nationalism' is seen to have existed amongst Tibetans pre-exile. Wary of Lopez's 'prisoners of Shangri La' scenario that offers no alternative to or chance of escape from the all-encompassing influence of orientalism, Dreyfus questions whether, instead of seeing the Dalai Lama as a defenceless dupe, we might see him as a shrewd manipulator of dominant discourses, possessed of a great deal more agency in his self-representation than we might suppose.

Accordingly, I contend that Lopez's appraisal is problematic for the way in which it potentially empties any action on the part of the Dalai Lama and other Tibetans of political significance or expediency, because of the idea of 'false consciousness' that it evokes. Lopez's formulation risks implying that identity performed or articulated for an audience, or further, as currency, is likely to be

less complex, less flexible, and to leave less room for personal innovation, socio-historical complexity and multivocality.

Unveiling Tibet: Knowing Tibetans and Knowing Better

Despite their relevance, the assessments of many scholars in the field(s) leave me, as a budding cultural-social anthropologist and Tibetologist, uneasy. In writing about cultural identity and Tibetan-ness, and wrestling with existing literature on such topics, I have found it useful to concentrate on Lopez and his contentions. In focusing on Lopez's work here, I by no means wish to suggest that Lopez take sole responsibility for my misgivings. Rather, in reviewing his claims I intend to delineate what I see as a constellation of broad, and potentially problematic, theoretical tendencies, against which I can position my own data and conclusions. I am interested in a certain style of writing about Tibet that is at once strongly critical and apologetic, and strangely paternalistic even as it looks towards less limiting horizons for Tibetan subjectivities and self-empowerment. Perusing the literature, it seems to me that while the majority of academic commentators on Tibet are forever jostling reactively against each other, stating compellingly why this or that particular representation of Tibetans and their cause is skewed or one-sided, obscures the full gamut of Tibetan subjectivities, and so on, paradoxically, little is achieved through this exercise aside from a troubling re-inscription of the very dilemma commentators are avowedly seeking to address. Commentating thus, Tibetans are again spoken for – or rather, when Tibetan standpoints and interpretations appear, we are made to understand that they cannot be taken at face-value; remaining inadequate in their own right, they are in need of critical analysis and supplementation. A common preference for elite perspectives over those of 'ordinary' Tibetans, too, troubles me, as does the frequency with which Tibetan studies scholars confess that their interpretations of Tibetan history, religion and culture are liable to rub against the grain of their informants' sensibilities[20].

[20] See for instance, Mills (2006); Laird (2006); Norman (2009)

To be sure, social science inquiry by nature seeks to speak for others, to supplement native interpretations and cosmologies with a critical, outsider's eye, in ways that may not fully square with informants' positions. And no doubt, the question of authorial voice and authority continues to haunt the ethnographic exercise. What concerns me specifically, however, is how what Anand (2003, 222) defines as a certain victimisation of Tibetans, might extend to the very process of writing about Tibet itself – to what extent, if any, could we be accused of somehow seeking to rescue Tibetans with our commentary? Much as we might strive in surveys of Tibetan history and culture to go beyond the face value of the 'mythic' annals of native religious chroniclers, supplementing and amending these perspectives with the insights of critical and contemporary scholarship, so too contemporary assertions of Tibetan-ness, of Tibetan nationalism, ethnicity and history are prone to our deconstructions and extensions. They, too, can be shown to be deceptively simplistic, their 'mythic' flavour can be exposed.

It is indeed, as Norman (2009:384) notes, "a paradox of the Western world's enthusiasm for Buddhism and for Tibet that the one is perceived as being a uniquely peaceful religion and the other as a uniquely peaceful place". Truly, "these perceptions entail gross over-simplifications" and very possibly "the collective history of [Tibet and] the Dalai Lamas startles us with its passion and its bloodiness" (ibid). Likewise, the CTA's stress on pan-Tibetan unity and unequivocal continuity of nationalist sentiment may well not stand up to historical scrutiny[21]. But perhaps the more subtle paradox is that such corrective academic assertions appear to constitute a continuation of the very Western fascination for the 'unveiling' and 'penetration' of a 'secret' Tibet that contemporary theorists such as Lopez see as so closely associated with the problematic orientalist accounts they are writing against. My uneasiness, then, comes in large part from the ironic proximity of recent

[21] It is somewhat strange that this point is so frequently laboured in the literature with regard to Tibetan nationalism, when, as Anderson noted some time ago (citing Renan's "suavely back-handed" contention): the essence of a nation could be said to be as much in those things its members have in common, as in those they have so expertly forgotten." (Anderson, 1983, 15, my translation)

counter-orientalist 'unveilings' with some of the more extreme and gloating imperialist accounts of long ago[22].

Norman (2009), speaking like any apologetic anthropologist, in his recent history of the institution of the Dalai Lamas, elaborates on some of the uses to which such unveiling might be put:

> *While it is true that...the Tibetan folk-religious tradition can seem by turns ludicrous and outrageous, it clearly provides an entirely valid way of being in the world, with benefits that are unavailable to modern society. We catch, in Tibetan culture, a glimpse of the universe enchanted, of how our world must have looked before the West's own folk-religion tradition was obliterated by modernity, and it enables us to identify some of the losses that went with it.* (13)

Certainly, I am sympathetic with this position, what hard-line empiricist and campaigner for enlightenment rationality, Meera Nanda (2003), has deplored as 'epistemic charity,' this apologetic for metaphysical and ontological relativism. What is worrying is how Tibet's 'folk-religious tradition' is naturally assumed to be in contrast, distinct from (if not incommensurable with) Western modernity. Tibetans do *us* a service, even as we help them save face. And yet, as much as we seem so ready to assume such dichotomies (then and now, them and us), they trouble us. They spur us to this obsessive unveiling, ascertaining, disclosing (even Norman's 2009 title, '*The Secret Lives of the*

[22] Waddell's triumphant account of his 'deflowering' of Lhasa is a case in point. While the tone is decidedly different, his basic message proves much the same as Norman's: "Tibet never was Shangri-La"(2009, 385) :

> "But now, in the fateful Tibetan Year of the Wood-Dragon [1904], the fairy Prince of "Civilisation" has roused her [Lhasa, "the secret citadel of the "undying" Grand Lama...shrouded in impenetrable mystery on the Roof-of-the-World"] from her slumbers, her closed doors are broken down, her dark veil of mystery is lifted up, and the long-sealed shrine, with its grotesque cults and its idolised Grand Lama, shorn of his sham nimbus, have yielded up their secrets and lie disenchanted before our Western eyes."
>
> (Waddell, 1905: 1-2)

Dalai Lamas' attests to the persuasiveness of the idea of something hidden, of Tibetan subjectivities needing capable outside investigators to bring them to light).

Barbaric Tibetans, Barbaric academics: Tibetan Studies and Latour's Critical Trick

Without depreciating the sincerity and good intentions of contemporary Tibetan studies commentators, we can nonetheless recognise something of Bruno Latour's (2004) critical barbarism in this situation. Decrying a postmodern obsession for deconstruction and declaring social critique at an impasse, Latour identifies two critical positions cherished by the social sciences at large, into which theorists invariably thrust the objects of their critique. Where the process of critique is closely associated with anti-fetishism and iconoclasm, Latour (2004) diagramises the first (or 'fairy' position – 'critical gesture: move one') as follows: "You believe in the power of an idol to make you do things but in fact it is only the power of your own ingenuity that merely projects onto an indifferent matter your own power" (238). The 'ordinary fetishist' then suffers the double-whammy of Latour's 'fact' position ('critical gesture: move two) where: "You believe in the free power of your own will to make you do things out of an indifferent matter but in fact you are unwillingly activated to do things by the necessary power of genes, interests, drives etc." (239). From these positions derives Latour's 'critical trick' that fuels the whole critical enterprise:

> *There is never any crossover between the two lists of objects - The subject is either so powerful that he or she can create everything out of his/her own labour...OR...Nothing but a mere receptacle for the forces of determinations known by natural and social sciences/The object is either nothing but a screen on which to project human free will...OR...So powerful that it causally determines what humans think and do.* (241)

This is why social critique feels so good, Latour tells us, as long as you are the one doing it. By virtue of the trick, the theorist is assured of always being right:

> *When naive believers are clinging forcefully to their objects, claiming that they are made to do things because of their gods, their poetry, their cherished objects, you can turn all of those attachments into so many fetishes and humiliate all the believers by showing that it is nothing but their own projection, that you, yes you alone, can see. But as soon as naive believers are thus inflated by some belief in their own importance, in their own projective capacity, you strike them by a second uppercut and humiliate them again, this time by showing that, whatever they think, their behaviour is entirely determined by the action of powerful causalities coming from objective reality they don't see, but that you, yes you, the never sleeping critic, alone can see. Isn't this fabulous? Isn't it really worth going to graduate school to study critique? "Enter here, you poor folks. After arduous years of reading turgid prose, you will be always right, you will never be taken in any more; no one, no matter how powerful, will be able to accuse you of naïveté´, that supreme sin, any longer? Better equipped than Zeus himself you rule alone, striking from above with the salvo of antifetishism in one hand and the solid causality of objectivity in the other." The only loser is the naive believer, the great unwashed, always caught off balance.* (239)

So we burst open the 'long-sealed shrine' in a spasm of deconstruction and see through the mirage that is Tibet, disabused of naive notions of Tibetan history, nationalism and identity. And lest we be too hasty to excuse our subjects' idolatry as so many aspirational and strategic representations, in case we find ourselves speaking too freely of agency and expediency, we remind ourselves that we are all yet 'prisoners', and take strange comfort in the inescapable facts of the world market, the media, the exigencies of an orientalist archive, and whatever other modes of structural domination thought to pre-determine these representations take our fancy. The point is not that these academic observations are wrong, or even injudicious, but rather that they are barbaric, as Latour would have it, in their hopeless circularity: in their dogged war on naivety they curb informants' scope for self-

expression. Somehow, in the end, there is only one mantra to be heard droning from the halls of the academy: WE KNOW BETTER. Yet again, we come to the rescue of Tibet and Tibetans, we, the great liberators from naivety.

Towards the Gathering: Looking Eastwards

If I focus on Lopez in levelling this assessment, it is precisely for his complexity and nuance as a researcher. Given he is a scholar deeply concerned about the power-relations at play in informant-ethnographer engagements and someone wary of bulldozing over Tibetans with his own agendas, it is all the more imperative that we adequately account for the lingering and subtle presence and implications of Latour's critical trick in his work. I, like Lopez and Latour, would try to see my way through this critical impasse, but from my own unique position. More than merely react against the critical commentary of others by furnishing some of my own, the articulations of identity that I provide in the pages that follow aim to move away from this strange love affair with naive subjects and unforgiving objects. Rather than seeing an appeal to the constructed-ness of identities as a call for deconstruction and disarticulation, I take it as an invitation for increased attention to the changing assemblages and networks that go towards sustaining such identities. Dreaming of a different kind of critic, one who walks her own enlightened 'middle-path' between fact and fairy extremes, Latour's 'fair position' critical utopia is one where:

> *The critic is not the one who debunks, but the one who assembles. The critic is not the one who lifts the rugs from under the feet of the naive believers, but the one who offers the participants arenas in which to gather. The critic is not the one who alternates haphazardly between antifetishism and positivism like the drunk iconoclast drawn by Goya, but the one for whom, if something is constructed, then it means it is fragile and thus in great need of care and caution. I am aware that to get at the heart of this argument one would have to renew also what it means to be a constructivist, but I have said enough to indicate the*

direction of critique, not away but toward the gathering, the Thing. Not westward, but, so to speak, eastward.

(Latour, 2004, 246)

In casting my sights eastward, I take inspiration, too, from Green's (2009) appraisal of identity and notions of personhood and intersociality amongst Palikur speaking villagers living along the Rio Urucuaua of Brazil. Green exemplifies 'being Palikur' as something changeable and aspirational, not reducible to the dictates of a bounded, integrated or 'final' culture, but part of shifting modes of conviviality that (borrowing Santos-Granero's 2000 phrasing) comprise an ongoing 'cycle of settlements'. This allows her to imagine the politics of 'ethnic' community as one of mutual co-presence that does not degenerate into a dangerously inflexible politics of cultural representation that freezes communities in place, but encompasses the shifting ideals and opportunities of mutual presence in the world, of a mode of being-together, beyond a nationalistic being of togetherness. While the particulars of her research are quite different, I find her focus on the aspirational, contingent and ambiguous dimensions of identity highly relevant and instructive in my own engagements in the field.

Green's (2009) discursive distinction between a politics of presence or being-together and a politics of collective representation appears to speak to my frustration with a certain seemingly tautologous, even banal style of talking about cultural difference and identity used sometimes by Lobsang and Nyima, which might be summed up as 'What makes you Tibetan is your Tibetan-ness'. Emphasising being-together is not to say that nationalist sentiment and representational identity politics are not of vital and ongoing importance, but rather that (as in Green's 2009 ethnographic examples) the scope of everyday lived experience goes beyond the parameters of such discourse, and requires

something more capable of encompassing aspirational and contingent identities. Thus it was that, asking Lobsang "what it is about the Tibetans you've met that you could say brings them together, unifies them as a people?" he could reply without hesitation that "number one is being a Tibetan, your Tibetan-ness brings you together...I may not be able to speak much about the fourth, the fifth generation, but when I met other Tibetans in the United States or elsewhere the other person, the other Tibetan say they're *happy* that they're meeting Tibetans. One common factor is that you are Tibetan, [is] your Tibetan-ness.

CHAPTER FOUR

"Maybe one such case is the Tibetan spiritual leaders, spiritual teachers, who have centres, for example, the Kagyu Centre in Johannesburg, where the spiritual teacher is Akong Rinpoche. Akong Rinpoche, has projects inside Tibet - to go to Tibet, he has to obtain [a] visa from the Chinese government. In order that his visa is not rejected, or that they cause any problem to him, it is believed that the more distant he and his students are from Tibet-related activities...the safer they will be; in other words, trying to keep a low profile, especially not engaging in political activities. So, what you see here is – yes, there is a necessity for the Tibetan people inside Tibet to be supported, by Tibetans living outside Tibet, and I think His Holiness has also encouraged exiled Tibetans to help in projects that help Tibetans inside Tibet. But, as a Tibetan – you may be a highly spiritual, highly acclaimed, highly achieved teacher...the fact that he is a Tibetan, you are a Tibetan, cannot be ignored, cannot be rejected. Wherever you live, you are a Tibetan, and the reason you came to Canada, or South Africa and why you are not inside Tibet, is because you left your country, because there was an invasion, and today you are able to support projects because you are still in exile...Yes, so the first question is: Tibetans, all Tibetans – the day Tibetans stepped their foot in exile, they became political exiles...They did not become religious exiles, they did not become spiritual exiles, they became political exiles. And whatever they do, it may have certain political links...whatever they do, they do it for the cause of Tibet – the cause of Tibet is political!..."

(Excerpt from interview with Lobsang)

G – [When you're dealing with His Holiness] you're dealing with an entity of truth...and also, as you know, Samdhong Rinpoche, who's an incredible person, he's a very spiritual person...When you're dealing, with that type of energy - let's just put it in the form of an energy - you've got to deal with subtle energy too, you can't just deal with the Tibet issue in isolation, because you're dealing with people whose life has been spiritual and you've got to incorporate that – His Holiness's whole life is Buddhism…Samdhong Rinpoche's whole reason for being is Buddhism, his whole outlook is very Gandhian, and, His Holiness has a lot of empathy towards Gandhi's philosophy, but…Yeah, you can't divorce that, you've got to incorporate it, somehow, I dunno how you're gonna do it, but it'll be very interesting…

B – Well, it's a question I think will follow me throughout the research, because of my own interest, and involvement in Tibetan Buddhism… and there are different positions - one of the things that Lobsang stressed in Pretoria, was that he felt - I mean, I don't think it goes against what you're saying, but...he seemed concerned about some religious teachers who he felt were, in the West, disinclining converts to Buddhism, Tibetan Buddhists from being actively involved in political issues. So, he said, "Don't forget the 'Tibet' in Tibetan Buddhism," but based on what you say, I'd say that the Tibet in Tibetan Buddhism is Buddhist, so, it's like they're not two separate things –

G – You can't -

B - …that should go together, they –

G - …because the whole life of each and every Tibetan would, revolve around their Buddhist principles.

(Excerpt from interview with Gwen, long-standing Tibetan Buddhist and pro-Tibet activist)

Lamas, Lawyers and Diplomats

In this chapter I consider two pre-arranged, public events during which expressions of Tibetan-ness could be said to have been strategically or instrumentally performed. In so doing, I trace some of the ways in which Tibetan-ness is articulated for divergent audiences, and examine the push-and-pull of priorities, registers and gazes through which Tibetan subjects come to be constituted. As the opening interview excerpts suggest, a complex interplay exists - both within Tibetans' lives and the domain of Tibet-related social activism - between designations of the political, and the religious or cultural. During the events under review (two separate celebrations marking the 14th Dalai Lama's 74th birthday) participants' assorted outlooks and concerns were brought together and into interaction in a dense and unstable field of transnational social activity that ultimately upset any attempt to draw up definitively the dividing lines between imagined spheres of action, such as those of the religious and political, the local and global and the public and private.

For Tibetans in and outside of Tibet, even the unqualified assertion 'I am a Tibetan' constitutes a powerful political act, since, officially speaking it could be said that there are no 'Tibetans' but only 'Chinese citizens of Tibetan ethnicity or nationality'. In the very moment of self-identification then, an oppositional politics is evoked and sustained. As Lobsang stresses in the opening interview snippet, any Tibetan's Tibetan-ness (whether they like it or not) is irresistibly political, and the 'diasporic consciousness' (Vertovec, 1997) of Tibetans must therefore be an actively political one, demanding political engagement and cognisance of some kind. For Tibetans outside and (perhaps especially) inside Tibet, the putatively private act of reciting a mantra, making a prostration, circumambulating a holy site or even displaying an image of the Dalai Lama, cannot help but have political resonance, as it implicitly affirms, if not actively inscribes and embodies, an alternative social landscape and imaginary. The deep co-referentiality of the political and the religious for the majority of Tibetans, however, permits of multiple, potentially contradictory readings and

responses. For some parties connected with Tibet and Tibetan support, political agendas risk hampering or hijacking religious ones, or co-opt or subsume cultural matters in potentially misrepresentative and threatening ways.

Friends of Tibet

For Lobsang and Nyima 'local Tibet support networks' meant local Buddhist groups. While not every Tibet supporter was Buddhist, or Buddhist in the same way, significant support in South Africa for the Tibetan cause was inevitably linked to some or other Buddhist constituency. Lobsang stressed that working relations with Buddhist centres and "individual Tibet support networks and groups" around the country (principally in Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban) were good – "we do not see any problem communicating to them unless Buddhist groups themselves have problems communicating with us." As a *spoke*sman what Lobsang and these groups did more than anything was *talk.* Lobsang saw his and Nyima's role as primarily advisory – whether giving counsel on the proper procedure for legally staging a demonstration or disseminating material concerning Tibetan culture and history, Lobsang (and the CTA's) understanding was that the Office representatives' job was to function as reliable and authoritative sources of information for a range of interested parties.

Audiences and Anthems: Anticipating Tibet

His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama's 74th birthday (trung-kar, *'khrungs-skar*) celebration was the major public function staged by the Office during my time in Pretoria. The catered event was hosted at the Office residence on a Friday afternoon in July, and of the hundred odd guests invited, at least half of this number, if not closer to sixty or seventy people attended. Nyima, Tashi, Lobsang and I assembled a shelter for the drinks area, set up sound equipment and tables, decorated the balcony, strung up lines of colourful flags around the perimeter of the garden and erected a Tibetan flag from

a flag post on the balcony. A draped platform positioned in front of a clean, white sheet as backdrop formed the main focus of the space. Atop this makeshift altar, decked with white silk offering scarves and propped behind a row of seven incense offering bowls was displayed a large framed photograph of the Dalai Lama. A small faded rug on which to make prostrations lay at the platform's base.

The demographic of those who attended on the day was diverse. A large number of mostly middle-aged Buddhist practitioners and teachers, their friends and families, connected with the nearby Lam Rim Tibetan Buddhist centre in Johannesburg, as well as other Buddhist groups, comprised the majority. The rest were an odd assortment of individuals who had crossed paths with the Office in the past: the colleague of a complementary doctor and practitioner of yoga who had known Lobsang for some time and was a strong supporter of the Tibetan cause, a representative from a social interest group that Lobsang had once addressed on the status of Tibet, Lobsang and Nyima's neighbours, two Burmese exiles, a young Nepalese student in 'ethnic' dress, a student from the University of Pretoria who had helped stage peaceful protests in the past, a young Chinese South African couple (also Tibetan Buddhists). Two free-lance journalists were also present, a Hungarian South African with his own blog and a Chinese South African who had worked for a number of local newspapers. I later learned that while a number of government-affiliated individuals had attended, almost none of the many representatives of provincial and national government who had been issued invitations had arrived. Lobsang was not visibly unsettled by the fact and countered charitably that it was typically difficult for politicians to find the time to attend such events. But whatever the turnout was in the end, it seemed clear that he wished to prioritise a certain kind of audience at the event.

Some days prior to the celebration, during an online communication I had asked Harriet, a Tibetan Buddhist practitioner in Johannesburg, whether she would be attending the event. Since she was a friend of Tsering and Michael, and had organised a small pro-Tibet march that the Office representatives had attended (and at which Lobsang delivered a speech), I was sure that she would be. To my surprise then, she informed me that she had not received an invitation. Confused, I assured her that she must have been invited, and that the invitation had probably simply been lost in the mail. However, when I asked Nyima about it, she explained that Lobsang was the final decision-maker when it came to who to include on what, given the Office's shoe-string budget for catering, was a regrettably limited guest-list. Despite her history with the Office, Lobsang had chosen not to invite Harriet and her Chinese Canadian husband James this year. Though, the decision worried Nyima, who was on good terms with Harriet, there were many people who could have been invited but were not: Nyima had suggested Tashi's schoolteacher (his teacher had attended in 2007 but not 2008) and a local high level Buddhist practitioner who had staged and lead the prayers at a protest fast in which the Tibetans participated, but these two were also left off the list. Lobsang's first priority thus seemed to be individuals whose relationship to the Office was particularly longstanding (most having been had ties since before Lobsang and Nyima's tenure) and whose influence had a somewhat more official flavour.

Lobsang, Nyima, Tashi, Tsering, Michael and Chokyi all wore chubbas for the event[23]. Once guests had arrived and snacks had been served, Nyima formally welcomed everyone over a microphone

[23] *Phyu-pa*, or traditional Tibetan robes are worn by men, women and children. In their simplest form they are usually grey in colour, and loose-fitting. Women also frequently wear long colourful, sometimes braided or decorated aprons. Tashi evinced an interesting mixture of emotion about his chubba. Before the party, both he and Nyima said that he was 'excited' and 'shy' about wearing it. I sensed that though Tashi enjoyed wearing the robe (he wore it on special occasions such as the party and at school events that encouraged cultural self-identification, something his school seemed to emphasise), he was nonetheless slightly embarrassed about wearing something so exotic and formal around non-Tibetans. I watched on the morning of the party as Nyima helped Tashi put on the grey robe and his elaborately embroidered yellow silk undershirt with mandarin collar, cleaned his face, nose and ears and fussed over his hair. As he protested loudly against her ministrations,

and requested the crowd to observe a minute of silence 'for all the Tibetans killed, maimed, tortured and detained following peaceful protests up until now.' Standing in a line, 'all the South African Tibetans' (which included Michael) then sang the Tibetan national anthem[24] without musical accompaniment, while the crowd listened solemnly and respectfully in silence. Tsering held a piece of paper with an English transliteration of the words out for Michael, and the two giggled as they struggled to keep up with Nyima and Lobsang. The others then returned to the crowd, and Lobsang delivered a short speech. He and Nyima had both expressed the desire that the proceedings be succinct and not overtly religious. While commemorations of His Holiness's birthday in Dharamsala and in other Tibetan areas were typically very formal and involved a number of longwinded ritual observances such as the offering of long-life prayers for the Dalai Lama, the Tibetans stressed that this was neither an expressly religious nor political event, and they did not wish for guests to become bored, or for non-Buddhists to be alienated by lengthy and unfamiliar ceremony. All the same, Lobsang's speech displayed an interesting mixture of political and religious elements. For the most part, he reminded the audience of ongoing oppression in Tibet, and asserted that the political

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Nyima chided him gently for not knowing the proper way to tie his chubba. I had not heard her instruct him so directly in how to be Tibetan before. "You need to know how to do this, how to tie this, you are Tibetan" she exclaimed, adding to me, as an aside, "if he was at Tibetan school he would know how to do this". "If you don't know how to do this then you will be like the Chinese, you don't want to be Chinese do you?" "Ama-la! (Mom!)" Tashi moaned, presumably to indicate that he did not. She added, "even the Chinese in Tibet are doing like this now". "You mean, like wearing a chubba?" I inquired. "Yes, they want to be like Tibetans." The short exchange implied much about public demonstrations of identity. On the one hand wearing (and further, knowing how to wear) a chubba was a strong statement of Tibetan-ness, a skill Tashi ought to have; at the same time, Nyima recognised that simply possessing such knowledge was insufficient – after all, Michael, as well as Chinese could wear chubbas too.

[24] Two Tibetan anthems exist. One was composed in the 18th century and the other (*Bod rgyal-khab kyi rgyal glu*, the one sung at the birthday event) is a 20th century invention. It is not clear whether this anthem was employed by the 14th Dalai Lama's administration prior to the Chinese take-over, or whether it has only ever been used in exile. Composed by a tutor of the current Dalai Lama and set to a traditional tune in the manner of a religious hymn, the anthem is replete with Buddhist terminology and objectives. Prohibited in the TAR, its lyrics appeal to Tibet as sacred zone where the secular and religious are inexplicably interwined. Praying that 'a new golden age of happiness and bliss [may] spread throughout the three provinces of Tibet and the glory expand of religious-secular rule" and that Tibet may be triumphant "in the battle against negative forces," it obliquely challenges Chinese cartographic assertions and calls powerfully for an alternative political cosmology and an end to oppressive occupation.

situation of Tibetans in Tibet had not significantly improved since the 2008 clamp-down in the wake of widespread Tibetan protests surrounding the Beijing Olympic Games. Going on to pray for the long life of the Dalai Lama, as well as an *"immediate end to the sufferings of all those Tibetans who are facing Chinese suppression and torture,*" he gave a lengthy description of traditional festivities within Central Tibet surrounding the Dalai Lama's birthday, and concluded with the hope that *"the Tibetan people's wishes of seeing their undisputed leader His Holiness the Dalai Lama, on the golden throne of Potala be fulfilled and realised soon."* Such appeals to both religious and political action suggest the blending of these domains within the person of the Dalai Lama himself. In its articulation of Tibetan identity, Lobsang's address offered a complex collage of images, times and places. Describing His Holiness's birthday as *"the happiest day for all Tibetans"* he appealed to a Tibetan national identity unified through the figure of the Dalai Lama. Slipping into the present tense, even as he spoke about a religious freedom now long past, he juxtaposed images of *"the people of Lhasa, resplendent in their best clothing and full of joy* [who] *offer juniper incense on various local hills and spend several days singing and dancing*" with those of innocent protesters *"arrested, mercilessly beaten, tortured and imprisoned."* Tibetan devotion to the Dalai Lama was thus presented as timeless, uncontested and universal (which of course, it is not). The present tense usage suggested a continuity of practice able to transcend the particulars of political unrest, even as it remained imaginary for Tibetans inside Tibet.

With his appeal to familiar notions of oppressed and religiously-motivated Tibetans, in gearing the event towards conscientising guests to the current political and human rights status of Tibet, Lobsang was obliged to perform a delicate balancing act between the representational currency of 'spiritual Tibetans' and the demands of his role as political activist and spokesperson. Interestingly, on more than one occasion, I got the impression that activists and practitioners were mildly disappointed that the current employees of the Office did not make themselves more freely

available as 'cultural' representatives. Informants contrasted the vivacious, gung-ho approach of the previous secretary, who by some accounts seemed more ready to stage impromptu 'cultural events' and demonstrations on a minimal budget, with the more reserved tactics of the current employees. Likewise, the activities of the former secretary's wife, a traditional Tibetan doctor, who ran a practice as well as staged introductory workshops on Tibetan healing practices from the Office premises ensured that the Office was in some ways more of an outlet for Tibetan 'culture.' In short, informants expressed a certain nostalgia for a time when, for a variety of reasons, more people were coming to the Office more often, separate from 'purely' political and official activities. On the Sunday following the Office birthday party, however, both Nyima and Lobsang adopted to a certain extent the role of 'cultural specialist'.

"This is how we do it" - Liberation for All (but don't forget Tibetans!)

Arriving at the Lam Rim centre's event for His Holiness's birthday a few minutes past nine on a crisp Sunday morning, I found participants sitting on cushions on the lawn outside the main building, facing a roaring bonfire. Lobsang was seated cross-legged in the front row closest to the fire, with a low table at his right hand, upon which various ritual offering substances were assembled. Reading from a prayer booklet printed in Tibetan characters with English phonetic transliteration, he intoned the required chants for the incense puja rapidly and monotonously. Two feet away, Nyima tended the fire. Adding new fresh branches of aromatic plants and broken up bundles of rolled incense periodically to the flames, she mouthed the mantras and prayers along with the rest without recourse to a prayer book, her face impassive with concentration. Shortly after finding a place to sit with my two friends who had transported me to the event (alongside Tsering, Michael and Chokyi who had arrived just as we did), Tashi, dressed again in chubba and undershirt, came bounding up to me from where he had been idling at the periphery of the small assembly and whispered in my ear conspiratorially that he had a number of water balloons hidden in his robe. I laughed and

admonished him not to cause too much havoc, before he dashed off[25]. When the puja was over and Lobsang had been thanked for leading the prayers, the group rose and assembled in a circle around the central prayer flag post. Grasping a fistful of flour each, Nyima and Lobsang bid us to follow their example as they swung their arms up and down three times, intoning mantras and releasing the flour into the air with a yell on the third round. Lobsang's manner was expressly didactic, "This is how we do it," he told the crowd. Whereas at the Office event Lobsang, Nyima, Tashi and I offered our *khatas* and performed our prostrations to the Dalai Lama before the guests arrived, away from the public gaze, this time Lobsang and Nyima agreed to guide the participants in their capacity as Tibetans in proper religious procedure. Later, however, Lobsang did not take any leading role in the hour long group Chenresig puja held in the shrine room, and Nyima opted to sit this out, preferring to perform her own prayers in her shrine room at home during our day off the following morning. Furthermore, she recognised that the event was pitched at the Lam Rim practitioners' needs and capabilities. Participants were simply 'doing what they can,' practising the rituals in which they had been instructed by their teachers, as non-Tibetans their repertoire of rituals was limited.

Though adopting an advisory role, the Tibetans respected the priorities of the Lam Rim religious community, and made no effort that I observed to refocus the day's proceedings explicitly towards questions of Tibetan nationalist politics. Still, prostrating before the Dalai Lama's image, I could not help but feel that I was engaging in a potent political gesture, knowing that the opportunity to offer long-life prayers to the leader so unreservedly on the day, was something denied to Tibetans inside Tibet.

[25] I noted that none of the other Tibetans wore chubbas. Nyima explained that following the Office birthday party Tashi had chosen without any particular encouragement from her to wear it a second time. Nyima and Lobsang's focus on the day was inward – their participation in Buddhist rituals necessitated no special external marker of their Tibetan identity. The juxtaposition of Tashi's chubba with his mischievousness and lack of interest during the puja, where he took every opportunity to hurl rice grains at the introspective participants (without Nyima voicing her disapproval) was perhaps a subtle challenge to 'traditional' expectations about demure and pious Tibetans.

Lobsang and I frequently returned in our conversations to the place of the political and the religious or cultural in Tibetan subjectivities, and the appropriate connection between social activism and the practice of Buddhism. During my research, I observed firsthand how more than one Buddhist teacher promoted a rather dim view of political involvement. As Lobsang alluded to in the opening interview, the local Kagyu centre typically defended its forswearing of political affiliations by appealing to the sensitive upliftment projects within Tibet which their spiritual director sought to continue promoting unmolested by state suspicion. An even more polemic view was offered by a visiting guru from the New Kadampa Tradition (NKT), a prominent (and highly controversial[26]) Gelukpa lineage with thousands of disciples in the West. During teachings given in November 2008, he extolled the virtues of regular meditation aimed at generating unconditional compassion, and remarked that, "Some people say Buddhists are lazy, that they're apathetic, that they sit around and do nothing…but meditation is the very best thing you can do to end suffering." He stressed that properly executed meditation was the *only* safe and certain strategy for doing good in the world. All other forms of action were ultimately wildcards. Even the best and most compassionate physical

[26] The NKT has emerged as chief opponent of the Dalai Lama in the wake of the latter's 'recommendation' against religious practices relating to a Tibetan 'dharma protector' known as Dorje Shukden Based on a range of evidence, from literary and historical sources to the pronouncements of the state oracle, the Dalai Lama and his administration have established that Dorje Shukden is a harmful, non-enlightened being actively hostile to the institution of the Dalai Lamas, whose propitiation jeopardises the Tibetan people. Ironically, advocacy for Shukden is particularly strong amongst conservative monastic elites of the Gelukpa school (of which the Dalai Lama is the supreme head) who see the being as charged with the task of exacting violent retribution on those practitioners who endanger the purity of Gelukpa doctrine through the incorporation of teachings and practices from the other schools of Tibetan Buddhism (which undertaking, with his non-sectarian efforts the Dalai Lama actively pursues). The Dalai Lama has forbidden Dorje Shukden practitioners from attending his meetings and talks and there are claims of widespread harassment and abuse against practitioners. For more details on the history, ritual cosmology and controversy surrounding the Dorje Shukden affair, see Lopez (1998); Dreyfus (1999); Nau (2007) and McCune (2007). A summary of the CTA's official position can be found in *A Brief History of Opposition to Shugden (Measures Taken by Various Learned Non-sectarian Scholars and Great Practitioners Against the Practice and Propitiation of Dolgyal or Shugden)* (The Dolgyal Research Committee, 1989), the Dorje Shugden International Coalition has published various rejoinders (see for instance, *Dorje Shugden and the Dalai Lama of Tibet,* 1998).

actions could have unforeseen and severe consequences. We were to work on our minds, for "only a mind of suffering perceives suffering". The impurity of our environment, of our bodies, of the entire world around us, was, he said, ultimately, on the highest level, simply a projection of our currently impure minds, yet awaiting transformation through meditation.

In response to the Dalai Lama's sanctions, the NKT has severed all political ties with Tibet and Tibetans, contending that, by allowing political in-fighting and worldly priorities to compromise religious integrity, Tibetans have shown themselves unworthy of functioning as custodians of true Buddhist teachings. Counter-intuitive as it may be, Tibetan culture, politics and history are thus effectively redundant when it comes to sound (Tibetan) Buddhist practice. Though monks entering the tradition adopt Tibetan names, wear traditional robes and preserve lineage practices hailing back to Tibet, the adoption of Tibetan culture is disowned as an ultimately retrogressive and unnecessary exercise[27].

Of course, the NKT represents an extreme case – both in terms of the thoroughness of their own self-exoneration from political involvement and the extent to which they have been quarantined and demonised by the CTA and the majority of Tibetans. If indeed the torch of the Dharma has passed out of Tibetan hands and we ought to work towards ending suffering for all, in the long term, then the end of this line of reasoning may well be accepting the appropriation of Tibet and its ultimate disappearance under the guise of good Buddhist philosophy. Lobsang gave the impression that the NKT's worst crime was its anti-politics, and their refusal to acknowledge the politics inevitably involved in religious practice. Whatever the Dalai Lama's ultimate motivations, the Dorje Shukden scandal returns us to the central issue of the relationship between religion and politics and how

[27] For all their claims of political indifference, however, it is ironic that part of how the NKT has sought redress and appealed to the non-politics of their position and their pure religious intention is by invoking the sanctity of universal human rights and the provisions of the Tibetan and Indian constitutions. Ultimately, the NKT's position cannot *not* be a political one. It remains that by eschewing political involvement and helping to keep their students uninformed about contemporary Tibetan politics except to denounce the Dalai Lama, the NKT have done Chinese 'anti-splittists' a favour.

'ethnic identity' is mobilised in response to these. While he naturally had no dealings with the NKT, Lobsang did find himself having to negotiate with members of local support networks less inclined in their own way to engage with political issues. While such members were far from unsympathetic to the Tibetan's political struggle, Lobsang's concern was that religious or cultural interests overshadowed all others and only rarely translated into strenuous pro-Tibet activity. Taking account of local groups' priorities, he did what he could to reframe their perspectives to allow for a broader scope of political 'response-ibility'. In an instructive instance, he declared:

> *"You do realise the Tibet support group in Durban has their own priorities, when it comes to, you know...spearheading a demonstration in support of Tibet....When I first met some of the TSSA committee members in Durban in 2006, I believe, um...whatever their priorities and agenda may be, I brought out the importance of finding a political situation for Tibet. I mean, the issue of Tibet is, well, it's not simply cultural, it is a political issue, and this is something you can't really escape from...Tibetan Buddhism prevailed, was preserved, unhindered before 1959, because [Tibet] was a free, independent political sovereignty, sovereign nation...today, to regain Tibet, to its original...status...and to preserve Tibetan Buddhism, it is, number one, a political issue – regaining freedom for the Tibetan people, and its nation, is a political issue, a political measure...We cannot really say, 'our society is simply focussing on cultural matters, not political matters...'*

Again, we are lead to the mutual imbrication and co-referentiality of politics and religion. Indeed, attempting to force undue distinctions between the two could be misrepresentative or disingenuous. I realise in retrospect my own subtle assumptions in assessing Tibetan governmentality in exile that drew sustenance from such pigeonholing. Discussing democracy and the Tibetan constitution, I asked Lobsang:

> *I know that the Youth League has said the reason why the non-monk* [from the candidates for the position of Tibetan Prime Minister] *wasn't voted for is because the older generation...doesn't really understand, they're just acting automatically, because they're religious-minded people, and they don't really understand the democratic process, or whatever – I mean, do you feel that the Tibetan people still have a way to go, or is it just more about streamlining the procedu-, is it more technical? Do you feel like Tibetans really have on a deeper level embraced democratic ideas? And it's more...about them getting more used to, just the process? Or is it, some people are saying that there's like an ideological...aspect to it, you know, that Tibetans still think [or] make decisions based on religious factors, as opposed to politic[s] - you know what I mean? Do you think democracy's strong in the hearts, in the minds of Tibetans? Do they need to sort of, learn it more, 'cause some people have said we need to teach, to get it out there more...*

Lobsang emphatically denied that "major decisions were taken on religious factors." More significant, however, was the way in which insidious oppositions of tradition and modernity crowded my questioning, implying that Tibetans either fully assimilated unproblematised Western democratic principles or merely took them up expediently, and remained motivated on some deeper level by some 'customary' Tibetan-ness (the Dalai Lama speaks the language of the United Nations and global democracy and diplomacy convincingly when he needs to, but in the end he remains obsessed with consulting spirit oracles)[28]. Such sentiments pander to dangerous essentialism, and clear the space for theorists such as Nakamura (1971) to avow categorically that "the religious charisma ascribed to a particular personality is more effective in moving the Tibetans than appealing to

[28] It is striking how such ideas and the language of my question construes democratisation as a kind of conversion process, predicated on a thoroughly Christian model of the 'true and sincere believer'. Indeed, provoked by the "show of faith" tenor of my questions, Lobsang felt the need to assure me that he "believe[d] in democratic values". Equally worrying, is how my position smacks of a subtle species of infantilization that is an enduring part of the Western imperialist constitution of the non-Western/Asian other (cf. Anand, 2007: 38-39)

economic interests" (1971: 325). Discussing what he calls this 'discursive dissonance' Mills (2006) responds:

> *It is, perhaps, rather easy to simply put this down to a cynical manipulation of the international media, especially when it comes to the portrayal of the fourteenth Dalai Lama himself: 'easy-going eclecticist in public, draconian theocrat in private' makes for good headlines but bad social analysis. Certainly, some writers on Tibet have interpreted things this way, giving way spectacularly to the 'school of suspicion' model of political interpretation[29]. Others have been more circumspect...Tibetan historian Tsering Shakya has proposed a centrifugal model of diasporic cultural diffusion, arguing that whilst Western discourses of political modernity have permeated the outward looking international discourses of the Tibetan exiled government, they have dramatically failed to influence Tibetan internal governmental relations, and thus 'penetration by Western constructs, whether cultural or political, remains at the margins of Tibetan subjectivity (Shakya, 2001). Shakya's thesis is a tempting one, but does not wholly capture the janus-faced nature of this problem. The truth of the matter is that this discursive imbalance does not simply separate two domains of Tibetan governmental practice – the internal, Tibetan stage and the external, international one. Rather, it often pervades single projects. Thus, His Holiness often gives speeches in favour of World Peace which clearly embody the kind of non-sectarian multi-faith perspective that has characterized Buddhist modernism, and which won him the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989. At the same time, and often on the same day, His Holiness will consecrate Buddhist 'World Peace' monuments whose liturgical purpose has never been anything but the ritual subjugation of the local landscape in which it was built, and the particular local spirits and deities that reside there. The problem here, then, resides in the analysis of social action itself, and the manner in which it interacts or even embodies discursive meaning.*

[29] See Trimondi and Trimondi (2003) for a particularly paranoid and poisonous example.

(201-202, original emphasis)

Reflecting on a meeting that took place between Tibetan CTA representatives and legal experts in connection with a proposed redraft of the Tibetan constitution, French (2001) describes how the parties in question missed each other as they discussed constitutional democracy. That Tibetans could be firmly committed to a democratic administration even as they allowed for a living god-king to oversee and preside over it all left legal professors largely dumbfounded, accustomed as they were to thinking of such political visions as vestiges of a romantic or medieval past. At every moment the Dalai Lama remained for Lobsang and Nyima both a religious and a political icon. Lobsang was able to go from enumerating the various qualities that made the Dalai Lama an exemplary modern statesman, to a vivid account of "one of the most important moments in his life," when the Dalai Lama offered him a piece of birthday cake directly from his own hand. Sanctified through its contact with a living divinity, the food was possessed of such incredible blessing power that Lobsang was speechless with awe and gratitude. In the end what French (2001: 102-103) underscores as she elaborates on the Tibetan institution of sacred-secular rule both historically and reformed in exile, is that even while we can talk alongside Lobsang about Tibetan-ness as first and foremost political, the political vision we are faced with is one that challenges us by its partaking of a "totalising religious cosmology [where] the sacred realm is understood as incorporating the profane world even as it defines its included distinctiveness".

As Kolas (1996: 52) comments:

> *When we set out to study 'politics' or 'religion', we are already making use of categories we assume are relevant, or may be even taken for granted... As pointed out by Nicholas (1973) the Western notion of 'the political' relies on the dichotomy between sacred and secular, or spiritual and temporal. In other words, the political as a secular pursuit is somehow opposed to the sacred or religion. When we are confronted with very different notions about the*

> *political, e.g. in Asia and Africa, we have difficulties explaining these notions. Nicholas (1973: 67) describes a typical reaction to this: 'Culture' is invoked mainly to explain away aberrations from the expected patterns of 'political development' rather than treated as fundamental to an understanding of what politics is conceived to be by the citizens of the new nations.*

While democracy remains a complex issue for Tibetans and their onlookers, it would be fallacious and irresponsible to suggest that democratic processes have been adopted by Tibetans in exile purely for gaining political legitimacy and platform with Western audiences. Rather than obscure or constrain the full scope of Tibetan subjectivities, the implementation of democracy as part of the building of a nationalist identity in exile has become an arena for the promulgation of a range of divergent and contingent positions and interpretations. Too often, demands for the demarcation of the political and the religious are informed by ulterior discourses of modernity and progress, the West and its others. In adjusting their representations (or not) to take account of the shifting priorities of their spectators, room remained for the Tibetans at the Office to express behaviours, motivations, perspectives and desires able to challenge or simply side-step narrow representational orders. Yet, in exploring the creative negotiations that such processes entail, the lure of the 'intrinsically Tibetan' lingers. In the next chapter, I consider where it might lead to indulge such a lure, and see to what theoretical use such results may be put.

CHAPTER FIVE

I squinted at the colourful thumbnails that filled the screen of the laptop balanced on my knees. Sandwiched between my hip and the edge of Nyima's sofa, Tashi peered along with me. "They made a Milarepa hotel," Tashi remarked suddenly referring to a particular tiny image, "I wonder why they did that?" I scrolled down and marvelled at the vagaries of fieldwork. This was definitely not what I thought I would find myself doing in Pretoria. I cast my mind back to a few days before when Nyima had first asked if I could help Tashi with his school project on caves. That first day, when I had found the pictures and information he had initially requested, I had made the joke to Nyima that in Tibet "you might find a few yogis camped out in a cave or two". Without skipping a beat she had endorsed the sentiment, exclaiming simply, "Milarepas!" Alongside the maps, photographs of a blindfish, bat, and drawing of Neanderthals (what Tashi had learned to call "cave-dwellers"), which I placed on Nyima's flashstick, I had included an icon of Milarepa seated in front of his ascetic's cave, thinking to get as much mileage out of the joke as possible, and broaden Tashi's education in the process. The next day, Nyima told me that Tashi was not satisfied with the information he had on one of his three caves, and was keen to write about a Tibetan cave instead. She had discouraged him, she said, since she did not know the names of any, and didn't want him to be penalised for veering away from the famous American and European caves they had covered in class. Still, he had repeated his desire, and now here we were google-image-searching for the only Tibet-related cave (or caves, rather) I could think of, the ones that the legendary yogi Milarepa had spent years of his life meditating and performing miracles in. As we read about Milarepa's life on Wikipedia, encountered websites offering bite-sized translations of his famous visionary songs and poems, and gained glimpses inside impossibly remote painted caves grimy with centuries of incense smoke and the candle wax of untold

votive offerings, I thought about how strange it was, me sitting here, in the tiny sitting-room of a house that was in some sense itself a votive offering, alongside a young refugee who knew more about the Jonas Brothers than the Buddha or the magical exploits of an 11th century Tibetan hermit. As I contrasted one ancient "cave-dweller" with another, and struggled to explain the notion of "enlightenment in one life-time," giant, phantasmal scorpions conjured by black magic and the mechanics of miraculous hand-print relics, I was overcome by a sense of the interconnectedness of the world. I felt myself swell with the pleasure of knowing that I could fill the gaps in Tashi's 'Tibetan education' that I could help in my small way to pass on knowledge connected to the place which he (and I) had never seen, but which stared out at us from the myriad of framed snapshots adorning the walls. My eye caught the small Lonely Planet guide to Tibet resting on the low coffee table before us and I thought about Tashi learning the meaning of his name under its brief section on 'culture and etiquette' – a tourist to one's own culture. Meditating on diasporic novelties and the peculiarities of Tibet.com, I was glad (and perhaps a little proud) that I had at least enough bookish knowledge to be of service to Tashi. I pointed out a thumbnail of the current and 17th Karmapa (the spiritual head of the sect of which Milarepa is one of the founding luminaries) to Tashi, gesturing to the framed picture of the reincarnate lama positioned alongside that of the Dalai Lama on top of the TV. I waited for Tashi to respond, and pointed again. Tashi looked at me simply, gravely. "You mustn't point, you must do like this," he said after a moment, and opening his palm upwards and directing his outstretched fingers towards the lama's portrait, demonstrated the proper etiquette for gesturing at religious icons. I felt like an imbecile. "Oh! Ja, sorry, I know, I should have rememb- that is very rude of me!" Thankfully, he did not seem overly perturbed.

I however, was. In an instant, my self-satisfied pedagogic musings felt hollow. A second ago puffed up with my own educational value, so convinced that the classic ethnographic arrangement of 'expert native,' ill-informed fieldworker was out the window, I was forcibly reminded of the learning that could not be had in books. For all the disruptions of a life in exile, for all the paradoxes of

continuity, here was the difference between knowing about and knowing how - visceral, unspoken, embodied Tibetan-ness. For indeed, though I might have known conceptually about the finer points of Vajrayana ('Diamond vehicle') doctrine and Tantric hagiography better than he, the reverential guru-centred relationship at the heart of these, I reasoned, was for Tashi an intimately embodied reality. But before letting the flush of this ethnographic epiphany fully overwhelm me, I hesitated. Even if this was so, then surely his knowing how to hold the rickety LAN cable inside the laptop port just the right way so that the icon he thought resembled a diamond (– a very different 'Diamond vehicle'!) appeared in the bottom right-hand corner of the screen to signify a solid internet connection, was just as real and significant a part of his embodied knowledge as a Tibetan exile making do with the limited resources at his disposal of his everyday bodily knowledge as a young refugee whose sense of community was largely powered by long-distance telephony and google?

I clicked on another link at Tashi's behest, thoughts reeling.

Milarepa strikes again...

Having considered in the previous chapter pre-meditated and strategic displays of Tibetan-ness, I move now to examine the feasibility of a different kind of Tibetan identity, arguably suggested by the first. My second-guessing and deliberations over how to interpret the opening incident with Milarepa and the Karmapa serve as a lead-in into this enterprise, permitting me the scope to critically flesh out the contours of a hypothetical diasporic Tibetan identity. Could it be, I ask, that there is indeed some Tibetan-ness that goes beyond a strategically performed ethnicity? If so, where might it be located? Perhaps it lies in moments such as those described – in Tashi's embodied deference to the lama, in Nyima's virtually knee-jerk utterance of a mantra as she leans back in her desk chair, stretches and yawns? Such moments promise something more unconscious, more visceral, something less politicised than pre-prepared speeches and 'traditional garb', less glamorous

and more everyday. They suggest philosopher Nakamura's (1971) proposed outline of a Tibetan 'way of thinking' with its crowning emphasis on religious charisma, and speak to phenomenological trends that privilege the analytic importance of that which is everyday, embodied - the stuff of habitus. They point possibly to a uniquely Tibetan philosophy and praxis of 'liberation through the senses' that though an example of 'naive sensualism,' the 'rattling off of prayers', nonetheless constitutes far more than mere lay superstition and empty ritualism, being a full-fledged 'soteriological cycle', an elaborated technology for 'destroying the discursive awareness' and generating 'borderline experiences' (Tokarska-Bakir, 2000). Signs of such a technology seem ever-present in the data – in the fluttering of prayer flags that crowded the branches of the trees outside Nyima's window, in the mantras displayed prominently in her home, in the ubiquity of the Dalai Lama and other divine personages' portraits around the property, in the foods Nyima preferred to eat, in the manner in which she managed Tashi's religious education. This other Tibetan-ness is beguiling for the apparent depths of its earnestness and authenticity, in the way that it does not seem to be performed for anyone in particular, and for how I, the anthropologist, have been smart and attentive enough to intuit its existence.

But here again, a green-skinned Milarepa, right hand notched quizzically behind one ear, materialises to spoil the punch-line. Am I falling into an orientalising trap, hungry for hidden depths and mystery? Am I, I wonder, determined to overplay the presence of ingrained religious impulses in Tashi – indeed, who really was it that needed to talk about Milarepa, him or me? No mistake, Tashi exhibited undeniable enthusiasm for finding out about Tibet and presenting the information to his class, an enthusiasm that was largely self-motivated and unabetted. Still, as much as I can read his gesture as indicative of a deeply felt, 'behind the scenes' Tibetan-ness, it is too simplistic, too convenient to imagine this as some kind of timeless genetic essence that warrants no further comment once its contours have been called into daylight and newly focused.

In attending to the presence and immediacy of sacred images, of important words and gestures in this chapter, I nod provisionally in the direction of a kind of Tibetan habitus, towards what Marcel Mauss long ago (1973) dubbed the everyday 'techniques of the body'. Initially, I intended for this to be a highly speculative chapter about a particular, tacit, uniquely Tibetan style of parenting – an approach to transmitting 'tradition' and values predicated more on indirect exposure, exemplification and 'presence' than on active instruction and educational imposition or dictation. I mulled over whether a case could be made that what initially seemed a kind of disinterested, laissez-faire attitude to raising children could in fact be of a piece with a deep and subtle Tibetan sensory logic, itself a vital undercurrent in long-standing Tibetan religious traditions. For all I know, there may be something to this – the problem of limited data, however, rules out any firm opinion on the matter. But what is more compelling, perhaps, is my own readiness to ascribe my observations to less mundane factors, or my sense that whatever possible conclusions could be made about these sorts of parent-child relationships, they did in fact warrant explanation in terms of cultural difference, and further, exotic and somehow timeless spiritual dispositions.

In her diachronic survey of Sherpa-mountaineer relations, Ortner (1999) seeks a middle ground between self-referential symbolic analyses in anthropology interested in the cataloguing of cosmologies, and sociological studies of history, domination and power. She discerns in Sherpa rituals and the particular negotiations with non-human entities they entail the embodiment and activation of a kind of Sherpa agency that, while strongly informed by a broad Tibetan Tantric sensibility (a distinct way of knowing and interacting with the world, a cosmology) moves and responds to power and structural exigencies in space-and-time. Sherpa habitus (as enshrined in ritualised forms of comportment in relation to figures of power (be they mountain, monk or mountaineer) shows itself to be both enduring *and* flexible in the face of new demands and relationships - through its influence, the interests of mountaineers are subtly incorporated and re-positioned to fit with Sherpa priorities. In such a scheme, concerned though it may be with such

customary and long-feted anthropological interests as ritual and the relations between humanity and divinity, tradition and innovation lose their categorical impact; the dividing lines between structure and agency, continuity and rupture become less certain. And yet, perhaps what is most ironic about habitus is how, though it has its provenance in inevitable processes of accommodation to change and disruption, though it may have started its life as a strategic response in the face of life's capriciousness, it ends by disowning the inconstancy tied up in its very nature – in short, it conceals its own historicity. Focusing on what I perceived as natural and 'homely' in my Tibetan friends lives[30], I argue that these examples encourage us to speculate on questions of identity in the face of what might be called habituated itinerancy, where the impact of novel histories and contexts become undeniable.

Chubbas not required: Surface and Depth Culture

Expounding on the relationship between culture and landscape during an interview with Wendy Singer, the Dalai Lama demonstrates a particular understanding of the relationship between 'external' and 'internal' manifestations of culture and identity:

> *"Some Americans have altered their culture. They become interested in Buddhism. Let's say Zen Buddhism. And this is a good thing.... Japanese Buddhism, Chinese Buddhism, whatever. Many of them travel to Japan, for example, to learn more. Then they return to California and build a Japanese house. But you don't need a Japanese house to practice Zen Buddhism.... A different climate, different way of life, so no need for the culture to transfer."*
>
> (Singer, 2003: 233)

[30] Passes and Overing's (2000) strong case for the study of the everyday in the context of Amazonian anthropology is germane here. Necessarily, I draw predominantly on my time spent socialising with Nyima and Tashi, as well as with Tsering and her family in what follows. I am aware that in doing so I risk re-affirming a regrettable gender-bias that sometimes creeps into otherwise exemplary critical evaluations of the private-public, domestic-political divides.

Singer (2003) remarks further that:

> *"The Dalai Lama uses this example to illustrate what he calls the "outside" manifestations of culture, of which architecture is a salient example. In this case, he is arguing that knowing and practicing the principles of Buddhism is more important than producing symbolic representations of Japanese or even Buddhist culture. In addition, he is commenting that external culture should be and is connected to the local environment. He views these characteristics of culture i.e., art, environment, cuisine-as less important to propagate than internal Buddhist qualities, such as compassion or nonviolence."* (233)

Moreover, in his interviews with Singer and elsewhere[31], the Dalai Lama asserts the existence of certain fundamental unique pan-Tibetan qualities or tendencies, which go beyond but are largely parallel with Buddhist particulars. Tibetans, though "physically quite small," are a naturally "non-violent," "compassionate" and "self-disciplined" people, whose inherent proclivities were only enhanced by the transportation of Buddhism into the country (Singer, 2003). As the mythic progeny of the patron Bodhisattva of Tibet and Buddha of Compassion Chenresig (Tib. *spyan-ras-gzigs*) the Dalai Lama indicates that Tibetans enjoy a special covenant or karmic connection with the deity, which accounts in part for their unique "inner strength" in the face of adversity.

My deliberations over Tashi's pointing are arguably in line with His Holiness's cosmogonic musings, calling attention to the centrality of embodied relationships between human and non- or super-human beings in constructions of Tibetan personhood. To be sure, a number of incidents spring to mind to support this notion. When babysitting Chokyi, Nyima, usually so reticent when Tashi asked her about religious matters, repeatedly directed Chokyi's attention to the prayer-flags in the garden, emblazoned with various divinities. At one point, Chokyi found a small bracelet of blue stone beads in Nyima's living room and began playing with it. Again and again, I watched Nyima take the beads

[31] See for instance discussions in Laird (2006)

gently from Chokyi's hands and tell them, muttering one Chenresig mantra[32] for each bead that passed between her thumb and forefinger in a deliberate gesture of demonstration. Later, she fetched one of her longer rosaries to give to Chokyi, and sat with the bracelet next to the baby in her stroller quietly thumbing and chanting. The gaze and exemplary, blessing presence of divine beings, and especially His Holiness, was ubiquitous in and around the Office: the Dalai Lama beamed out from photographs on walls where he walked arm in arm with former president Nelson Mandela, he graced calendars, stickers stuck on computer screens, spines on bookshelves, and his small, smiling portrait even peered at me when I used the guest-room toilet. Truly, as Anand (2000: 282) attests, the centrality of the figure of the Dalai Lama in unifying the Tibetan people, in concretising and lending coherence to particular notions of Tibetan personhood cannot be overstated.

Nyima told me how grateful she was to the administration for providing her with schooling as a refugee. She felt she couldn't compare her education then to what her children were receiving, "back then we don't know so much, there isn't the choice like now...I just wanted to finish school and start working." While in some ways working for the CTA was simply the easiest option, on another level her entire career was an act of service to the Dalai Lama (and through him, all Tibetans); a debt to be repaid: "You know, His Holiness, he has given me all this, this opportunity, when my parents have nothing." The Dalai Lama's role as Nyima's boss thus blended seamlessly with the 'guru yoga' sort of relationship that she intimated, where the dynamic exchange of gazes

[32] The six-syllable mantra Om Mani Padme Hum is specifically associated with Chenresig, the Buddha of Compassion and primordial progenitor and protector of the Tibetan people, of whom the Dalai Lama is an embodiment. In some ways then, the chant could be thought of as the 'national' mantra of Tibet (it was prominently displayed in Nyima's home alongside a number of framed portraits of the 14th Dalai Lama). As a kind of synecdoche for a longed for homeland *and* as a means of generating compassion and evoking the deity, Nyima clearly thought it important to 'transmit' it to Chokyi, who though too young to even speak coherent words in any language, could only benefit from familiarity with it.

through ritual activity (which possibly widens here to include doing book-keeping for the CTA) contributes to particular constructions and transformations of self[33].

But covenant or contract with Chenresig or not, religious or cultural predispositions cannot be truly timeless and innate. They must be fostered and 'lived', and they thus prove frequently open-ended and contentious. Ideas promulgated by the Dalai Lama of a genetic Tibetan-ness characterised by co-incidentally Buddhist virtues is of course complicated by the long and illustrious military history of the pre-Buddhist Tibetan empire, just as much as it is by the reality of human foibles and everyday life and its desires and frustrations. The Dalai Lama's particular spin on Tibetan history factors in the complications of a quest for nationalist unification within a heterogenous exile population; in appealing to qualities of non-violence and compassion as pan-Tibetan and para-Buddhist it naturalises, makes inevitable even, a particular brand of political activism (if not way of life) for all Tibetans. To borrow Bourdieu's phrasing, 'habitus is history turned into nature'. Despite longstanding norms of guru-yoga and reverence for religious figures, the current Dalai Lama's position is unprecedented in the history of his institution. Moreover, the adjustments Nyima made to her style of religious deference arose in light of new interpretations of Tibetan history and govermentality in exile aiming to downplay sectarian and regional differences (Mills, 2006). No matter how deep-rooted and culturally distinct Tibetan responses may seem, they are just that – responses to the demands of changing circumstances that can prove in their own ways just as strategic and context-specific as any other.

[33] Indeed, the extent to which one could be *bodily* (re)constituted through the mutual entanglement of gazes and iconic 'presences' can be seen in the anxiety that Nyima and Lobsang, as well as local Buddhist practitioners, expressed when they heard that I had unwittingly participated in a Dorje Shukden puja with a NKT group in Cape Town. "Are you alright?" everyone seemed to want to know. When His Holiness "told her" in the 1990s about Dorje Shukden, Nyima took down all the icons of various gurus she had had displayed in her home. Non-sectarian, and having received teachings and empowerments from a range of teachers, from a range of schools, Nyima could no longer be sure that certain teaching lineages weren't compromised by association with the "Dorje Shukden people". She could not risk that their sheer presences harm her well-being or transform her into "someone else".

Career-girl or Cave-dweller? Depression in Diaspora

During a lunchtime tea at the Office, Tsering described how when she was a teenager she went through a protracted period of depression, instigated by what might be called a conflict of subjectivities. Finishing high school she entered into the working world, and began a three year period of 'apprenticeship' at various companies, which saw her developing her accounting and secretarial skills. She described the model for occupational progress prevalent in Switzerland: having studied and achieved a certain level of qualification, young people started working for a company that matched their skills and stayed there, easily sustaining themselves on more often than not ample salaries. All the same, securing and holding down a job in Switzerland still required a certain amount of ambition, competitiveness and aggressive self-promotion. These and other skills required 'to make it' in the job market flew in the face, however, of the specifically 'Tibetan' way of life and values that Tsering's family had emphasised when she was growing up: "not to chase after material things, not to put yourself in the spotlight, yourself first, not to talk back." Feeling incapable of reconciling these competing priorities, Tsering could not imagine how to be both a 'good Tibetan' and a financially and socially successful young career woman. Paralysed between two seemingly incommensurable and competing ideals of personhood and proper conduct, she found herself disillusioned and filled with angst. "Nothing made sense...I didn't care about people anymore, about what they wanted from me, everything...I wanted to be a nun, go and live in a cave in India." Friends tried to offer her advice, but in the end the problem cleared in its own time: "Your friends can give you a lot of advice – there were these Buddhist teachings, they often went to them, about how to be Buddhist, to meditate and fit it in with the rest of your life, and they tried to give me advice. I could understand what they were saying, but it has to click inside, just for you. Then it just clicked, and I realised just let it be."

Tsering's desire to escape from social networks and demands, her disillusionment and urge to renounce worldly matters was in some ways a strangely Tibetan response. Interestingly, what she

initially sought to resolve through transcendence or erasure, was finally resolved through a profound embodiment of these two worlds, through her 'never-would-have-guessed' marriage to Michael and by giving birth to a child who in some ways bridges these two universes. Generally speaking, Tsering characterised young Tibetans in Switzerland as finding it difficult to express their anger in ways that squared with familial and broader social expectations of appropriate peaceable Tibetan behaviour. Tsering's observations dovetail with Yeh and Lama's (2006) account of intergenerational tensions around appropriate forms of Tibetan habitus in the American immigrant context, where Tibetan teens' appropriation of African-American hip-hop styles of dress, address and music as a form of self-expression is seen as jeopardising the Tibetan cause, where paradoxically, despite the low ranking their socio-economic position assigns them in the spectrum of 'American racial bipolarism', Tibetans have been 'whitened' through staying close to "discursive practices...making them seem particularly worthy and deserving of sponsorship" (2006, 809). Habitus thus connects strongly with considerations of the previous chapter regarding audiences, expectations and instrumental ethnic performances.[34]

On Being Many Places at Once: Telling where Home is

[34] An incident with Tashi, too springs to mind. During a conversation initiated by the image of a Tantric deity on a wall calendar in Nyima's house:

> *"Sometimes those gods come in my dreams." "What happens in the dreams?" "They tell me things, the answers for my test, but I'm not sure all of them are the right answers." I have no time to reflect on Tashi's last pronouncement. "Was the Buddha a man?" Tashi asks. I launch into a pithy summary of the religious founders career. After chatting for a while Tashi says, looking again to the calendar in the corner: "My friend says that god, the one with the four arms, isn't real. He says I mustn't believe in the gods and Buddha. He says Buddha is just a person." I groan inwardly, mulling over how to explain Christian chauvinism to Tashi.*

The idea of 'wrong answers' is interesting here. The gods who appear to Tashi to frighten and confuse him in his dreams with their heavy-handed offerings of help with his schoolwork (not to mention his growing awareness of opposing religious paradigms through school and his neighbour) point perhaps to a sense of competing obligations reminiscent of Tsering's account.

These anecdotes speak to Brah's (1996) notion of Diaspora as indicative of "processes *of multi-locationality across geographical, cultural and psychic boundaries*" (196, original emphasis). Coming into Nyima's home, the more I sought to examine what I thought was local, private, domestic and outside the realm of the political, the more I found myself in the midst of spaces that defied easy definition as local or global, and the more the influence of external authoritative gazes and complex intersectionalities emerged. Much as Prost (2003) describes the Tibetan cultural hub in exile Dharamsala as a paragon of postmodernity, Nyima's home was equally "satisfying...to postmodern sensibilities" (no page number). Her TV unit that picked up local stations, Al-Jazeera and an Indian satellite channel, religious photo-icons, the weird detritus of former inhabitants (an Australian curio, an African 'ethnic' key holder, a Jewish hamsa charm, and prominent Lilo and Stitch poster, discarded European cookbooks and Readers Digest fare),Tibetan flag, numerous photographs of her family on vacations around the world, German origami book from Tsering and Michael, Lonely Planet guide to Tibet, Tin Tin comics all alluded to complex trajectories and exchanges through which her and Tashi's identity came to be constituted, and described a space in which Tashi could appreciate Milarepa's iconic yoga-pose as both something special and Tibetan and reminiscent of another cultural hero of his, Michael Jackson. Peeking into a tiny grotto in the mountains of Tibet through the screen of a laptop, he could conclude that maybe Milarepa "is still alive, his spirit is in his poem and in his statue that people visit" - things whose continuing iconic impact he encountered now by means of a compression of time and space that brought far-flung periods and places into striking co-incidence.

Just as Tibetan-ness evaded location in any one particular space and time, so too did the Tibetans themselves. As Nyima put it, she "had no home". Owning neither land nor property of her own, she had spent much of her life renting accommodation cheaply from the CTA. As an employee, she was accustomed to moving around a lot and settling in places for indeterminate periods through transfers largely, if not entirely, outside of her control. If anything, the transnational, bureaucratic

space of the Office was her 'true' home. In many ways this transnational space both facilitated and went beyond the 'nationalist territory' created in cyberspace by CTA websites and popular online forums. The broad networks and 'audiences' that such technologies promoted during the Office birthday event, for instance, (where Tsering's mother was able to castigate her from Switzerland one or two days after the proceedings for using notes while singing the national anthem, after having seen damning photographs of the event uploaded on a prominent website) operated through a kind of simultaneity that collapsed familiar local/global binaries. Appealing to this sort of simultaneity in the context of transnational pro-Tibet political activity, Davies (2009 24), drawing on actor-network theory and new developments in the ethnography of space, calls along with Hart (2004) for a re-reading of 'place' as not 'local' but as something that "reaches across space in unknown ways," and for a networked, relational ethnography capable of better accounting for multi-sited processes and "how information unfolds from a place/event." (Davies, 2009, 24)

Referencing Malki's (1994, 41) argument that the dominant imagination of the international community is not a cosmopolitan or supranational world but "an international one, a world where *globality is understood to be constituted by interrelations among discreet 'nations'* " (41, original emphasis), Anand (2003, 224) comments on how Tibetans have "had to appropriate the hegemonic language of sovereignty, autonomy, and nationalism to make their case" and adds that "the significance of this play between nationalism, internationalism, and transnationalism within Tibetan diasporic identity cannot be underestimated." However, Nyima's avowed homelessness and Lobsang, Michael and Tsering's openness to the possibility and advantage of multiple citizenship and the viability and meaningfulness of multiple homes ties in with Hess's (2006) account of the backward and forward transnational movements that typify Tibetan nationalism in exile, where over the last fifty years a strong sense of Tibetan nationalist identity has been maintained without being irrevocably fixed to any particular location or 'home'. Despite Clifford's (1994) authoritative claims that "p*ositive articulations of diaspora identity reach outside the normative territory and temporality*

(myth/history) of the nation-state" (307) Hess demonstrates how strategic mobilisations of citizenship and belonging lend Tibetans the freedom to engage with transnational activist networks to nationalist ends. And still, *"whatever their ideologies of purity, diasporic cultural forms can never, in practice, be exclusively nationalist. They are deployed in transnational networks built from multiple attachments, and they encode practices of accommodation with, as well as resistance to, host countries and their norms."*(Clifford, 1994, 307) Furthermore:

> *in claiming both autochthony and a specific, transregional worldliness, new tribal forms bypass an opposition between rootedness and displacement-an opposition underlying many visions of modernization seen as the inevitable destruction of autochthonous attachments by global forces. Tribal groups have, of course, never been simply "local": they have always been rooted and routed in particular landscapes, regional and interregional networks.* (309-310)

Eating exile

A focus on deep-rooted practices and habitus thus leads us to a consideration of the routes implicit in their very development. Nyima's almost daily anecdotes to me about her food preferences powerfully captured this strange marriage between an ostensibly fixed identity and the constant movement from which it arose. Though Nyima's mother had made Tibetan cuisine while she was growing up in India, it was easy and convenient to absorb Indian dietary habits. Both she and Tashi enjoyed Tibetan food like momos (dumplings), but making the roasted barley flour or *rtsampa* required to prepare the dish was mostly too difficult and time-consuming. The strong association of *rtsampa* with Tibetan identity notwithstanding (Dreyfus, 2005; Shakya, 1999), on a regular basis, Nyima preferred to eat foods she was used to having in (principally North) India, simple fare like rice, noodles, curried lentils, beans, spinach, potatoes and small amounts of chicken and beef. The fruits and vegetables she opted for were fresh and what was familiar to her from India – she steered clear

of canned foods entirely being used in Dharamsala to buying her vegetables freshly harvested from travelling vendors, and demonstrated extreme suspicion and displeasure in the face of foodstuffs she had never before encountered, such as sweet potatoes and asparaguses. Her absolute panic in the face of a local menu populated with such alien items as 'mayonnaise', 'tramezzinis' and 'bacon bits' on the one occasion when we ate out together, suggested that Nyima's dietary habitus, her choice to maintain a conservative palate was an important response to a life of habituated itinerary. Nyima's eating habits connected her to a Tibetan identity and life in Dharamsala, but one (like the place itself, whose name refers to a 'temporary resting place' for pilgrims) that was still in some way pragmatic and provisional. When suffering from minor ailments she would do what she could to get friends and family to send Tibetan remedies from India, but this was largely pointless, since by the time these arrived in the mail, her sinus problems or headaches would have resolved themselves, or she would have turned to more immediately accessible local treatments. Like Tsering and Tashi then, her Tibetan habitus emerged as a strategic mixture of accommodations and retentions.

Elaborating on 'key concepts in social anthropology' in their entry for 'Home and Homelessness' Rapport and Overing (2000) take classic, neat formulations of 'home' to task. Thinking of homes, they contend, "as being synonymous, in microcosm, with Durkheimian notions of solidary communities and coercive institutions... is anachronistic." Like Ross (2005), I take up the challenge provided by Rapport and Overing's cross-references to entries on 'Irony' and 'Movement' in light of my data. It becomes clear that even the most rooted gestures and propensities respond to contextual pressures. Knowing how to tie a chubba may be a pivotal part of Tibetan-ness at one moment and at another representative of non-essential 'external' culture. And yet, while the Dalai Lama tells us that Americans need not built Tibetan temples in California, Tibetan lamas continue to set up traditional structures with the help of sponsors at religious centres on foreign soil.

Becoming Tibetan and the problem with essences

An ironic dimension of these internalisations and embodiments rests in the peculiar tension between permanence and impermanence, between stable and contingent selves they evince. While daily mantra recitations to generate compassion could be seen as examples of a Foucault-ian type of cultivation of self, this perspective is complicated by the fact that the ultimate end of these practices is to realise a self ultimately empty of enduring substance, an expansive state of being that arguably runs counter to the finalities of contemporary identity politics. Likewise, Nyima's dietary decisions point to a Tibetan-ness in the interim, just as Tashi and Tsering's Tibetan-ness even in its most visceral dimensions arises as a travelling concept, a set of negotiated practices and dispositions that 'click into place' peripatetically . As a result, Tibetan-ness can be thought of as a becoming in the Deleuzian sense[35], built out of dynamic and embodied 'circulations of affect' where, in mapping its own contours,

> *...the trajectory merges not only with the subjectivity of those who travel through a milieu, but also with the subjectivity of the milieu itself, insofar as it is reflected in those who travel through. The map expresses the identity of the journey and what one journeys through. It merges with its object, when the object itself is movement.*
>
> (Deleuze, 1997: 61)

Writing these words in relation to maps and children's categorisation of experience, Deleuze's comments usefully frame the significance of Tashi's drawings, which when not concerned with warfare, tended to portray idyllic Himalayan topographies. One full-page A4 colour drawing showed a picturesque landscape, with high snowy mountain peaks off to the left upper corner, a forest of green trees, a lake in the lower left hand corner and a hill off to the right end. Small rustic houses, and tents, with stylised yaks dotted the environment. The whole picture was filled with small stick

[35] Deleuze and Guattari (1996)

people, climbing mountains, wandering fields, standing by the fish filled lake and so on. "Where is it?" I asked, "Tibet?" "Sort of" Tashi replied. Paging through his drawing book, he then showed me images of a "Chinese tank", coloured green with an uncoloured five-point star emblazoned on it; an angry crescent moon and sun "fighting"; a boy with carrots growing out of his eyes; a moustached man; and a up-close face of a bug. We might suggest that the picture(s) was an expression of Tibetan-ness for Tashi not for its representation of any particular landscape, but in the very fact of it being an indefinite environment spelling out a cartography 'both extensive and intensive'. "What concerns the libido what the libido invests, presents itself with an indefinite article," (Deleuze, 1997: 65) tells us. He qualifies:

> *the indefinite lacks nothing; above all, it does not lack determination," he explains that this determination is "the determination of becoming, its characteristic power, the power of an impersonal that is not a generality but a singularity at its highest point. For example, I do not become the horse, any more than I imitate this or that horse, but I become a horse by reaching a zone of proximity where I can no longer be distinguished from what I am becoming.* (65).

Narrating his drawings to himself and me in emotive, highly embodied ways, and playing with a medley of indefinite images that gestured at an imagined Tibetan landscape, Tashi was 'becoming Tibetan,' "through the trajector[ies] that turn the imaginary into a becoming." (65)

Discussing legal debates surrounding the nature of Mashpee ethnic identity Clifford (1988) highlights points equally relevant to the Tibetan case:

> *Metaphors of continuity and "survival" do not account for complex historical processes of appropriation, compromise, subversion, masking, invention and revival. These processes inform the activities of a people not living alone but "reckoning itself among the nations". The Indians at Mashpee made and remade themselves through specific alliances,*

negotiations and struggles. It is just as problematic to say that their way of life "survived" as to say that it "died" and "was reborn". (340)

Acknowledging the difficulties involved in demonstrating an ethnic identity that shows "recurring vitality but no unimpeachable essence or institutional core," Clifford (1988) draws our attention to cultural identity "as a real but essentially contested phemonenon" (340). In Clifford's case, the jury had to find firm evidence of an objectifiable identity through time, and the everyday, largely silent, variable and barely articulated 'bits and pieces' of Indian life could not be taken into account, could not prove persuasive in the face of the need for legislative finality. Neither the lawyer for the plaintiff or the defendant, Clifford tells us, made room for "the possibility of a group existing discontinuously, keeping open multiple paths, being *both* Indian *and* American" (341). My own examples above (while strikingly different to the Mashpee given the comparatively strong 'institutional cores' and historical continuities of language, custom and the like that would make Tibetan ethnic identity stand up far better in court) attempt equally to underscore some of the contentious ways in which Tibetans keep open such multiple pathways through processes of ongoing becoming that are "absolutely real" but which are not "*fundamentally a …certain number of characteristics"* but rather constituted by movement, open-ended interactions, circulations and exchanges (Deleuze and Guattari, 1996: 239). Such becomings (whether effected through transformative exchanges with iconic presences, menu negotiations, or crayons to paper) are complex assemblages that do not operate through filiation, but are creative and involutionary[36].

In characterising creative negotiations of Tibetan-ness thus, I have sought to move away in this chapter from a strict focus on rehearsed ethnic performance and pre-established rituals of nationalist identity, shifting emphasis from questions of location to issues of locomotion. This does

[36] "That is, they cannot claim some sort of serial link to an object or image which they resemble either more or less. Rather there is another process that is in play, a process of *alliance*... carried out by a form of folding activity, in which connections, networks of involvement and intertwining are the methods in an activity that is not an evolution but rather what Deleuze calls an involution" (Lee, 2002, 5)

not of course imply that strategic essentialisms, nationalist politics and claims made on the basis of ethnic particularity and entitlement to land go out the window or ought to be belittled, but rather that, as Battaglia (1999) informs us, in the rough and tumble of everyday life:

> *Especially in the light of the spiritual, the struggle for identity reveals itself as based in claiming a distinctive moral order, rather than in maintaining national, ethnic, or other sorts of mappable boundaries. It is in the terms of such moral claims that we are enjoined to seek (using Clifford Geertz's crucial formation) "models of and models for" un rapport à soi. That is, we must seek such models in the aesthetics of engagement of local and global, particular and collective formations of self that have as much to do with generating an enabling and purposive ambiguity as of creating enduring profiles and structures.* (119)

In order to consider how we might take up this challenge, allow for 'enabling and purposive ambiguity' while still taking proper account of the nonetheless crucial creation of 'enduring profiles and structures' possessing enough specificity to serve and legitimate definite political goals, I turn now to my final chapter, where I propose my own model 'for' un rapport à soi and notion of cultural identity.

CHAPTER SIX

L: Representation...In this fifty years [1959 to 2009] of journey, Tibetans are represented, not simply by the look of the people, but because of their culture, namely religion, so Tibetan Buddhism has become the face of the Tibetan people, and it is represented everywhere. This must be considered as a big achievement, and, I suppose...many European, Western countries...those who know Tibetan Buddhism, or Buddhist culture, can represent Tibetan culture much better than those who either know half, or not at all. In the movies, that's different because movies are based on a story, sometimes it could be trying to represent a character [or] characteristics [of Tibet] prior to [19]59, looking at their faces, how they dress, the shabby dresses, the dirty look, that they had, and, you're sitting here in 2009 trying to look back, seventy years, a hundred years, and it would be unfair to comment on it. You look at the movie – let's say 'Samsara', it's done by a European film – [it's] based on a story, perhaps the people who made it wanted non-Tibetan Buddhists, non-Tibetans, or [those] who aspire to become Buddhists to understand the concept, and, and what better way to do than have it in the form of a movie? It may not be liked by a Tibetan person –

B: Do you know if the film was liked by Tibetans?

L: I don't know. You know, some Tibetans may not like it, many portions [of the film] may be liked by the Tibetan people, maybe [a] few portions, they may not like it –

B: What portions might those be?

L: I don't know, just saying. But then, that is because they are Tibetan and they know what it [Buddhism] is. So, for them, [it's] something that they don't want to see. But, for a non-Tibetan, to

understand the Buddhist concept, the makers, felt it important, to have it shown in the film...So, I think the purpose depends on your intention and the objective of the film.

B: Makes me think about that idea of skilful means, that there might not necessarily be one, true way of representing some information, because you've got to be aware of your audience and how you teach them, and how you frame it...

L: Right. Take the case of Lobsang Rampa's books[37] *–*

B: Oh! I'm glad you brought that up, because some people first read Lobsang Rampa, and that was their first exposure to the Tibetan issue –

L: Credit to Lobsang Rampa, even though he was not a Tibetan. Thanks to him, at least, what we can say [is that] he was able to create awareness, maybe through his books, through his interpretations of Tibetan Buddhism, ok, people got to know about Tibet and they wanted to know more, ask more questions: 'Where is this mysterious land?', 'why, how do the people behave in this way?', 'how can they mysteriously act in this way?'. More and more questions came up, and he began writing more and more, as a result...how rich he became I don't know, but, I think one of [Rampa's] objective[s] was to let people know there is a country called Tibet and there is a tradition called Tibetan Buddhism, and trying to educate a non-Buddhist, a non-Tibetan. So, I think, money may not be the prime objective in his case, although he wanted money, he required money, he also got money, I think. But then, back in his mind, that may have been secondary.

B: I heard that he really did believe that he had the spirit of a Tibetan lama that he was in communication with at least – 'cause, you know, a lot of people said to him, when they found out

[37] Claiming to be a Tibetan lama inhabiting the body of an English plumber of Irish extraction, Lobsang ('Tuesday') Rampa was the author of a number of popular books on the subject of Tibet, the first of which, his allegedly autobiographical novel *The Third Eye* (1956), Lobsang had partially read some years previously. At once lurid and matter-of-fact, his account of miracle-working monks, psychic powers and yetis begins with the words: "I am a Tibetan. One of the few who have reached this strange Western world" (1956: 9). While Rampa and his work was unanimously denounced as inauthentic and despite Rampa's own admission that he had never visited Tibet, he enjoyed positive reviews from the press and retained a large and loyal following.

that he was a non-Tibetan who had never even left England, it obviously looked quite bad for him, but he said, "No, well, I'm actually, you know, letting my body be used by the 'soul' of a Tibetan, or whatever – I dunno, some of his followers still continue to believe that – But I suppose what you're saying is it doesn't really matter in the end about those details, what matters is the results of his books –

L: Yes

B: - how they generated interest...Ok...So, you don't feel like there's a strong need...It doesn't matter if people represent Tibetans in their own ways, as long as it ultimately serves Tibetan people...?

L: No what I'm trying to say is I don't mind, non-Tibetans trying to represent Tibetans or Tibet, if they are based on facts, figures and [are] true to its history, historical facts. And these I think are very important factors that one must keep in mind when trying to represent Tibet and Tibet[an] people, by non-Tibetans.

(Excerpt from interview with Lobsang, 2009)

Roots and Routes: Skilful identities and the Post-structuralist Dilemma

The above excerpt from an interview with Lobsang draws attention to the existence of contrasting rhetorics of identity that surface pointedly in this dissertation. On the one hand, we are directed towards the possibility of a somehow essential identity, an ethnic profile corroborated by 'historical facts' and 'figures'. On the other hand, we are also alerted to representations of Tibetan identity which owe much to the imagination of outsiders, which may not be appreciated by every Tibetan, and intriguingly – in spite of, if not because of their straying from 'facts and figures' - prove expedient in furthering Tibetans' political agendas. We are reminded here of Lopez's (1998) qualms about the Dalai Lama's representations of Tibetans and Tibet for international, non-Tibetan audiences , representations Lopez characterises as being as strategically 'imaginative' as Lobsang

does those of Lobsang Rampa. The apparent contradiction between Lobsang's willingness to give 'credit' to Rampa's theosophically influenced descriptions (as well as to speculate approvingly regarding Rampa's sources) and his closing statements concerning the importance of staying true to 'historical facts' returns us to tensions implicit in the notion of instrumental identity. Throughout chapters four and five I have interrogated and problematised the implications and feasibility of any easy division between 'true' or conclusive Tibetan-ness and expediently mobilised representations. Whether in the context of public and blatantly political speeches or the 'private' gestures of everyday life, I have shown how the Tibetan identities of my informants are best understood as contingent and dialectical. Emerging through encounter and exchange and adapting to different audiences and expectations, they put the lie to overly essentialist renderings of cultural identity.

Following Anand (2000; 2003), I value the theoretical and methodological productivity of a 'roots and routes' approach in accounting for contemporary Tibetan identities in diaspora. Like Anand with his stress on the 'creative negotiations' and ongoing processes involved in producing Tibetan identities, I recognise the need for a 'deconstructive attitude' to be harmonised with an appreciation of an 'agential politics of identity' (2003: 223). Still, this sort of corrective strategy, for all its usefulness, offers no sure escape from the futile loop of Latour's critical trick. As we have seen, if we become over-zealous in ascribing agency and creative freedom to our subjects so as to mitigate our anti-fetishist indulgences, we can expect petitions for the hard realities of structure, for the weight of determination, as reprisal. In the interests of getting beyond this critical dead-lock, I propose a way of thinking about cultural identity that borrows from the Buddhist notion of *upāya(kauśalya)*[38] or 'skilful means'[39].

[38] Sanskrit. Tib. *thabs.*

[39] The so-called 'Parable of the Raft' in the *Majjhima Nikaya* (Book I, 134-5) of the Pali Canon is paradigmatic of the concept. See Hick (1991: 142). See Pye (1978) for perhaps the most comprehensive study of *upāya* in Mahayana Buddhism available.

In its simplest form, *upāya* refers to the ability of a teacher to adjust his or her teachings to suit the level or understanding of his or her particular audience at any particular moment. The teacher, having access to some special truths or insights, mobilises whatever devices are necessary for relaying these truths or insights to others. Given that ultimate reality or truth can only be realised experientially by the individual, it follows that all Buddhist doctrine can only ever be expedient, a 'means to an end' for pointing towards ineffable truth, what Sharma (1990) dubs an 'interim dispensation' [40].

The characterisation of Buddhism as a "highly skilful", but "less-than-ultimate" cultural artefact "that makes available the ultimate" (King, 1996) is necessarily related to the fundamental Buddhist principle of emptiness (Skr. *śūnyatā*), which in turn is connected to the central idea of no-self or selflessness (Skr. *anātman*, *nairātyma*). *Upāya*, like Lobsang's appraisal of popular media representations of Tibetans, thus focuses our attention on the contingency, dialecticism and contextuality of identities. Indeed, *upāya* usefully embodies Battaglia's (1999) tension between "generating enabling and purposive ambiguity" and "creating enduring structures and profiles" in the production of cultural identities. In this regard, King and Queen (1996) highlight the potential paradox of Buddhism's 'self-negating' tendencies, which see contemporary Buddhist social activists fighting to realise particularising Buddhist identities which are in some ways predicated on non-ultimacy, and ironically, lend themselves to inclusivism. Worrying over the brutal efficiency of the contemporary 'global identity machine', where "the only way one can now make a political claim is by asserting some group identity" Graeber (2004: 101, presumably alluding to Leve, 2002) contends

[40] It could be argued that my proposal of 'skilful' cultural identities contributes exactly to the kinds of hermeneutical preferences I am trying to avoid: that revealing 'merely' instrumental representations for what they *truly* are (skilful) is one more form of unveiling, that appealing to notions like *upāya* risks treating Buddhism once again as a skeleton-key where Tibetans ultimately make sense only with reference to their supposedly chronic religiosity. In response, I hope that my suggestions themselves prove skilful, and note the difference between positing the existence of some distinct Tibetan identity, ultimately traceable to Buddhist insights (something likely to come across as an oxymoron anyway, since Buddhism is so much invested in non-essentialism), and putting forward a model for understanding Tibetan cultural identity (and its academic representation and evaluation) which draws inspiration from Buddhist notions.

that:"Things have come to such a pass that in countries like Nepal even Theravada Buddhists are forced to play identity politics, a particularly bizarre spectacle since they are essentially basing their identity claims on adherence to a universalistic philosophy that insists identity is an illusion."

While we can appreciate Graeber's point, it is somewhat misrepresentative in its tendentiousness. In what is a common over-simplification, Graeber mistakes a Buddhist recognition of the emptiness of identity for an assertion of its non-existence. Discussing the idea of the 'ongoing dialectical co-production of individual and society' as expressed in the works of Berger, Foucault and others and its affinity to the Buddhist notion of dependent origination or relativity (*pratītyasamutpāda*), Yarnall (2003) points out the striking resonance between Western post-structuralist sociological theories and Buddhist discourse:

> *We may note that this critical sociological Marxist discourse [around structure and agency and the nature of the individual] is rarely if ever compared with Buddhist Centrist (Madhyamaka) discourse...I am arguing that Buddhist discourse is likewise fundamentally interested precisely in "escaping explanations which privilege either the subject or the structure."...Indeed, of the two types of "selflessness" (nairātmya) fundamental to Buddhist discourse, pudgala-nairātmya (usually rendered as 'personal selflessness') may well be aptly translated as "not privileging the subject," and dharma-nairātmya (usually rendered as "phenomenal selflessness" or "objective selflessness") may well be aptly translated as "not privileging the structure"...While the negational term nairātmya is usually translated as "selflessness," this otherwise appropriate (though literal) translation masks affinities with the sociological discourse. We...see that "selflessness" (nairātmya) means "lack of intrinsic reality status" (nihsvabhāvāta). This negational term denies any ultimate reality status to either pudgala or dharma, but it does not entirely negate either one. Indeed...the Centrist solution to the Althusserian dilemma is to deny both pudgala and dharma any absolute,*

> *independent, non-dialectical reality status while simultaneously granting to both a "reality status" which is conventional, relational, and dialectical. Because neither pudgala nor dharma is reduced to the other (unlike puruṣa and praḳrti in some Hindu discourse), in the end neither one is given a privileged position as the "real" underlying reality of the other.*
>
> (Yarnall, 2003: 66-67)

I quote Yarnall's somewhat technical exposition at length (and take this detour into Religious studies), for the vital clues it provides as to how we might take up Latour's (2004) challenge, and write about Tibetan subjects and their identities in ways that do not succumb to his critical trick, where we are trapped between the extremes of either privileging the subject or the structure inconsistently, merely as it suits our purposes. Focusing on the work of Tibetan religious reformer Je Tsongkhapa, Yarnall (2003) drives home the co-referentiality of form and emptiness (or the conventional/constructed and the ultimate/absolute, the so-called 'perception' and 'empty' sides of phenomena) that undergirds Tsongkhapa's writings and Tibetan Tantric Buddhism in general. Writing against the over-negating tendencies of his day, Tsongkhapa stressed the importance of coupling an understanding of emptiness with an understanding of dependent-origination. Significantly, Yarnell (2003: 6) summarises Tsongkhapa's mission as 'safe-guarding the relative, perceived world against nihilist deconstruction'.

As such, we see that Tsongkhapa's project of what we might call enlightened realism corresponds neatly with Latour's (2004) hoped for 'fair position' that would too "retrieve a realist attitude" (243). Latour's remedying of excessive deconstruction with a focus on the 'associations', 'participations' and 'gatherings' that go toward the make-up of the Thing finds direct parallel in Tsongkhapa's insistence on the inseparability of emptiness with dependent-origination. Strikingly, we see that Tibetan Tantric Buddhist discourse responds virtually exactly to Latour's critical dilemma by countenancing forms, representations and identities that are at once empty, constructed and

contingent but which still, crucially, have meaning and powerful transformative influence in the world. Explaining the "feasibility of cause and effect" (in the midst of emptiness), His Holiness the Dalai Lama states:

> *We need to be able to comprehend the dependent –arising of all agents, actions and objects as a negation of their inherent existence and to see that cause and effect definitely exist. Indeed, an object is proved to be empty of inherent existence by reason of the fact that it is a dependent-arising, so dependently arisen dynamics, such as cause and effect, are totally viable. Emptiness is not utter void that denies the existence of all phenomena but is an emptiness of inherent existence. Phenomena are empty of this status, they are not empty of themselves; a table is empty of inherent existence, it is not empty of being a table. Hence, due to emptiness – due to the lack of inherent existence – agent, action, and object are possible.* (2007: 75)

This different approach to the constructed-ness of Tibetan identities that I indicate with the convenient and suggestive shorthand of 'skilful' allows for a positive re-evaluation of and re-engagement with perceived, 'surface' reality. The seeming banality of the 'surface' shifts us away from the lure of core selves and monolithic collective representations with their check-list approach to identity and awakens us to the significance of the 'enabling and purposive ambiguities' of identities in the making. Disabused of abstract or secret essences to be intuited, of root identities to be unearthed, our emphasis shifts from a vertical archaeology of identity to the horizontality of multiple and converging identifications, encounters and embodiments, to trajectories and becomings in motion and displacement. Equally interested in the significance of 'surface appearances' in the context of Sherpa subjectivities, Adams (1996b; 1997) similarly calls for a model of identity capable of going beyond the trite dichotomy of 'genuine' (deep) versus 'instrumental' (shallow) self-representations and motivations. Knowing that mountain-climbing was at one time largely taboo or outside of cultural 'convention' for Sherpas, Adams is initially dissatisfied and

confused when a Sherpa friend, following the death of his wife during an attempt on Everest, accounts for his spouse's sudden turn to mountaineering late in life by saying that 'she climbed mountains because she wanted to'. Interrogating the preconceptions stirred in her by this response, Adams (1996b) comes to focus on processes of mimesis and seduction implicit in the Sherpa-Westerner encounter. Her proposed model of 'virtual' identities discounts the possibility of discovering a 'final' Sherpa outside of the contingent encounter. 'Surface' representations open up to reveal a complex and multivalent back-and-forth of representation and counter-representation that precludes any privileged and separate position from which to offer a superior academic analysis and divulge what informants cannot see.

Locating Tibet

> *The Dalai Lama's "I" must be within this area where my body is; there is no other place it could possibly be found. This is clear. But when you investigate in this area, you cannot find an "I" that has its own substance. Nevertheless, the Dalai Lama is a man, a monk, a Tibetan, who can speak, drink, eat, and sleep. This is sufficient proof that he exists, even though he cannot be found."*
>
> (His Holiness the Dalai Lama, 2006: 63)

I have attempted to reach a point in Chapter Five where we can imagine a Tibetan-ness that is both powerfully embodied and contingent, empty and 'unsited' but still mappable through a thick description of the multiple pathways and crossroads that arise in lives in exile. In describing Tashi's 'sort of' Tibetan landscapes, in Tsering's grappling with opposing ambitions and expectations, in Nyima's palimpsest-home and in the muddle of religious and diplomatic commitments, we are obliged to pay ever more attention to how relations and subjectivities are sustained, how a being-together is feasible in the midst of obvious differences; we are made sensitive to the 'assemblies' and gatherings that go towards making up the 'Thing' of Tibetan-ness. In the end, 'skilful' identities

must be in motion and in conversation, are aspirational and provisional. At the same time as we carefully situate our subjects, we can credit identities that remain strong and meaningful en route and not necessarily in rootedness, or indebt to some final essence or subjectivity.

Perhaps then, we have an answer to Lopez, who fears that an 'unsited' Tibet means an "absent, ethereal, transhistorical" one (Lopez, 1996: 24-25). I have tried in this thesis to demonstrate the possibility of writing about and mapping Tibetan-ness in a way that stays grounded in subjects' experiences, without demanding any 'final' unveiling or reification of those subjects in the process. Taking inspiration from the Dalai Lama's words, perhaps Lopez's problem of the 'disappearance' of Tibet can be differently considered. Perhaps, in the end, it need not read as paradox that cultural identities can be at once deeply situated and impossible to 'find' as His Holiness describes.

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