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Affidavit

I hereby confirm that my thesis entitled “Life in Exile: Quotidian living experiences of Tibetans in Dharamsala, India” is the result of my own work. I did not receive any help or support from commercial consultants or others. All sources, data and materials applied are listed and specified in the thesis.

Furthermore, I confirm that this thesis has not yet been submitted as part of another examination process and neither in identical nor in similar form.

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1 Introduction

This Master's thesis is about the Tibetan exile community in Dharamsala, India. More specifically, it deals with the question how quotidian living experiences shape the political thinking of exile Tibetans in Dharamsala. This thesis is based on a four-months field research, which was conducted from mid-March to Mid-July 2017. Already in 2012, I have visited Dharamsala as a backpacker and became interested in the Tibetan exile community. During an internship at the Institute for Social Anthropology of the Austrian Academy of Sciences from February 2015 until June 2016, my interest became even stronger and with the support of my colleague Stephan Kloos I decided to go there again to conduct fieldwork for my Master's thesis. While staying there I did not only collect data but I was also volunteering with a Tibetan organization called Lha where I was teaching German and writing for their monthly issue "Contact Magazine". Through my position there, I got to know Tibetans who became my first interlocutors and informants and who helped me to get to know others. I did not keep it as a secret that I was doing research for my Master's thesis and thus a lot of people supported me with finding other interlocutors and to gain knowledge about the Tibetan exile community in Dharamsala. Before going into the field and after some discussions with Stephan I decided to focus on the current political situation in exile and I wanted to learn about the living conditions of the people there. I combined those two areas of interest in my research question.

1.1 Research question and aim of the research

Thus, the research central question of the thesis is:

How do quotidian living experiences shape the political thinking of exile Tibetans in Dharamsala, India?

Thereby, I show how life in the Tibetan exile community in Dharamsala looks like, where people struggle and where people are successful. I lay open what the concerns and what the challenges of living in exile are. Furthermore, I address questions such as where are opinions on political issues dividing and what does that mean for the community in the eyes of the people, thus from an emic perspective. I am interested in the interplay of everyday life and the political discourse and action.

Based on my fieldwork, I came to understand that in opposite to Huber's (2001) and Lopez' (1998) assumptions the community is not homogenous but heterogeneous and that there is a

range of different viewpoints and opinions. People are agents of their living conditions and thus able to make efforts for themselves and the community.

This thesis aims to describe the current political situation in exile from an emic or bottom up perspective. My motivation to formulate this research question derives from my intention to add new aspects to the field of Tibetan refugee studies. Such a research question has never been asked before in this context. This is why I am convinced that I can provide new findings in this field.

1.2 The field site

Dharamsala or McLeod Ganj, as the upper part of Dharamsala nine kilometres north of the core city is called, used to be a British hill station. The small town lies in the slopes of the Dhauladar mountain range in the northern Indian state of Himachal Pradesh.

Since the 1950s, Tibet is occupied by China to which Chinese authorities refer to as “*peaceful liberation of Tibet*” (Yeh 2013: 1). Since then, thousands of Tibetans have left the country and the majority of these refugees settled in India. In 1959, the Dalai Lama finally decided to flee too and found his new home in McLeod Ganj, which was a remote place until then. Nowadays, it is the headquarter of the Tibetan exile community and center of its political activity (cf. Houston and Wright 2003: 223). The Tibetan government in exile or the so called Central Tibetan Administration (CTA), a range of Tibetan NGOs and activists group as well as the office of the Dalai Lama are located in McLeod Ganj. This is one of the main reasons for choosing McLeod Ganj as my field site. In addition, Tibetans from different settlements around India and Nepal come here to engage in the Tibetan struggle for freedom but also simply, to find a job. This shows the interplay of political effort and everyday life matters I will address in this thesis.

The Tibetan community of McLeod Ganj puts its full effort on preserving their culture and keeping the Tibetan spirit alive. Besides this cultural preservation the CTA also works on the modernization and democratization of the Tibetan community, the support for Tibetan refugees in exile and the effort to get Tibet’s freedom back – known as the Middle Way Approach¹. Moreover, narratives and stories of Tibet, the Chinese occupation, the flight into exile and the arrival with all its hardship are shared and kept alive in exile. The community has created and

¹ tibet.net

reinvented new traditions such as the commemoration day of the Tibetan Uprising of 1959 in Lhasa (Houston and Wright 2003: 222).

In addition, McLeod Ganj has become a popular place for tourists, backpackers, yoga trainees, and researchers who arrive particularly in spring and summer time. People come there to find out more about “Little Lhasa” – as this place is called too relating to the capital city of Tibet – and hope to get a chance to see and listen to the Dalai Lama. Tibetan or pseudo-Tibetan artefacts such as prayer flags, rosaries and traditional clothes are ready to be bought by the visitors. Head shaved nuns and monks in their purple robes are present in the streets, the numerous restaurants and cafés, and the main temple.

1.3 Terminology and definitions

As this thesis is dealing with everyday life experiences, in this part I briefly explain how I use this concept. Löfgren writes that the study of everyday life in social sciences emerged in the 1960s, although already discussed earlier (Löfgren 2015: 323). The scholars started to focus on “ordinary people” and their daily life routines as creative actors. This study was developed as alternative, or critique of, mainstream traditions. The scholars want to explore the hidden worlds of daily life by using qualitative and ethnographic research. Recent studies offer a more nuanced understanding of how routines work in everyday life, Löfgren writes and cites Ben Highmore (2010), Elizabeth Shove et al. (2007) and Sarah Pink (2012).

“Studies of everyday life have produced techniques and methods for understanding how a lot of cultural energy may be condensed or crystallized in a trivial situation, an unperceived object, or a prosaic routine”,

Löfgren writes (Löfgren 2015: 326).

In my case, these trivial situations of “ordinary people” especially reflect the daily hurdles and difficulties of Tibetans in exile. The study of everyday life is important because it provides us with the analytical tools to answer the main question. Thus, I will include a description of how the living conditions in exile look like and how these conditions affect the political discourse. This information was collected by looking at the everyday life activities of Tibetans in Dharamsala and their own contribution to their community and though reflecting upon their expectations from the CTA politicians.

With quotidian living experiences, I mean daily life challenges and difficulties Tibetans in exile have to deal with. More generally, I will describe what the living conditions in exile look like and how these conditions impact the political thinking of the people. Thus, I want to find out what the Tibetans in Dharamsala expect from the politicians of the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA), what is actually realized and what people do and contribute themselves. The latter will additionally lead us from political thinking to political action and activism. Moreover, the question rises if there is a continuum between what people expect from the CTA politicians and what is done for real. In short, do expectations and reality meet?

With political thinking, I mean everything, which has to do with the CTA and its agenda. Furthermore, this includes political movements and activism towards a free Tibet since the issue of Tibet itself is a political one. “*Writing about Tibet and Tibetans is political*”, the anthropologist with a focus on Tibet and the Himalayas, Carole McGranahan writes (2010: 33). Additionally, Kloos stresses that the Tibetan culture is “*anything but apolitical; it is [...] central to the Tibetan cause*” (Kloos 2010: 39). In the Tibetan case, politics are related to religion i.e., for the majority of Tibetans, Tibetan Buddhism as the Tibetan society still combines politics and religion despite the democratization process initiated by the Dalai Lama (cf. Ardley 2002: 3).

1.4 Note on transliteration

As I do not know the Tibetan language, I did no translations from Tibetan to English. Most of the Tibetan expressions I use are proper names of people, towns and regions. All these names are written as people have given them to me or as they are used in the literature. Certainly, I have changed the names of my interlocutors in order to anonymize them. In other publications, I have found the Wylie system (cf. e.g. Kloos 2004, Ardley 2002) for the transliteration of Classical Tibetan words as “*it is useful for preserving original Tibetan spellings*” (Yeh 2013: xv). Besides that, I will use a range of abbreviations which will be described more in detail in the empirical part of the thesis.

1.5 Methods

1.5.1 Defining the field

This thesis is based on a four-month field research in Dharamsala, North India. The following section explains how and why I have chosen Dharamsala as my field site.

“Defining this space is an important activity that traditionally takes place before and in the early stages of fieldwork”,

Jenna Burrell (2009: 182) notes. Defining a topic for my Master’s thesis and therefore a certain place for my fieldwork is closely connected to an earlier internship at the Institute for Social Anthropology (ISA) of the Austrian Academy of Sciences from February 2015 to June 2016. However, I visited Dharamsala already in 2012 as a backpacker when I was doing my Bachelor’s. Back then, I had already considered working on the situation of the Tibetan community in exile as an issue for a later research but had pushed it to the back of my mind for some time afterwards. During and after my internship at ISA, I was considering other topics for my Master’s thesis but eventually decided to stick to my initial idea. One of my colleagues at ISA, Stephan Kloos who is leading the ERC project “Reassembling Tibetan Medicine”² which deals with the Tibetan science of healing and its transnational industry, was a key figure for this decision. He knows Dharamsala very well and has conducted fieldwork there too. Stephan encouraged me to choose Dharamsala as my field site and to find out more about the current political situation of the Tibetan exile community. He supported me by sharing literature, own experiences and practical tips for my first individual field research. When I started to deal with the literature I found out that Dharamsala is *“the heart of political activity for the Tibetan diaspora”* (Houston and Wright 2003: 223) and thus, a perfect place to investigate on the political situation of the exile since the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA), the office of the Tibetan religious leader His Holiness the Dalai Lama and the headquarters of the main Tibetan NGOs and activist groups are located there.

In order to get in touch with people in Dharamsala I arranged to volunteer with one of the largest Tibetan NGOs in exile, Lha Charitable Trust³. Lha offers various language classes for Tibetans and Indians, awareness raising projects on HIV/AIDS and environmental issues and generally supports the Tibetan refugees. For the first two months of my stay I was teaching German to a class of eight to fourteen students who were mainly Tibetan. Besides, I was writing for Lha’s

² <http://www.ratimed.net>

³ <http://www.lhasocialwork.org/>

monthly issue “Contact Magazine” where I got the chance to find out more and write about political issues inside Tibet and in exile. Through my volunteer position at Lha I got to know many Tibetans who worked there or attended the various language classes. Lha served as a valuable starting point for my research. However, the field site was not confined to this single NGO but spread around the entire town of McLeod Ganj as the upper part of Dharamsala is called.

Burrell by citing Marcus notes that “*movement is central to social practice*” and therefore following people, objects and metaphors is an integral part of dynamic fieldwork (Marcus 1998 cit. in Burrell 2009: 183). Thus, I always considered leaving McLeod Ganj for other places as a possibility. Although, I also visited Bir, a Tibetan settlement around seventy kilometers far from McLeod Ganj the latter stayed my core field site. Nevertheless, I was moving within McLeod Ganj and accompanied people to the places where they went to. Students and colleagues of Lha invited me to their homes, I came with them to the temple or we went to less well known and touristy restaurants for interviews. Other occasions for “*following people*” were demonstrations or candle light vigils for self-immolators. This way, I got the chance to get a picture of the situation in exile, their daily life conditions and their way of political thinking.

1.5.2 Describing the field

McLeod Ganj lies in the slopes of the Dhauladar mountain range. Its snowy summits can be seen from the town. It used to be a British hill station during the times of the Indian colonization and a remote place until the Tibetans arrived there in 1959. Most of the streets in the region were constructed by the Tibetans themselves and shops are run mostly by Tibetans who successfully managed to have their own businesses.

Nowadays, McLeod Ganj is a rather touristy place, especially in springtime when it is not too cold anymore and before the raining season starts. There are a lot of hotels, guest houses and restaurants, which makes the town a cosmopolitan place. In the restaurants, Tibetan monks in their purple robes discuss next to Western scholars who sit next to backpackers and yoga trainees. All over the town lies the noise of the honking cars, which an Austrian friend of mine once described with the words “I am honking therefore I am”. In the streets cows, dogs and monkeys try to find food in the big dumpsters, which stand at some street corners and spread a rather unpleasant smell. McLeod Ganj unfortunately has a big garbage problem. The hills are covered

with waste as the people just throw it away anywhere not thinking of the impacts on the environment. Some organizations like Lha try to raise awareness and even organize clean ups but so far there has been little change in the minds of the people.

When passing by a monastery people can hear the monks or nuns discussing and clapping, which is a traditional Tibetan Buddhist way of gaining knowledge through “*careful analysis*”⁴.

In the South of the town lies the main temple as well as the residence of the Dalai Lama. Many people from all over the world come here to get the chance to see one of the most famous religious leaders in the world. Although the Dalai Lama is in his eighties he is still teaching and travelling abroad to spread the message of the Tibetan cause.

My field was therefore a whole town and not a certain institution. Hence, I decided to choose an NGO to do volunteering at. This way, I was able to do both, contribute to the Tibetan community and get access to it. For two months, I was working as a German teacher at an institute for social work and education for Tibetan refugees⁵ called Lha. Lha is situated in the town centre of McLeod Ganj and through my position there I got the chance to get in touch with Tibetans. I got to know most of my interview partners through this organization and the so called “*snow ball technique*”⁶.

1.5.3 Data collection

For this thesis, I used several ethnographic research techniques. I have mainly concentrated on qualitative research methods but in addition I have also created a quantitative questionnaire in the field to get a broader source of information and to practice this method. However, I decided later that I will mainly use the results of the qualitative research and only bits of the questionnaire, which I used like qualitative results. As mentioned above I did not do research at a certain institution but I chose the entire town of McLeod Ganj as my field site.

“Defining the spatial terrain [...] is both an act of exclusion and inclusion [...] the field site is in certain ways constructed rather than discovered”,

⁴ <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/bengaluru/picking-the-brain-of-a-monk-where-buddhism-claps-its-hands-for-science/articleshow/60051644.cms?from=mdr>

⁵ <http://www.lhasocialwork.org>

⁶ <http://www.encyclopedia.com/social-sciences/dictionaries-thesauruses-pictures-and-press-releases/snowballing-technique>

Burrell (2009: 182) writes. Thus, my field site was constructed and reconstructed throughout the time I spent there.

In total, I conducted interviews with fourteen Tibetans living in McLeod Ganj. I mainly used the method of narrative biographic interviews, which I kept open. In some cases, I created guidelines for semi-structured interviews. I especially used these guidelines when I talked to CTA politicians as I wanted to avoid getting superficial answers. Nevertheless, I also asked them about their biographical background.

Susan Chen who herself did field research in Dharamsala suggests working “*methodologically casual*” and on an everyday life basis (Chen 2012: 265). According to her, interviews, even semi-structured ones, are less effective. To a certain extend I agree with Chen, nevertheless, I decided to use specific kinds of interviews too. The “*episodic interview*” (episodisches Interview) following Flick (1995 cit. in Lamnek/Krell 2016: 343f.) and the “*problem centred interview*” (problemzentriertes Interview) following Witzel und Reiter (2012 cit. in Lamnek/Krell 2016: 344ff.) became very useful for my research. The episodic interview resembles daily life conversations and does not follow strict questions or a guideline whereas the problem-centred interview is suitable for complex questions addressing topics like violence experiences, refugee backgrounds and the like.

Besides, semi-structured or non-structured interviews everyday life and informal talks played an important role. Living in a small town for a couple of months and working for an NGO offered the chance to become friends with various people who told me about their life, their worries, their future aspirations and a lot more which concerns them.

As for every ethnographic fieldwork, participant observation plays a significant role for the data collection and thus also for my research. By staying in Dharamsala for four months, teaching German and communicating with locals on a daily life basis I collected lots of field notes, which formed an integral part for my analysis of the quotidian life situation and the impact on the political thinking of the Tibetans in Dharamsala.

I recorded about half of the fourteen interviews with my mobile phone in order to transcribe them later. For the other half, I only took notes during the interviews and wrote a protocol afterwards. At the beginning, I recorded all the interviews but soon I realized that it is more suitable to avoid this as people were often speaking about sensitive issues of their personal life. Thus, oral history played an integral part of my field research.

Since I do not speak Tibetan, all the interviews were conducted in English. I am aware that this implies certain limitations as it is not the first language of the interlocutors and as I was not able to speak to Tibetans who did not speak English. Nevertheless, all of them I spoke to were very well educated and spoke excellent English. Thus, I did not work with an interpreter but led all the interviews in English. I asked all my interviewees if they feel comfortable with English and all of them agreed.

When I arrived in the field and during my stay in India I repeatedly reflected on my own role as Western female student, teaching at an NGO. Thus, besides learning more about the life of exile Tibetans, I also shared my own life story, worries and ideas and with some of them I should become friends with. Dewalt et al. note that the most important attribute of an ethnographer is active engagement in the lives of the people who are studied (Dewalt et al. 1998: 291). This way, I spent as much time as possible with my Tibetan friends while I also spent time with other volunteers of Lha.

In the last half of my four-month research, I decided to create additionally an online questionnaire. Based on a first analysis of the qualitative interviews I have conducted until then, I formulated more precise questions for the survey based on the analysis of my qualitative interviews. The questionnaire was dealing with questions about what it means to be a Tibetan nowadays, what people think about certain political issues, which came up in the qualitative interviews.

The questionnaire was a mixture of open and closed questions and therefore a mix of qualitative and quantitative data collection. Sixty-eight Tibetans participated in the survey, which led to a broad range of data. As I shared the online link through friends and colleagues in McLeod Ganj I did not have an influence on what people from which places would participate. Hence, Tibetans from other settlements and even other countries and continents took part in the survey. For that reason, the data of the qualitative interviews serves as the main source for this thesis. Nevertheless, some aspects and results of the questionnaire are mentioned in this thesis as well.

Another important source of data however is my research diary where I noted down all my thoughts, impressions, ideas, the minutes of conversations, protocols and so on from the very first day on.

1.5.4 Data analysis

To analyse my data, I decided to use the method of qualitative content analysis following Breidenstein et al. (2013) and Schreier (2014), which provides a range of useful techniques of analysing data. The first step of this method is to design codes in order to mark all the relevant parts of an interview or a memory protocol according to one or more of the codes. While I was still in the field, I started to analyse the first qualitative interviews after I had transcribed them or I have transformed my handwritten minutes into computer written interview protocols. I used five to six codes for all the interviews. After the first two analyses, I changed and adapted the interviews a bit according to my new and more precise research questions. After the coding of the transcripts I combined the relevant information and summarized it under the codes, which I transformed into titles, which later became the subtitles of the empirical part of my thesis. Back home, I coded and analysed the rest of the qualitative interviews I had conducted and I coded and analysed the open answers of the questionnaire. In addition to that, I coded and analysed most parts of my research diary as I noted my observations, ideas, further questions after interviews and so on. I already did some interpretation and analysis of the data I collected in the diary. Now I was able to sum up the answers and make generalizations. For example, I could tell in more detail which difficulties most of the Tibetans face in exile or which role the Dalai Lama plays in the daily lives of the people in Dharamsala.

1.6 Outline and framework

This thesis on the current political situation of the exile community in Dharamsala contains this introduction where the researches questions, the hypotheses as well as the methods are presented.

It contains the theoretical chapter where I will define the terms and concepts I use such as diaspora, exile, political thinking, nostalgia, homeland conflict and collective memory. The relevant theories will be described more in detail. The main part of this thesis is the empirical part though. First, I will present my data and my findings in order to discuss and reflect them, thus to answer the research question. Finally, the conclusion will sum up the results briefly.

The thesis is based on the data of my four months field research in Dharamsala. I have conducted fourteen qualitative interviews as well as a range of informal talks and participant observations. To evaluate my data I use the method of qualitative data analysis (cf. Schreier 2014).

2 Theoretical framework

This thesis is dealing with everyday life issues of Tibetans in Dharamsala, India and how these quotidian experiences shape the political thinking of the people. Before discussing the data I have collected during my field research the theoretical part of the thesis summarizes some significant concepts. First, it starts with a conceptualization of what is meant by “political thinking” and how the Tibetan exile community can be described in political terms. Afterwards, the concepts or terms diaspora, exile and refugees will be discussed in order to understand how the Tibetan diaspora is organized and what the conceptual differences between these three terms are which appeared when reading the significant literature but also during my field research. Two other concepts, which are strongly linked to diaspora – identity and belonging – will be discussed thereafter. Finally, the last section deals with nostalgia, collective memory and homeland conflict. Nostalgia is a concept, which was not used in this context so far. Thus, it will be interesting to find out how it can be applied. Collective memory by contrast appeared already in some publications and is part of the diasporic identity. The conceptualization of all these topics allows us to better understand the circumstances in exile and how everyday life experiences shape the political thinking of Tibetans in exile.

2.1 Exile politics and political thinking

„[T]he Tibetan exile community is interesting from a political perspective because it offers a rare example of a traditional polity – and an unparalleled example of a spiritual polity – adapting and reacting to modern political pressures“,

Ardley notes (Ardley 2002: 3).

It is important to say that the Tibetan community is a religio-political society, thus religion and politics are combined (ibid. 2002: 4). Despite the process of democratization, religion is still important, which Ardley describes as an *“unbroken continuance of religio-political structures”* (ibid. 2002: 3).

“Religion permeates all political, cultural, social and economic aspects of [the Tibetan] society” (Ardley 2002: 4).

Thus, political thinking is equally directing towards politics and religion. Here, the Dalai Lama plays a significant role since he is highly valued by the Tibetans until today. Besides, the Tibetan government in exile is functioning without parties.

McConnell notes that

“[...] despite attempts to introduce political parties [...] the current system is a rare example of non-party democracy” (2009: 124).

As mentioned in the introduction, with political thinking concerning the Tibetan exile community I mean everything which has to do with the CTA but also with political NGOs and activist groups as well as the former political and religious leader the Dalai Lama. In the empirical part of this thesis the political circumstances in exile will be described in more detail. Nevertheless, I will make some important notes here.

McConnell writes that the Tibetan government in exile (TGiE) or the CTA is an

“unrecognized government operating within the sovereign space of another state [and] has state-like functions” (McConnell 2012: 79).

The functions of the CTA are directly linked to the Tibetan identity and culture, which are *“perceived as endangered”* (ibid. 2012: 87). Therefore, the CTA fostered a particular kind of population in exile,

“a cohesive, united and homogenous community, which shares a single national identity” (McConnell 2012: 87).

McConnell quotes Norbu and further notes that

“this essentialising of national identity and the politicising of Tibetan ethnicity [...] form a key part of TGiE’s nation building project in exile” (Norbu 1992 cit. in McConnell 2012: 87).

Thus, politics are very present in the everyday life of Tibetans. As the Tibetan community is a religio-political society, talking with my interlocutors about politics did not only concern the CTA and activism but also religion and culture and the Dalai Lama.

2.2 Concepts of Migration

Diaspora, exile and refugees are terms, which are used in the literature and in the colloquial discourse on Tibetans who live outside of Tibet. These terms, which interrelate, will also come up in this thesis. Thus, it is necessary to theoretically clarify what these terms mean and relate to in the case of Tibetans.

2.2.1 Diaspora

In the “Lexikon der Globalisierung” (Encyclopedia of Globalization) Heiss and Six-Hohenbalken describe diaspora as a community, which was formed by forced or voluntary migration from a place of origin to a distinct place. The authors write that characteristics of diasporas are a sense of belonging within the diaspora community and transnational networks to the place of origin and other diasporas across national borders. Furthermore, diasporas share an idealized memory of the home country (Heiss and Six-Hohenbalken 2011: 44).

Bauman notes that

“until the 1960s, the term diaspora was confined to the histories of Jewish and Christian religions” (Baumann 1997: 385).

Nowadays, diaspora is used in colloquial speech as well as in scientific discourses and relates to different migration flows, which settle at different places (Davis-Sulikowski et al. 2009: 95). Clifford defines diaspora as follows,

“Diaspora societies are deployed in transnational networks built from multiple attachments, they encode practices of accommodation with, as well as resistance to, host countries and their norms. Diaspora involves dwelling, maintaining communities, having homes away from home” (Clifford 1994 cit. in Davis-Sulikowski et al. 2009: 96).

In the last decades, social anthropologists and other (social) scientists have strongly focused on migration and thus on diaspora studies all around the world. Thus, diaspora studies are not confined to a certain society anymore. Lopez writes that the Tibetan community is

“a true diaspora in that it was forced dispersal by an oppressor of a morally superior dispersed” (Lopez 1998: 7).

In their text “Making and remaking Tibetan diasporic identities” Houston and Wright (2003) distinguish between “*diaspora as condition*” and “*diaspora as process*”. The former relates to the issues of belonging and exile as well as nationalism while the latter deals with the producing of identities. The former is described as having its roots in the occupation of Tibet, which triggered a sense of belonging and national sentiment linked to the land of Tibet. Here, the Tibetan government in exile plays an integral part and “*serves as living practice for imagining a future, autonomous democracy in Tibet*” (Houston and Wright 2003: 221).

Tibetan diasporic nationalism involves the reinvention and invention of traditions as well as the “*rhetoric of a singular Tibetan identity*” (Houston and Wright 2003: 222), which was not given in Tibet itself. Thus, diaspora as condition is “*a central force that helps to forge a uniform, collective transnational nationalism*” (ibid. 2003: 229).

On the other hand, diaspora as a process is dealing with the “*attributes of actual Tibetan refugee life*” (Houston and Wright 2003: 223). These attributes are linked to daily concerns such as the uncertainty of life in exile. In this sense, diaspora is not a rigid concept but a

“*process involving the making and remaking of Tibetan identities [...] which are heterogeneous*” (ibid. 2003: 229).

Houston and Wright focus on the lived experiences of Tibetan refugees and stress that diaspora is “*always in the making*” (Houston and Wright 2003: 218).

Kauffmann confirms that the Tibetan population in India can be defined as a diaspora as it follows the six formulated characteristics of Safran, which describe members of such a community as follows,

“*1) they, or their ancestors, have been dispersed from a specific original ‘centre’ to two or more ‘peripheral’, or foreign, regions; 2) they retain a collective memory, vision, or myth about their original homeland [...]; 3) they believe that they are not – and perhaps cannot be – fully accepted by their host society and therefore feel partly alienated and insulated from it; 4) they regard their ancestral homeland as their true, ideal home and as the place to which they or their descendants would (or should) eventually return – when conditions are appropriate; 5) they believe that they should, collectively, be committed to the maintenance or restoration of their original homeland and to its safety and prosperity; and 6) they continue to relate, personally or vicariously, to that homeland in one way or another, and their ethnocommunal consciousness and solidarity are importantly defined by the existence of such a relationship*” (Safran 1991 cit. in Kauffmann 2015: 26).

Kauffmann adds to Safran’s second point that there is not only a collective memory of the homeland but also of the arrival in exile, which was a challenging time for the actors. The author argues further that Tibetans in exile do not want to be integrated in their host society and want to keep their own culture as authentic as possible. In addition, the notion of diaspora implies to Kauffmann’s mind a strong leadership of the community i.e. the Dalai Lama (Kauffmann 2015: 26). Kloos argues that the Dalai Lama can be regarded as the central figure to the diasporic

Tibetan community. He refers to Malkki and underscores that this “*diasporic identity construction*” is not unique to the Tibetan case (Malkki 1995 cit. in Kloos 2010: 43). A crucial factor in the Tibetan case, however, is the importance of religion i.e. Buddhism to the Tibetan diasporic identity. Kloos further notes that the Tibetan nationalist movement is a “*struggle of refugees operating transnationally as a diaspora on foreign territories*” (Kloos 2010: 32) who avoid assimilation into the host societies.

In the case of Tibetans, the diaspora is “*perceived as a cultural and national repository*” (McConnell 2012: 87) because their identity and culture is seen as in danger to be annihilated. Thus, the Tibetan government in exile

“*needed to foster a very particular kind of population in exile: a cohesive, united and homogenous community which shares a single national identity*” (McConnell 2012: 87), McConnell writes.

She adds that a “*powerful imagined sense of solidarity and belonging*” (ibid. 2012: 89) was created in form of a national flag, a national anthem, which was written in exile and national holidays. The diaspora serves to preserve the Tibetan identity and culture, to reinforce the national sentiment of exile Tibetans and to avoid the disappearance of the as unique perceived culture. The Tibetan identity is therefore “*standardized through generalized education*” (McConnell 2012: 89) and education has a high priority within the community.

Additionally, many diasporas share the desire to “go home”. This desire is also prevalent in the Tibetan diaspora. The Tibetan government in exile finds itself “*in-waiting ready to return to govern a future Tibet*” (McConnell 2012: 86). Therefore, Tibetans feel the need to protect their culture and identity.

2.2.2 Exile

The terms diaspora and exile are often used simultaneously in the Tibetan case. But what exactly is meant by exile? Stephanie Roemer gives a brief insight in her book “The Tibetan government in exile” where she deals with the political situation and organization in exile. The term exile itself is strongly linked to political activity.

Roemer uses the considerations of Shain who writes that

“exiles are persons who are engaged in political activity directed against the policies of a home regime, against the home regime itself, favourable to their return” (Shain 1989 cit. in Roemer 2008: 37).

Roemer adds that

“this definition implies that political exiles are involved in a struggle to return home from a base abroad” (Roemer 2008: 37).

This definition perfectly suits Tibetans in exile. The main agenda of the Tibetan government in exile or Central Tibetan Administration (CTA), is the preservation of the Tibetan culture in order to be able to return “home”. Every Tibetan is expected to be politically committed in the struggle and to fight for freedom in Tibet. The notion of “returning home” is prevalent in the Tibetan exile community and to do so is the or has to be the aim of every Tibetan. Besides the government in exile there are a range of political active NGOs who fight for the freedom of Tibet and thus, for the possibility to return.

2.2.3 Refugees

Besides diaspora or diasporic community and exile the term “refugee” is often used in this context. In the public discourse the term refugee is used very broadly but legally the term is defined very clearly based on the 1951 United Nations refugee convention in Geneva (cf. Tošić et al. 2009: 110).

“A refugee is someone who has been forced to flee his or her country because of persecution, war or violence. A refugee has a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group. Most likely, they cannot return home or are afraid to do so. War and ethnic, tribal and religious violence are leading causes of refugees fleeing their countries” (UNHCR 2018)⁷.

Since the convention originally only focussed on European refugees of the Second World War, in 1967 an additional protocol was later added which annulled local and temporary restrictions. The convention and the additional protocol regulate the rights, the protection and the duties of refugees all around the world (Tošić et al. 2009: 111).

⁷ <https://www.unrefugees.org/refugee-facts/what-is-a-refugee/>

Although Tibetans living in India are often called refugees and also name themselves as such they do not officially have the refugee status because India did not sign the document. Nevertheless, Tibetans comply with this definition and India provides Tibetans with certain rights and duties, which are often similar to those of refugees in other countries. Tibetans are sometimes even regarded as “*model refugees*” (Fürer-Haimendorf 1990 cit. in McConnell 2013: 972), which derives from their way of governing themselves, the role of the Dalai Lama and the importance of compassion and non-violence (McConnell 2013: 972) as well as successful economic development within the refugee community contrary to the local Indian community (Kauffmann 2015: 1).

Thus, even though the term “refugee” has been loosely used a lot over the past few years, it is important to note that it has a clear legal definition, which is linked to certain rights and duties for those who actually get this status. The Tibetan case is different as we will see in this thesis. In the empirical part, the legal status of Tibetans will be discussed in more detail.

Two other important terms came up when theorizing about diaspora, exile and refugees. These are belonging and identity. Thus, the following section will briefly conceptualize these two terms.

2.3 Belonging and identity

2.3.1 Belonging

It has become apparent in the section on diaspora that this concept is strongly linked to a sense of belonging. Moreover, in the field I have experienced that belonging and attachment to a certain place play an integral part to the quotidian life of Tibetans as well as their political thinking and action. Thus, this chapter briefly discusses the concept of belonging.

Authors writing on belonging claim that they want to go beyond identity constructions as they see these constructions as too rigid and “*call into question the idea of permanence implied by this term*” (Pfaff-Czarnecka and Toffin 2011: xi). The authors regard identity as much less important than belonging and stress the matter of attachment.

Pfaff-Czarnecka and Toffin, the editors of “The politics of belonging in the Himalayas”, write that

“belonging emphasizes emotional investments, affective bonds and desire for attachment. It helps us to understand and analyze what crystallizes a feeling of commitment in such collectives as nation states or any other strongly bonded unit, either imagined or real” (Pfaff-Czarnecka and Toffin 2011: xiii).

In the empirical part, we will see what importance this feeling of commitment has for the Tibetan community and how this feeling is reinforced through collective memory and reinvented tradition. Education or *“homogenous upbringing”* as Chen names it (2012: 272), plays an important role to reinforce this commitment in the freedom struggle of Tibet. The curriculum and the textbooks in schools are controlled by the Central Tibetan Administration in order to strengthen the interest in the Tibetan language and culture among exile-born Tibetans (Chen 2012: 272). For Weinzimmer, caring and being informed about the homeland conflict is an integral part of belonging (Weinzimmer 2011: 24).

Although, Pfaff-Czarnecka and Toffin want to go beyond identity constructions and focus on belonging, they admit that belonging and identity are overlapping concepts. Thus, one must not exclude one for the other. For the Tibetan community both concepts as well as that of attachment play an integral part to analyze quotidian life experiences and politics.

Pfaff-Czarnecka and Toffin describe attachment as an *“intimate connection with the land to which one belongs”* (2011: xxi). Tibetans strongly feel attached to the land of Tibet, which in their view was occupied by an alien force, namely the Communist Republic of China. Even though, subsequent generations were brought up in a different country and have never visited Tibet in their lifetime they feel connected to this place, which they regard as their homeland.

2.3.2 Tibetan identity

Identity is a concept, which is used a lot in social sciences although it is sometimes quite blurred or used as a buzzword. I aim to explain on this term in the context of Tibetans in exile. Many scholars have already conceptualized Tibetan identity or “Tibetanness”. The following section will give a brief overview on some of these concepts.

Safran notes that *“religion and language are still two most important building blocks of ethnonational identity”* (Safran 2008: 178). This is also the case for Tibetans. The Tibetan religion,

which is Tibetan Buddhism and the Tibetan language are the most important markers of Tibetan identity.

Anand writes more generally that identity is socially and politically constructed and quotes Malkki who writes

“identity is always mobile and processual, partly self-construction, partly categorization by others” (Malkki 1992 cit. in Anand 2000: 273).

In the Tibetan case, identity is strongly linked to religion and politics as well as to the Tibetan language. Anand stresses that the diasporic identity formation *“should be studied in terms of political and cultural process and discursive practices”* (Anand 2000: 275). Kloos writes that the Tibetan diasporic community can be described as a *“moral community”* and that the Tibetan identity is both religious-ethical and political (Kloos 2010: 34). Thereby he contradicts Barnett, Lopez and Huber who stress that a single community cannot be ethical and political at the same time (cf. Kloos 2010: 31ff.). For Kloos, Buddhism is the *“constitutive element of Tibetan identity”* (ibid. 2010: 15) and in the diaspora, there is an even stronger emphasis on the Buddhist ethics of altruism and compassion, *“which exile-Tibetans genuinely regard as their cultural and national identity”* (Kloos 2010: 28). Kloos further stresses that *“this kind of diasporic identity construction is not unique to the Tibetan case”* (ibid. 2015: 43). Ardley remarked already earlier that the Irian case of combining religion and politics is similar. Therefore, she calls the Tibetan society a religio-political society (Ardley 2002: 4). She writes that the *“emphasis upon religion is changing but continues to dominate the Tibetan life”* (ibid. 2002: 4).

Nevertheless, Anand stresses that the Tibetan political identity is influenced by the interaction of the West and that the Tibetans are learning the language of international politics in terms of democracy, human rights, peace, development and environmental protection (Anand 2000: 281). Until today, Western governments, NGOs and individuals are supporting Tibetan refugees (cf. Kauffmann 2015).

In the diaspora, a single or collective Tibetan identity is stressed which fades former regional identities (Houston and Wright 2003: 222). A crucial factor and a unifying symbol of matters of religion and politics is the Tibetan’s religious leader the Dalai Lama (Anand 2000: 281f.). Although he resigned from his political position in 2011 to foster the democratization in exile he still acts politically in many ways as we will see in the empirical part of this thesis. Thus religion i.e. Buddhism is the core element of the Tibetan identity in exile, Weinzimmer who works with Jewish Israeli and Palestinians living in the diaspora in the United States writes that

a “*threatened existence [...] facilitates greater collective identification*” (Weinzimmer 2011: 3). This is also true for the Tibetan diaspora. Tibetans feel their “unique culture” is threatened and has to be preserved. Through shared stories and collective memories of a Tibet before the occupation as well as of the refuge to India and the hardships of the arrival strengthen a collective identity in the diaspora. Thus, diasporic identities can also be shaped by the threat of annihilation, homeland conflict and shared stories about it (Weinzimmer 2011: 7). Furthermore, Weinzimmer writes that identity is a socially constructed process and that all identities are social identities (ibid. 2011: 8f.). The impact of collective memory and homeland conflict will be discussed in chapter 2.4.

In conclusion, the Tibetan identity in exile can be described as ethical and political, which is shaped by a threatened existence, the preservation of culture and reinforced through collective memory.

2.4 Nostalgia, homeland conflict and collective memory

2.4.1 Conceptualizing nostalgia

When going through the literature on the Tibetan exile community the concept of nostalgia appears here and there but is not discussed in detail. I am convinced that nostalgia is a useful instrument to explain Tibetans’ sentiments for their “*lost homeland*” and their wish to return “home” be it first, second or even later generations. Therefore, in this section I want to give an overview on the concept. This section provides a general conceptualization of nostalgia. It starts with a brief historical overview on the emergence of the term itself and its development through history. Furthermore, it describes the main theoretical approaches of nostalgia and tells us more about its meaning especially in the social sciences. Thus, the chapter gives an insight into the present research on nostalgia in socio-cultural anthropology.

Although not Greek in origin the word nostalgia derives from the Greek terms *nostos* and *algia*. *Nostos* stands for returning home while *algia* means longing, grief, or sorrow (Boyer 2006: 362). Nostalgia is a feeling or sentiment of loss (Angé and Berliner 2015: 3, Bonnett 2016: 1, Palmberger 2008: 103) and displacement (Boym 2001: xiii).

The term nostalgia has its roots in Switzerland and Swiss doctors initially used it to describe a medical disorder linked to homesickness (Lévy and Olazabal 2015: 140). In 1688, the Swiss physician Johannes Hofer invented this term for his “Medical Dissertation on Nostalgia” to

describe a disease, which in his opinion derives from spatial or national displacement (Boyer 2006: 362).

Hofer and his colleagues used the term nostalgia for patients who were suffering from mental disorders with physical symptoms. Their patients were persons who left their places of origin in order to study, work or do military service in different places within Switzerland. The doctors regarded nostalgia as synonymous to a severe form of homesickness (Boyer 2006: 362), which could even lead to suicide (Lévy and Olazabal 2015: 140).

Regarding nostalgia as a severe form of homesickness, Lévy and Olazabal stress that the notion was already used in even earlier times although not labelled as nostalgia. Homer relates in his prominent book *Odyssey* to a severe form of homesickness. In the narrative Ulysses, prisoner of the nymphs, chooses to go back home to his wife Penelope rather than deciding for his immortality offered by the goddesses, which the authors describe as nostalgia in the early meaning of Hofer and his colleagues (Lévy and Olazabal 2015: 139f.).

In the seventeenth century, the Swiss physicians believed that nostalgia was a disease, which could be cured and considered opium, leeches and a journey to the Swiss Alps as successful treatment for nostalgic symptoms (Boym 2001: xiv). Back then, it was certainly more difficult to stay in touch with family and friends at the place of origin than it is nowadays. Nevertheless, nostalgia is a sentiment, which is still around. In contrast to the usage of the terms as in the seventeenth century as a medical disorder the meaning of nostalgia has changed through the centuries. From the nineteenth century onwards, nostalgia lost its medical connotation and took a metaphorical meaning and is nowadays used to express a *“longing for a lost place and a vanished time”* (Angé and Berliner 2015: 2).

Today, mainly scholars of post-socialist studies use the concept of nostalgia (Angé and Berliner 2015: 1). Monika Palmberger confirms that nostalgia occurs in all post-socialist societies (2008: 101). The phenomenon of nostalgia in post-socialist societies was also studied by Chris Hann (2015) in Hungary, Daphne Berdahl (1999) and Dominic Boyer (2006) in East Germany respectively the former German Democratic Republic (GDR) and Monika Palmberger in an Ex-Yugoslav context in Bosnia.

However, nostalgia is a *“social phenomenon”* (Palmberger 2008: 100) that reaches across the world (Bonnett 2016: 1). Different scholars are about to extend the research in theoretical as well as ethnographic terms. In their book *“Anthropology and Nostalgia”* Olivia Angé and David

Berliner (2015) provide a vast and deep insight into this “*multi-facetted phenomenon*” (Palmberger 2008: 101) and show that nostalgia is a global issue. On 235 pages the editors and the contributors offer worthwhile ethnographies and theoretical considerations on nostalgia. The editors stress that nostalgia is a “*fascinating site for studying contemporary issues of identity, politics and history*” (Angé and Berliner 2015: 1). Therefore, nostalgia is a core issue of socio-cultural anthropology.

Nostalgia triggers from temporal and/or spatial change. Boym names revolutions and political and cultural manifestations of longing (2001: xvi) as trigger events. Palmberger who deals with post-socialist societies in Bosnia writes that regime changes and war are likely events to cause nostalgia. Therefore, nostalgia is a serious issue she stresses (Palmberger 2008: 103). She additionally and more generally names the rapid changing world, which provokes feelings of loss and discontinuity (ibid. 2008: 103). However, nostalgia does not only relate to change in terms of war and revolutions but stands also for “*unrealized dreams of the past and visions for the future that became obsolete*”, Boym writes (2001: xvi).

Berdahl notes that a single nostalgic person can experience a whole range of feelings such as longing, mourning, resentment, anger, relief, redemption, and satisfaction (Berdahl 1999: 203). Nevertheless, nostalgia always refers to a sentiment of loss. The geographer Alastair Bonnett writes that nostalgia is an act of dislocation, an articulation of homelessness and a “*declaration of distance from one’s object of desire*” (Bonnett 2016: 16). However, Boym stresses that it is difficult to say what exactly nostalgics are yearning for – even for themselves (2001: xiv).

The authors writing on nostalgia ascribe nostalgia a “*utopian dimension*” (Boym 2001: xiv). Berdahl quotes Susan Stewart and stresses that nostalgia

“*wears a distinctly utopian face [it is] a past which has only ideological reality [...] nostalgia is the desire for desire*” (Susan Stewart 1993 cit. in Berdahl 1999: 201).

Thus, a certain object of nostalgia and therefore of yearning is often not given. Nostalgia is rather about the feeling itself. Bonnett writes that nostalgia is “*a sadness without an object*” (2016: 16).

It is important to note that nostalgia never refers to the past alone. The authors agree that nostalgia is directing to the past, the present and the future or rather “*sideways*” (Boym 2001: xiv). Moreover, nostalgia “*does not imply that the past was better than the present*” (Bonnett 2016: 17). It says more about “*contemporary social configurations*” than about the past (Angé and

Berliner 2015: 5, 12). Nostalgia is moreover not only a sentiment of loss but a “*result of a new understanding of time and space*” (Boym 2001: xvi).

Writing on nostalgia in a scientific context offers a broader conceptualization of the concept. In politics and the public discourse, nostalgia is often dismissed as seeing the past in a distorted picture or through rose-colored glasses (Palmberger 2008: 102) and is therefore rejected as fake history (ibid. 2008: 104). Furthermore, nostalgia is often attacked as sentimentalism and historical falsification. For some, nostalgia even means a dangerous misuse of history (Angé and Berliner 2015: 4). The hierarchy between history and nostalgia is often addressed by the authors but they stress that they nostalgia is not “*fake history*” (Palmberger 2008: 103). Bonnett adds that nostalgia is often dismissed because it is used by nationalists and right-wing forces (2016: 14). Therefore, Nadkarni and Shevchenko warn that political uses of nostalgia can be problematic (2015: 63) although they believe that nostalgia itself is politically neutral or even apolitical (Nadkarni and Shevchenko 2015: 80).

However, the scholars who deal with nostalgia show which interesting and often positive functions nostalgia has. The authors agree that nostalgia has an empowering capacity. It has the ability to criticize or even change the status quo (Angé and Berliner 2015: 5; Palmberger 2008: 102) or to negotiate trauma instead of avoiding it (Bonnett 2016: 104). Nevertheless, it is important to note that not every reference to the past is an expression of nostalgia, Angé and Berliner stress (2015: 7). Therefore, a careful analysis of nostalgic practices is indispensable.

Thus, it has been proven that nostalgia occurs across the world and has many functions, which are worthwhile to study in depth. For this thesis and the context of Tibetans in exile it is interesting to point out that nostalgia has an empowering capacity and is able to change the present towards a better future. Tibetan nostalgics do not only yearn for a lost homeland but actively stand up for change and a better life in future as we will find out in the empirical part of this thesis.

2.4.2 Nostalgia and diaspora

As this thesis is dealing with a diasporic community, the following chapter provides a close look on nostalgia in migratory societies. As presented above, nostalgia is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon (Palmberger 2008: 101) that reaches across the world (Bonnett 2016: 1). Therefore, also migrant nostalgias are complex and have to be examined in its own terms. This chapter intends to display these different manifestations. Moreover, it will discuss the links

between nostalgia and collective memory and additionally provides an examination of the feelings and the attachment to a “*lost home(land)*” (Bonnett 2016: 17), which derives from displacement and homeland conflict.

2.4.3 Nostalgia and homeland conflict

In diasporic communities, the place of origin or the country perceived as homeland plays a significant role. This attachment can even “*become extreme and puritanical*” writes Bonnett (2016: 101). For the Tibetan exile community their place of origin, namely Tibet, occupies this significant role. In every single interview my interlocutors mentioned that they want to “go back home” one day, even those who were born in exile. Tibetans describe themselves as living in hope to return one day. Angé and Berliner note that hope is never far from nostalgia (2015: 11). Thus, the narrative of a lost homeland and the yearning for it or the feeling of nostalgia are intertwined sentiments. Bonnett writes that “*loss and yearning are chronic aspects of the mobile condition*” (2016: 97). Those sentiments are triggered by migration and are shared with the subsequent generations.

Bonnett further notes,

“Loss and longing have diverse consequences [...] from creative attempts to rescript identity in new contexts to forms of exclusionary identity politics” (Bonnett 2016: 97).

For the Tibetan exile community, both is true. Tibetans created a new collective exile Tibetan identity, which fades out different socio-political and regional belongings and social status of the past. At the same time, the Tibetan exile community excludes others, above all their Indian hosts.

In the Tibetan case the homeland finds itself in conflict with its Chinese counterpart and is therefore even more present as it has to be freed from its oppressor. Bonnett additionally notes that

“the migrant’s sense of attachment [...] to the homeland can change within a lifetime or generation [...] from melancholic regret to ignited activism.” (Bonnett 2016: 97).

The Tibetan identity is tied with activism for a free Tibet. Every Tibetan is expected to be committed in the struggle and to do something for the cause. Opinions of the subsequent generations on the conflict are shaped by their parents’ views and experiences there (cf. Weinzimmer 2011: 31). The narrative of a lost homeland which is in need to be defended and to which

every Tibetan wants to return is shared through a common history and memory. Subsequent generations

“can have even stronger feelings about supporting the homeland [which is] especially true when the homeland situation involves conflict and perceived adversary” (Weinzimmer 2011: 12).

“Second generation members, some of whom have never even visited the homeland, continue to be affected by the conflict there” (ibid. 2016: 15).

Bonnett further notes that homeland conflict is linked to nationalism, which is engendered by an ongoing, constant supply of news of fresh humiliations and conflicts back home (2016: 102f.). He writes that a *“long running nature of conflicts can produce distinctive forms of nostalgic attachments”* (Bonnett 2016: 104). Furthermore,

“a sense of loss and longing has to be maintained across the years and the generations – otherwise it would allow the occupiers to win” (ibid. 2016: 104).

Weinzimmer stresses that group conflict, even if not personally experienced, is a constitutive element of diasporic identity (Weinzimmer 2011: 1). Concerning nostalgia, Bonnett writes that conflicts with an inter-religious aspect as it is the case for Tibetans *“draw nostalgia and hatred into a single emotion”* (Bonnett 2016: 105). For religio-political societies as the Tibetan society (Ardley 2002: 4) demolished places of worship and restrictions of religious freedom are equal to a threatened existence which at the same time facilitates greater collective identification in the diaspora (Bonnett 2016: 105, Weinzimmer 2011: 3) and tightens the boundaries and hostility towards the other side (Weinzimmer 2011: 3) i.e. in the case of Tibetans the Chinese authorities.

2.4.4 Collective memory

Nostalgia is closely connected to memory and the social functions of nostalgia reveal how important this concept becomes in constructing a collective memory and personal and social identity (Bellelli and Amatulli 1997 in Lévy and Olazabal 2015: 140).

Collective memory is part of every diasporic society, Malkki notes (Malkki 1995 cit. in Kauffmann 2015: 25). Thus, also the Tibetan exile community shares a common narrative of the past, which is kept alive through the generations.

Weinzimmer notes that

“memory [...] is not a static thing carried from the past to the present but is instead a fluctuation process that works differently over time” (Weinzimmer 2011: 32).

At the same time the process of remembering and thus collective memories are drastically selective, write both Palmberger (2008: 102) and Weinzimmer (2011: 29). It is about

“creating and sharing a historical narrative that recalls certain details while disregarding others” (Weinzimmer 2011: 35).

Thus, Palmberger notes that it is

“interesting to find out which memories are important to people and why and how these constructions of history influence their lives” (Palmberger 2008: 102).

Weinzimmer further notes,

“while history remains in the past collective memories are the active past which forms our identities” (Weinzimmer 2011: 13).

Collective memory is an integral part of the Tibetan identity as it keeps the community together based on a common history where Tibetans have successfully recreated their own society. These stories are kept alive in the present in order to reinforce commitment in the freedom struggle. Weinzimmer stresses that

“collective stories about ancestral heritage [...] help reinforce group solidarity and ethnic identity” (Weinzimmer 2011: 25).

As noted above shared history is linked to the conflict of the homeland and a threatened existence, which *“facilitates greater collective identification”* (Weinzimmer 2011: 3). Subsequent generations *“can have even stronger feelings about supporting the homeland”* (Patterson 2006 cit. in Weinzimmer 2011: 12), which is very true for young Tibetan activists who have never been to Tibet. Thus, an integral part of the Tibetan society is to *“keep people invested in and connected to the homeland”* (ibid. 2011: 2). Collective memory involves an *“us vs. them mentality”* (Weinzimmer 2011: 29) in order to keep the diaspora united and younger generations invested to the cause. The parents’ stories have an impact on the identities of the second generation, Weinzimmer notes (ibid. 2011: 14).

Every society has its own collective memory and as Palmberger notes it is interesting to find out which memories are important to people and how they influence their lives (2008: 102). Which memories are important to Tibetans will be part of the empirical chapter of this thesis.

Diasporic societies often have to deal with traumatic experiences, which Hirsch calls post-memories (Hirsch 2008 cit. in Lévy and Olazabal 2015: 141; Bonnett p. 104). Hirsch defines post-memory as

“a structure of inter- and trans-generational transmission of traumatic knowledge and experience. It is “a consequence of traumatic recall but, unlike post-traumatic stress disorder, at a generational remove” (Hirsch 2008 cit. in Lévy and Olazabal 2015: 141).

Thus, there is a *“continuity of a traumatized collective memory in the diaspora”* (Lévy and Olazabal 2015: 144) and memories are kept alive in the minds of subsequent generations, which have not experienced the addressed events. Even younger Tibetan generations keep for example the Tibetan Uprising Day of 1959 alive and celebrate this day as a holiday in exile. Those memories are linked to the threat of forgetting in order to preserve and strengthen the remembrance (Bonnett 2016: 104).

It has been proven that different concepts can be applied to the context of Tibetans in exile. The ones I have chosen overlap and give an insight into the Tibetan community in Dharamsala as a whole. First, I gave a brief insight into Tibetan exile politics and what sort of society the Tibetan one is. We came to the conclusion that the Tibetan community can be described as a religio-political society because religion and politics are combined. Besides that, religion i.e. Tibetan Buddhism and the religious and former political leader, the Dalai Lama plays a significant role until today.

Furthermore, diaspora is a phenomenon, which was first used only for Jewish and Christian migratory communities. However nowadays we find a variety of diasporic societies around the world and the Tibetan exile community is one of them. The term exile is often used in this context and has a similar meaning but is sometimes stronger linked to politics than diaspora. Refugee is a term, which has a specific legal meaning and is defined by the United Nations convention.

Linked to these terms are the concepts of belonging and identity, which play a significant role in the Tibetan exile community. In exile, a diasporic or national identity was created which fades out former different regional and social backgrounds in order to strengthen a collective sentiment towards Tibet and to preserve the Tibetan culture and language.

I have also applied the concept of nostalgia as I am convinced that the quotidian living experiences of Tibetans involve nostalgic sentiments. It has been proven that nostalgia is not only directed towards the past but also towards the present and the future. It is not necessarily about false history and seeing the past through rose-colored glasses but it also has an empowering capacity and can even negotiate trauma. Trauma is a concept, which has not been discussed and will not be discussed in this thesis although it is noteworthy to take into consideration (cf. e.g. Das 2013; Desjarlais and Kleinmann 1997; Harries 1997).

Furthermore, this thesis deals with homeland conflict and collective memory, which overlap again with diaspora. Homeland conflict and its impact on the exile society is a present issue in the Tibetan community. The same is true for collective memory, which is part of a diasporic identity.

All these concepts will be helpful in order to understand the living circumstances of Tibetans in exile and the impact on their political thinking.

3 Life in exile

The following chapter is the core of this thesis as it is based on the four months of ethnographic fieldwork I have conducted in Dharamsala. This chapter is providing us with a deeper explanation and illustrations, which brings us closer to the answer of the research question, which asks how quotidian living experiences form the political thinking of Tibetans in exile. The first section describes these quotidian living experiences and shows what life in exile looks like, where people struggle but also how people cope with these challenges. The second part deals with the political thinking of Tibetans in Dharamsala and what impact the daily living experiences of the past and the present have on this thinking. This chapter is followed by an analysis and contextualization, which combines the data with theoretical approaches. Before I am going to give an insight into the daily living conditions, I give an overview on some of the organizations in Dharamsala, which have a great impact on the Tibetan community. Furthermore, I am providing an overview of the political, historical and economic circumstances of today's exile in Dharamsala.

3.1 Organizations and abbreviations

In this thesis, I am dealing with various terms and abbreviations related to the Tibetan exile community in Dharamsala, which I will describe in the following section.

Talking about politics, the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA) plays a crucial role. The administration was established in April 1959 in Dharamsala as the Tibetan government in exile. Later, this expression had to be given up following an order of the Indian government and as no other government in the world recognizes the Tibetan government as such. The CTA has a de facto authority over the Tibetan exile community, which includes around 35 settlements on the Indian territory. Although the CTA is not recognized by any government as such and “*lacks legal jurisdiction over territory*” it has state-like functions (McConnell 2012: 79). McConnell describes the CTA as “*in-waiting ready to return to govern a future Tibet*” (ibid. 2012: 86). The agendas of the CTA involve the preservation of Tibetan culture, support for all refugees in exile, particularly for newly arrived refugees and their education, as well as the recuperation of a free Tibet in order to enable a future return⁸.

⁸ <http://tibet.net>

The central policy of the CTA is the Middle Way Approach, which was developed by the Dalai Lama in the 1980s. The core of the MWA is non-violence and therefore follows the Gandhian approach where religion and politics are inextricably linked. The Dalai Lama is known as a great admirer of Ghandi's stance on non-violence (Ardley 2002: 68ff.). The MWA does not demand the complete independence from China but rather a coexistence of the Tibetans and the Chinese in the future. Tibet would remain a part of China with its own administration. While the resistance against China used to be armed in the early years of the occupation, the Tibetan administration stands for non-violence now. Proponents of the approach stress that it brings advantages for both sides of the conflict, China and Tibet and is moreover the only approach, which would be supported by the international community⁹.

Dharamsala is the center of political activity. Not only the CTA is situated there but also the headquarters of various NGOs and activist groups. I have conducted interviews with activists of the Tibetan Youth Congress (TYC) and Students for Free Tibet (SFT).

The TYC was founded in 1970 in Dharamsala and is a controversial group as their methods differ from the official policy of the CTA, the Middle Way Approach. The TYC members are in favor of the complete independence and are ready for violent resistance against China. Members of the TYC are also famous for practicing hunger strikes as a non-violent form of resistance. Many CTA politicians used to be TYC members, including the current president Lobsang Sangay. The TYC operates across the world and has around 30,000 members¹⁰.

SFT by contrast follows the non-violence approach and thus the official policy of the CTA. The organization was founded in 1994 in New York and also has non-Tibetan founders and members. The members are not only fighting for Tibet's freedom and the rights for the people inside Tibet but also for environmental issues in Tibet. Headquarters are to be found around the world and the main Indian headquarter is situated in Dharamsala¹¹.

Another important activist group in Dharamsala is Gu-Chu-Sum, which was founded in 1991. The founding members used to be political prisoners in Tibet. The members are still supporting former prisoners and fight for the release of those still imprisoned by Chinese authorities in Tibet¹².

⁹ <https://www.dalailama.com/messages/tibet/middle-way-approach>

¹⁰ <https://www.tibetanyouthcongress.org>

¹¹ <https://www.studentsforafreetibet.org>

¹² <https://www.guchusum.in>

Finally, I would like to introduce the Tibetan Women Association (TWA) whose headquarter is located in Dharamsala too. The TWA was already founded in Tibet in 1959 when thousands of women gathered in Lhasa, the capital of Tibet, to protest against the Chinese occupation and to raise awareness for the abuses Tibetan women were facing under the Chinese rule. This day, the 12th March, is known as the “Women Uprising Day” and is celebrated yearly in exile. Today, the objectives and aims of TWA still involve awareness for the situation of women in Tibet but also the support of women and children in exile¹³.

Another noteworthy organization are the Tibetan Children Villages (TCV), which were established by the Dalai Lama when he arrived in exile. TCV boarding schools were particularly built for children who came into exile without their parents. Today less children are coming to exile, thus these schools are visited by all Tibetan children and even by Indians. Education plays a significant role within the Tibetan community in order to preserve the Tibetan culture and language¹⁴.

3.2 Description of interview partners

This thesis is based on qualitative field research where narrative biographic interviews occupied a major role. In order to introduce my interview partners and their biographic background, in this section I will provide a brief description of each of them. Giving the exact date of birth was not possible for most of them as the birthday has not a big significance for Tibetans. Thus, most of them could only give a time span in which they were probably born. For some, also the place of birth was unknown. I am only using the first names of my interlocutors, which I have changed in order to anonymize them. The names are spelled as the persons themselves gave them to me. Whenever I cite from my interview protocols, I indicate in brackets the name of my interview partner and the line where the quote is found in the protocol. For quotes of informal talks or non-recorded interviews I use the name of my interlocutor as well as the date of the conversation.

¹³ <http://tibetanwomen.org>

¹⁴ <https://tcv.org.in>

Tenzin

Interview on the 24th April 2017

Tenzin was one of my main informants. Beside the interview I have conducted with him we had various informal talks and discussions. Tenzin became a very good friend and we spent a lot of time together where he told me a lot about him, his life, the situation in exile and much more. He was born in the mid-1980s in Kham, Tibet. When he was around thirteen his father, who was divorced from his mother, sent him to India. He came with him to Dharamsala and left again after a few weeks. Tenzin's father encouraged him to study hard and to serve the Dalai Lama. Tenzin told me that he went to a Chinese Communist school where he had to wear the notorious red scarf and sing Chinese songs. He only got to know about the history of Tibet when he came into exile and got committed in the freedom struggle. He used to be pro-independence but changed his mind later and is now following the MWA. Tenzin has a Bachelor's degree in education and a Master's degree in economics, which he completed in Chennai. In 2016, he went back to Tibet for several months to see his family, whom he has not seen since he left for India. There, he was working as a taxi driver as it is difficult to find a job in China without properly knowing the Chinese language. In Dharamsala, Tenzin is working as an administrator at an NGO and as an English teacher. He was often speaking of going back to Tibet in order to care for his mother who is living alone but at the same time, he fears that he would not find an adequate job for his education but would probably have to work as a taxi driver or in a similar profession.

Dorjee, TYC member

Interview on the 28th of April 2017

As I wanted to find out about activism in exile I decided to speak to activists of various organizations. Dorjee is a member of the notorious Tibetan Youth Congress where he occupies an important status, which I do not indicate further in order to guarantee anonymity. He was born in India and completed a PhD in Boston, United States. Dorjee used to live abroad for several years but decided to come back to the Tibetan exile in order to fight for Tibet's independence. The TYC is famous for fighting for complete independence and Dorjee stated in our interview that armed fights against China might be possible in the future. He is married and a father of two. His parents came into exile from Amdo in the 1960s.

Dolma

Interview on the 28th of April 2017

Dolma is the director of a Tibetan NGO in Dharamsala. She was born in the 1980s in Kham and came into exile when she was around seven years old. Her younger brother and sister were also sent into exile but they did not come together. Her brother now lives in the United States as he has received a PhD fellowship. Back in Tibet, Dolma has three more brothers and sisters and her parents are still living there. When Dolma came into exile she went to a TYV school in the South of India. She did her Master's in mass communication in Chennai, where she started to work at Amazon for two years before she decided to come to Dharamsala. In Dharamsala, she worked with the Tibetan Women's Organization for two years, where she led projects on making Tibetans familiar with the Indian law, especially on sexual harassment, rape, and molestation. Dolma mentioned at several points in the interview that she wants to go back to Tibet one day. The main reason for that wish is that she feels she has to take care of her parents when they get older. Dolma is the oldest child in her family and feels responsible for her parents. Nevertheless, Dolma also regards friends with whom she grew up in foster school as her family as she barely remembers the time living with them. This causes her to be in a difficult situation, as she also feels responsible for her "family" in exile as well as for the cause of freeing Tibet.

Sonam

Interview on the 2nd May 2017

Sonam was born in the late 1980s in the South of Tibet, close to the Nepali border. She is working for the same NGO as Dolma. They grew up in a TCV school in the South of India and regard each other as family, as they have known each other since they came into exile. Like Dolma, Sonam was around seven years old when she came to India. Her two younger sisters were sent into exile as well. At one point, her sister got very sick and Sonam and her other sister wanted to send her back to their family as they saw the reason for her sickness in being separated from her parents. After several difficulties, they were able to send the sister back. Sonam and her other sister stayed in India. She studied English and did a Master's degree in education. After her studies, she worked for Amazon in Chennai as Dolma did. After two years she decided to follow Dolma to Dharamsala who went there one year before. Sonam stated in our interview that she "*wanted to come back to the Tibetan society*" (Sonam 20). She and her sister met their parents twice within twenty years of living in India. Once, when they were still young. They managed to meet at the border between Nepal and Tibet as their parents live close to the border. When they met the second time, Sonam already attended university. Both times, they saw their

parents for a few hours before they had to return. Several times, she tried to get the permission to visit her parents in Tibet but her application at the Chinese embassy in Delhi was always refused. Her parents asked her to stop applying as they were investigated by the Chinese authorities in Tibet and had to be very careful not to give them a reason for being suspicious of any pro-Dalai Lama or religious activity. Like Dolma, Sonam wants to return to Tibet one day to take care of her parents when they get older. Both feel responsible for their parents. Nevertheless, the relationship with their families is sometimes difficult as opinions and lifestyles are different and the understanding for the other is often not given. Both do not really know their brothers and sisters in Tibet as they are barely in contact.

Tsering

Interview on the 2nd of May 2017

Tsering was born in the 1970s in the North of Lhasa. He was part of a nomadic family. At the age of around six he had to leave family to work as a shepherd for lambs. Later, he attended a Chinese boarding school for six months, which he left in order to go to a monastery near Lhasa, as his parents wanted him to become a monk. In Lhasa, Tsering witnessed the extent of Chinese occupation. *"It felt like living in a war zone"* (Tsering 54), he mentioned in the interview. Thus, he decided to leave Tibet in order to share the story of occupation and what is happening to the Tibetans. He experienced that Tibetans got beaten, arrested and even killed when they were protesting in the streets. After a few years of preparation, he left Tibet in the winter of 1993. Tsering came by foot and crossed the Himalayas in a twenty-seven-day trip. He indicated several times that he almost died while fleeing from Tibet. Like many other Tibetan refugees at that time, he first came to Delhi where he registered and afterwards to Dharamsala where he stayed at a reception center for several weeks. As he was above eighteen years old he had to attend a certain school. Tsering also mentioned the hardships of coming into exile. Tibetans were not used to the food nor to the climate in India. Many got sick or even died. Nowadays, Tsering runs his own restaurant and is a father of two girls. He is also committed in the freedom struggle but is not part of any organization. He stated that the cause of freeing Tibet should be part of every Tibetan's life and compared it to caring for the own family, as for him this means the same. Tsering never tried to get in contact with his family back in Tibet or applied for visiting them as he does not want them to get in trouble because of his departure for India. He stated that he told his family they are supposed to tell the Chinese authorities that he just disappeared from the monastery. When Tsering came to exile he did not want to be a monk anymore and decided to live as a lay person.

Tashi, SFT member

Interview on the 8th of May 2017

Tashi is a member of the organization Students for Free Tibet where he occupies an important role, which I do not specify in order to guarantee his anonymity. Tashi was born in a Tibetan settlement in Nepal in the 1990s. He attended a Tibetan school in Nepal before he went to Bangalore in the South of India where he attended university. He completed a Bachelors degree in journalism, psychology and literature as well as Master studies in mass communication. Tashi decided to come to Dharamsala as he wanted to be part of the movement and to “*bring positive change*” (Tashi 134) as many other Tibetans do to his mind.

Pema, SFT member

Interview on the 11th May 2017

Pema works for Students for Free Tibet (SFT) and occupies an important role, which I am not mention for the sake of her anonymity. She was born in the late 1980s in a Tibetan settlement in Ladakh, in the very North of India where she went to school. For high school, she came to Dharamsala and attended a TCV school. Afterwards she went to Pune in the South of India to attend university. There, she completed a Master program for teaching and went to the Punjab to teach at a TCV school. Pema stated that she became interested in Buddhism beyond an everyday life practice. She mentioned that she was proud of being a Buddhist and wanted to know more about it. Thus, she attended a program on Tibetan Buddhism in Dharamsala. There, she met SFT members who impressed her and whose commitment she appreciated. Thus, Pema became a member herself. She stated that working for SFT gave her the chance to channel her feelings, which often include anger and frustration because of the situation of Tibetans inside Tibet but also in exile and to make an effort and to try to achieve a change. Pema also mentioned that there is not done enough for women’s rights and gender equality. Besides she regards the romanticized image Westerners have of Tibetans as dangerous as it fades out the problems and challenges within the Tibetan community such as rape, sexual harassment and child molestation.

Yeshi, CTA politician

Interview on the 19th May 2017

Yeshi was the first CTA politician I spoke to. He was between fifty and sixty years old and was born in India. He did not have a lot of time for the interview and we spoke mostly about political

agendas. Thus, I do not know much about his biographical background. We discussed the economic situation of the Tibetan exile as well as gender issues and the situation inside Tibet.

Kunsang, TWA member

Interview on the 22nd May 2017

Kunsang is a member of the Tibetan's Women Organization where she occupies a leading role, which again is not indicated for the sake of her anonymity. Kunsang was born in Tibet and escaped with her parents in 1959. She is married to an Indian, which is very rare. She studied in Mussoorie and Cambridge. She worked for different other organizations before she joined TWA. The interview with Kunsang was mostly about the agendas of the TWA and her opinion on the status of women in the Tibetan exile.

Dawa

Interview on the 26th May 2017

Dawa used to be the director of a Tibetan NGO in Dharamsala. Nowadays, he works as a journalist as he did before he became director. Dawa was born in the 1970s in the Eastern region of Kham in Tibet and came into exile in 1996 when he was around twenty-two. His parents sent him to a monastery at a very young age in order to become a monk, which he left when he came into exile. Nevertheless, in the monastery he got the chance to learn how to read and write, which many lay Tibetans did not learn. He stated that the Chinese government wanted to reform the religious system and practice and that it was not allowed to carry the image of the Dalai Lama anymore. Although he wanted to become a lay person he still wanted to practice Tibetan Buddhism, which became very dangerous under the Chinese rule. Thus, he decided to escape and go to India. Like Tsering he came to India by foot with thirty-two fellow Tibetans and had to cross the Himalayas. In Nepal, they were sent to prison before they were able to continue and went to Delhi first. He mentioned the hardships of the flight as well as upon the arrival in exile. He also stated that at that time, many Tibetans left for India. Thus, at the reception center they had to sleep on the floor and others even stayed outside. When he was working as a journalist he got the chance to visit different Tibetan settlements in Nepal and India. Nowadays, Dawa lives in Dharamsala. He is married and a father of two girls.

Gelek

Interview on the 8th June 2017

Gelek works for a Tibetan NGO in Dharamsala. He was born in Kham in Tibet and came into exile in the 1990s when he was around ten. Gelek was mentioning the hardships of escaping and of arriving in exile. It still seemed to challenge him. He stated that he does not feel at home in India and that he wants to go back to Tibet to join his family. He studied history in the South of India and mentioned many historical facts about Tibet and the Chinese occupation. He wants to share the story of Tibetans and try to give non-Tibetans a realistic image of their living conditions inside and outside of Tibet.

Norbu

Interview on the 7th and 13th of June

Norbu is a CTA politician and parliamentarian. For that reason, we were mostly discussing political issues. Norbu was born in Kalampur, India in 1966. His father used to be a government official and former monk. His mother was a nurse. Norbu attended the Special Frontier Force (SFF) army school. Later, he and his family moved to Dheradun where his parents had a small business. Norbu went to another boarding school, which provided a *“balance between tradition and Western education”* (Norbu 7). Although Norbu was educated by excellent teachers he experienced bullying and suffered from being separated from his family. After school, he went to Chandigarh where he studied English to become a teacher. He worked as a teacher in a government school as well as translator. Additionally, he did social activism and awareness raising on the situation of Tibetans. He was also protesting against the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing, which led to sixty days in prison. Norbu used to be part of TYC but quit it when he became a politician. He is married and a father of three boys.

Rinzin

Interview on the 21st of June 2017

Rinzin is a CTA politician and is also doing research on the situation inside Tibet. Thus, we were mostly speaking about political agendas and his research. He was born in Lhasa and fled to India in 1962. He and his family came first to Nepal where he went to a Christian missionary school. Afterwards, he attended university in Delhi where he studied History of Modern China. Furthermore, he did studies of journalism in New York. He does research with Tibetans who recently fled from Tibet and asks them about the situation inside Tibet as he does not have the possibility to go to Tibet itself.

Gyatso

Interview on the 24th June 2017

Gyatso was born in India in the early 1990s. His mother is Tibetan and his father, who he never met, is Indian. His mother left India when he was two years old. Thus, he grew up at friends of his mother. He went to a Tibetan school but mentioned that he always had difficulties as he looks very Indian. Gyatso also had problems to concentrate in school. He met his mother only once again when he was eight years old and when she came to India for a few months. He dropped out of high school and started to take drugs. Gyatso mentioned that he always felt like an outsider as his physical appearance was different from the others. A few years ago, he attended a program called Kunphen, a rehabilitation center funded by donations, which helps addicts as well as people who suffer from HIV/Aids. Kunphen also integrated its patients into a work routine. Since then, he has worked in a class bit factory. He also managed to get clean but still suffers from his position in society.

3.3 Political and historical context of the Tibetan exile in Dharamsala

This chapter serves as an overview of the political and historical circumstances of the Tibetan exile in Dharamsala in order to explain under which conditions the Tibetans came to exile and how they live today.

The Tibetan exile in Dharamsala or to be more precise in McLeod Ganj, which is the upper part of Dharamsala, was established in 1959. It used to be a hill station when the British were ruling in India. Before the settlement was established, McLeod Ganj was a rather remote place. Most of the roads and houses around Dharamsala were built by Tibetan refugees. The hardships of the initial time are memories, which are shared among the Tibetans until today and serve as a marker of the Tibetan diasporic identity (cf. Kauffmann 2015: 23ff.).

In the 1950s Tibet was occupied by China and claimed it as a part of their territory. Before that time, Tibet was ruled by Dalai Lamas from the seventeenth century onwards. The rule of the Dalai Lamas involved the political as well as the religious leadership of the Tibetan society. Thus, the Tibetan community is often labeled as *“region-political society”* (Ardley 2002: 3). The core of the Tibetan society and culture until today is the Tibetan Buddhism, which was brought from India to Tibet in the eighth century. Until then, Tibetans practiced the religion of Bon, which later became an official religion in exile. The majority of the Tibetans were illiterate nomads and farmers. Children of nomads had to start working at an early age and had to take

care of the smaller animals. The only possibility to learn reading and writing or to study was to go to a monastery and to become monk or nun as there were almost no schools. At least one family member chosen by the head of the family i.e. the father was sent to the monastery. This family member was often sent away at a quite young age and the rest of the family had to support him or her financially, my interlocutors told me.

Tibet consisted of three provinces, the Eastern province of Kham, the Northeastern province of Amdo and the Central province of U-Tsang (cf. Giles and Dorjee 2005: 139). The center of Tibet was its capital Lhasa, which is situated in the U-Tsang province where the aristocrats and the Lamas were ruling. People had to pay taxes despite their low income. The military of Tibet was comparatively small and weak and Tibet had no international allies (Ardley 2002: 21). Thus, it was easy for the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) to overthrow them in the early 1950s as Tibet was not prepared for such an attack (ibid. 2002: 19). Tibet was quite secluded at that time and people only learned the Tibetan language in the "*holy land of Tibet*" and non-Buddhists were seen as enemies of Tibet (Ardley 2002: 21ff.). When the PLA arrived in Tibet the Tibetans and especially people from the Eastern Kham region tried to fight back but did not succeed. People started to flee to Nepal and India. In 1959, the Dalai Lama finally decided to flee as well and many thousands followed him into exile. Tens of thousands of Tibetans were killed, houses and monasteries destroyed. The Chinese authorities banned every religious symbol and started to settle Chinese people in the Tibetan villages and towns. Nowadays, Tibetans are the minority in Tibet in terms of population. In 1965, the so-called Tibetan Autonomous Region was created, which is situated around the capital of Lhasa and despite official autonomy is ruled by China. Since then, any political or religious activity is prohibited in Tibet. It is not allowed to carry the image of the Dalai Lama or to speak of him publicly. According to China authorities, Tibet has always been a part of China and the Chinese are convinced that they liberated Tibet from the rule of the Lamas and the Tibetan aristocrats. In the first decades of the occupation, negotiations between Chinese authorities and attaches of the Dalai Lama were taking place. The 14th Dalai Lama developed several peace plans but China refused all of them. Due to the oppression of Tibetans, every year thousands of Tibetans left Tibet to settle in India, Nepal, Bhutan or went from there to Western countries (cf. Kauffmann 2015: 13ff.).

For several years now, the numbers of refugees decreased due to severe restrictions and controls. Consequently, for many a flight into exile does not seem worth anymore. This situation

has particularly intensified since the violent 2008 outbreaks in Tibet following the Beijing Olympic Winter games restrictions according to my friend Tenzin.

When the Tibetans came into exile they had to survive on their own. India tried to avoid troubles with China and did not build big refugee centres. Already in early years, Westerners started to support the Tibetans. Nevertheless, Ardley describes the support by the United States as having an “*anti-communist agenda*” rather than fighting for the independence of Tibet for its own good (Ardley 2002: 21; Kauffmann 2015: 15). The Tibetan refugees faced a myriad of difficulties during their flight and when they arrived in exile. Many died in the Himalayas when they had to walk through the snowy mountains in winter time. When the Tibetans arrived in India, they were not used to the climate nor to the food and did not speak any Indian language. Hitherto unknown diseases broke out among them and many died in the early years of exile. Lots of Tibetans worked under hard conditions in road construction and died because of diseases or malnutrition. However, simultaneously Tibetans started to recreate their cultural, social and political environment and also succeeded in economic terms as they built up their own businesses and schools. In the 1960s, Tibetans settled permanently in McLeod Ganj and installed the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA) and a new exile society was created in India. India gave relative independence to the Dalai Lama and his people (Kauffmann 2015: 24ff.)

In exile, the negotiations around Tibet continued. In the late 1970s and in the early 1980s the Dalai Lama sent three fact finding missions to Lhasa to discuss the issue of Tibet. Yet, the missions returned with the message from Deng Xiaoping, the general secretary of the Chinese Communist Party, that except for independence everything can be discussed (cf. Kauffmann 2015: 28). In 1987 the Dalai Lama finally abandoned the Tibetan claims for independence in favour of autonomy.

Thus, the Middle Way Approach (MWA) became the official policy of the Central Tibetan Administration and of the Dalai Lama. In 1989, he received the Nobel Peace Prize for his non-violent agency towards China. The MWA renounced the complete independence of Tibet from China and now follows a non-violent approach. While in the first years of occupation, the Tibetans fought against China the freedom struggle now takes place in non-violent terms (Kauffmann 2015: 28).

In 2011, the Dalai Lama resigned from his political function and officially serves as religious and spiritual leader of the Tibetan community only. Today, the political leader, the president or

Sikyong in Tibetan language, is democratically elected by the exile Tibetans. The Central Tibetan Administration still functions like a government with its own constitution although it is not recognized by any other government. Exile Tibetans have the same rights and duties as citizens in any other nation state. They must pay taxes and have the right to vote. Every Tibetan who is registered possesses a so-called Green Book. McConnell describes the Green Book as “*material manifestation of Tibetan citizenship*” which only exile Tibetans can get (McConnell 2013: 977).

The CTA mainly concentrates on people in exile. It consists of the cabinet whose head is the Sikyong or president, the parliament and the Tibetan Supreme Justice Commission. Despite its efforts, the CTA is still dependant on outside support as they are still struggling economically. There is a high unemployment rate among Tibetans and particularly among the young educated generation. For that reason, many Tibetans go to Western countries and the Tibetan community is getting smaller as less people are coming into exile.

Although Tibetans meet the requirements set by the UN convention to be called refugees they are not officially recognized as such as India has not signed the UN convention and the additional protocol. Nevertheless, Tibetans in exile still receive considerable support from Western governments, organizations and individuals (cf. Kauffmann 2015).

3.4 Quotidian living experiences of Tibetans in Dharamsala

As explained earlier, this thesis aims to offer a bottom up perspective on the political atmosphere in exile on the basis of everyday life experiences. The latter will be described in the following section. This thesis is based on the data I have collected during my four months field research from March to July 2017 in Dharamsala, India. In this first section of the empirical part, I describe what the daily life of Tibetans in exile looks like, to what extent people are struggling with their daily living conditions and which events and experiences of the past and present shape everyday life. Thus, the following chapter does not only deal with the current situation in exile but also with the experiences of flight and the arrival in exile as these events have an impact on the living conditions of today.

I will make a distinction between the so called “first generation” and the “second generation”. This decision has several reasons. In migration studies such a distinction is often made to show the different experiences, living situations and thoughts of those who have experienced migration on their own i.e. the first generation and those who only know the narratives of migration

from their parents or grandparents. Among migrant societies the narrative of migration or flight is prevalent and has an impact on the quotidian living experiences on the first but also on subsequent generations. The latter also feel connected to the place of origin through shared stories and collective memory as every refugee population tends to create a common history (Malkki 1995 cit. in Kauffmann 2015: 25) In the case of Tibetans this becomes particularly obvious in terms of activism and resistance. From the data I have gathered in the field, I found that the bond and commitment to Tibet is different between the two generations. Those who have never been to Tibet sometimes feel even more committed to the struggle for a free Tibet as those who were born there as the subsequent generation does not even have the chance or the choice to go back and live there.

In this thesis, first generation exile Tibetans describe people who were born in Tibet and went into exile later. It has to be mentioned that people came from different regions, at different ages and at different times. Nevertheless, I summarize them under the term “first generation”. Second generation includes all Tibetans born in exile. Here, it is again necessary to say that some were born in Nepal or in other settlements and came to Dharamsala later on. Some actually have to be called “third generation” as their parents were born in exile too. By contrast, I will not make a distinction between them and summarize them under the expression “second generation” or exile born Tibetans. Thus, it becomes obvious that the exile Tibetans of Dharamsala are a quite heterogeneous group, which has an impact on the political opinions as can be seen in the second part of the empirical section on the political thinking of Tibetans in Dharamsala.

This chapter consists of the following parts. I divided the quotidian living experiences of exile Tibetans in Dharamsala in three different dimensions in order to give a clear impression of the exile living situations. These are the collective dimension, the personal or individual dimension as well as the cultural and religious dimension. The first dimension addresses living experiences, which effect the community as a whole. The second one effects people on an individual or personal level and rather deals with the private sphere. And the third dimension deals with religious and cultural aspects of life in exile, which affects the whole community in its own terms.

3.4.1 Collective dimension

This part will give an overview on the living situations of Tibetans in Dharamsala in general. Thus, this section discusses aspects, which have an impact on the exile society in general before individual and personal issues are discussed in the second part.

It is worth to mention that Tibetans and Indians hardly mingle. Both groups stay among their own society. Although Tibetans have lived in India for almost sixty years now relationships or marriages are rare. One of my interlocutors described this fact as follows:

“You can even count people who get married to Indians [...] There is still this gap I feel personally” (Sonam 230-32).

In general, the relation between Indians and Tibetans is described as peaceful and unproblematic but even real friendships are rare. When I was in Dharamsala, some of my friends repeatedly told me a story of a case where a Tibetan girl was killed by two Indians when she was on her way home at night. This story became quite popular in the community and made the relationship between the two communities even more distanced, as my friends stated. In general, the Tibetan exile community is quite exclusive and Tibetans prefer to stay among themselves.

Even one's physical appearance can cause problems. I had an interesting interview with a man of around 28 years old whose father is Indian, which makes him look Indian. He told me that although his mother is Tibetan, he speaks Tibetan and feels Tibetan he always had to prove that he was in fact Tibetan. Hence, he struggled his whole life to be part of this exclusive society and still does not feel as a part of it. Additionally, his mother left him when he was only a few years old and he grew up at a Tibetan foster family. Later he developed a drug addiction and still has difficulties finding his place in life.

This brief story shows how important demarcation from others is for the Tibetans. This demarcation happens particularly in language and culture. These are the most important markers to distinguish Tibetans from other central Asians. One of my friends told me once: *“Without our language, we are nothing. We could be Nepali or even Chinese”* (Tsering, 3rd May 2017).

Tibetans very much differentiate themselves from their hosts, the Indians. They do not allow Indians to be part of their society and they do not want to be integrated in theirs. This shows their clear Tibetan national identity, which they express on as many occasions as possible. Every Wednesday the exile Tibetans show solidarity with the Tibetans inside Tibet and celebrate the so called White Wednesday. On this day, they exclusively go to Tibetan shops, eat

Tibetan food only and wear their traditional Tibetan clothes. The national solidarity and the exclusiveness of the Tibetan community keeps the exile Tibetans together.

Another important bond is their religious leader the 14th Dalai Lama, as well as their Buddhist belief, their language and their struggle for Tibet's freedom. Nevertheless, it was mentioned several times that these bonds are becoming weaker. Many people are afraid of the time when the Dalai Lama passes away. Tibetans see him as the icon of the whole community and of the struggle. Tibetans, especially activists fear that the struggle will lack active people in the future. Tibetans in general but particularly those who were brought up in Tibetan children villages were told through their life time that they have to work for the cause. Thus, currently there are many Tibetans who are committed and who are taking part in the struggle. Still, the Dalai Lama reminds the Tibetans on many occasions that they have to serve the community. However, nowadays only few people are coming into exile and more are going abroad as they do not see a secure future in India. Thus, many fear that the struggle will die one day.

The issue of going (back) to Tibet is prevalent in the Tibetan exile community. Even those who were born in exile speak of "going back". Younger generations often have a blissful and romanticized image of Tibet in their minds as Westerners had for a long time or still have. They imagine Tibet as a land of green grasslands, snow cap mountains and the beautiful Potala palace in Lhasa. The hope to return was addressed in every single interview I conducted. Even young people mentioned that they want to die inside Tibet although they have never been there and do not have any family members or acquaintances in Tibet.

Although the exile Tibetans have achieved a lot and are often regarded as successful refugees who are still able to attract substantial assistance (Kauffmann 2015: 2) or "*model refugees*" (McConnell 2013: 972) thanks to the Dalai Lama but also to their own effort they still face many difficulties. Because of their status or non-status as refugees Tibetans face considerable bureaucracy. For example, they are forced to renew their resident certificate every year. They have several different other documents, which they have to renew at different times. These circumstances of a range of different papers, which have to be renewed again and again McConnell describes as "*bureaucratic messiness*" (2013: 973) and also the Tibetans feel bothered by this bureaucracy. An interlocutor told me that whenever they have to fill in a form, be it at the university or at a hotel, they do not know what they are supposed to fill in. They cannot fill in a certain citizenship nor they are entitled to put in "refugee" as they are not officially recognized as refugees.

One of my interviewees sums it up as follows,

“We have a good life but there are a few big things you cannot do anything but it does affect you a lot” (Sonam 304f.).

Furthermore, none of their papers is a passport and allows them to travel freely around the world. Particularly young, well-educated Tibetans mentioned the impossibility of travelling abroad. Also, Tibetans in exile do not have the right to buy land in and around Dharamsala, which forces them to rent their houses, flats or offices. Those who have children or plan to have any feel uncertain about the future. They fear that they cannot provide them with much and secure their future. *“Literally you own nothing”*, Tenzin once stated (Tenzin 88-89). Those who still have family in Tibet struggle with the fact that they *“cannot just go there”* (Sonam 309) and support their family as they are meant to do.¹⁵

These circumstances and limitations lead to frustration among the Tibetans as the following quote underlines:

“I personally, I am frustrated with all this like whenever I need to travel, I am frustrated, whenever I need to renew my stay in India I am frustrated” (Pema 80f.).

At the same time, many try to channel their frustration into action and take part in the freedom struggle. Although it is exhausting for them to renew their documents every year and although they do not have citizenship and feel lost on many occasion Tibetans manage to put their effort into the struggle and to move on.

Besides that, there are certain groups who struggle with specific other problems. As mentioned above, the physical appearance has an impact on the inclusion into the Tibetan society. Also gender inequality is an issue. Women still do not have the same rights as men do. When it comes to leadership positions women are undeniably underrepresented as they are not encouraged that they have the same possibilities as men do. Although there are seats reserved for women in the Tibetan parliament there are only a handful of them represented there.

“There is so much judgement around being a woman leader. That kind of frustrates me and obviously we need to overcome that” (Pema 420-422).

In NGOs and activist groups there are also hardly any women. Some women told me that they regard the efforts of the CTA only as an eye wash. Women are still confined to taking care of

¹⁵ The issue of having family members in Tibet will be discussed in chapter 3.4.2.

the household and the children. One Students for Free Tibet (SFT) member told me that the pressure of preserving the culture is always on women. One example is that those women who occupy jobs at the CTA are encouraged to wear the traditional dress, the “chupa”, while men are wearing suits.

Besides the inequality women are facing in the Tibetan society there are other issues, which are barely addressed in public and by the Tibetan authorities. As in every other society, rape, sexual harassment, molestation and domestic violence are happening in the Tibetan community. Pema, an SFT activist, stated that particularly in schools rape and sexual harassment are issues but that there is not enough talk about it. She mentioned that this also has to do with the image Westerners have of the Tibetan community and that Tibetans are still not regarded as human beings who make mistakes like this. *“It so frustrating at times as if we were not human beings”* (Pema 411f.), Pema said. She wishes that the community would openly speak about these problems and do something against them. However, at the moment this is rarely happening. In general, sexuality and in particular homosexuality are very hidden in public. Girls and women are still judged when they have sex with different partners and victims of rape and sexual harassment are often afraid of speaking about what happened to them, Pema stated. She was the interlocutor who brought up these topics and who spoke openly about these issues. More thoughts on these issues and how they impact the political thinking of particularly women will be discussed in the second part of the empirical chapter.

Another factor of the Tibetan society is that Tibetans almost exclusively live among Tibetans. They work, live, speak almost only with Tibetans in their daily life routine. Relations to Indians are very superficial, love relationships and marriages are barely taking place. There is no integration and assimilation is strictly avoided. Thus, Tibetans live in a Tibetan bubble, which also means that many Tibetans are not aware of the Indian law. When it comes to domestic violence, molestation or sexual harassment they often do not know what they can do to get their right. However, many people told me that it is important to them to live among Tibetans and within the Tibetan community. Throughout their lives they were told to do something for the community and this indirectly includes living among Tibetans to support each other. Particularly those who went to TCV schools feel that they have to serve the community and to do something for the cause. It is their duty as Tibetans to be committed as they were raised like this. The Dalai Lama reminds the Tibetans on many occasions that they have to serve the community.

Education plays a significant role in the exile community. While in the Tibet of the past only few people and especially monks and nuns had the chance to learn how to read and write this

completely changed in exile. The Dalai Lama and the CTA put a tremendous effort into educating the people. However, at the same time there are not enough jobs for all the well-educated people. Therefore, many Tibetans consider going abroad. As less people are coming into exile, the community in India is shrinking. Some fear that this could cause less commitment in the struggle.

As mentioned above, a prevalent topic in exile is the issue of going (back) to Tibet

“Everybody wishes to go back. The problem is that we could not find a solution to go back” (Tenzin 114-115), Tenzin summed up.

The deep wish to go (back) to Tibet one day is deeply rooted in the collective memory of the exile community. First generation Tibetans share stories of the time before the occupation, which became romanticized over time. Young generations are presented with a glorified image of a place they have never been to but they want to see at least once in their life time, a place they nevertheless call home.

3.4.2 Individual dimension

In this part, I intend to describe the quotidian living conditions of Tibetans in Dharamsala on an individual level, which nevertheless does not only concern single persons and their individual networks. I will deal with topics such as the relationship to the family in Tibet as well as the family life in exile. Further topics are the experiences of flight from Tibet and the separation from the family as well as the ongoing suffering triggered by those events.

During my research in Dharamsala I made the acquaintance of Tibetans who shared their experience of leaving behind their home country and their family in order to come into exile in India. Many of those had traumatic experiences during the flight and also when they arrived in exile. One of my first interlocutors mentioned that he almost lost his life when he had to cross the Himalayas to reach India. Two others shared their story of being arrested when they stopped in Nepal. The initial time in India was described as tremendously hard as they were not used to the climate nor the food and as they could not speak or understand the language. Many got sick when they arrived in exile and had severe health problems later on. Some even came as small children and were brought up in boarding schools separated from their parents and siblings (cf. Kauffmann 2015: 13-34).

Nowadays they barely have any contact with their families in Tibet as it is too dangerous. Some of them did not see their families again, others only a few times within around twenty years. The contact with their parents is difficult for different reasons. On the one hand, they cannot speak openly on the phones as they are tracked by the Chinese authorities. On the other hand, the relationship often suffered from the separation across time and space. The families live in two totally different circumstances, which often leads to conflicts. Some told me that they find themselves in a controversial state. Somehow, they blame their parents for their lost childhood and that they were separated from their family and did not have any choice. At the same time, they are grateful that they got the chance to live in a free country and that they received an education. However, often the family members do not understand each other's life styles. One of my friends, Dolma stated that she often cannot make her mother understand that they had difficult times in exile too. Nevertheless, she also got sad when she told me how it must have been for her mother to leave three of her children at a young age and stayed back to Tibet. The relationship to their siblings in Tibet is mostly superficial as they did not grow up together. The life styles vary to a great extent. While arranged marriages at a young age are still common in Tibet people who live in exile are often not married or have children. For these reasons, exile Tibetans often tried to create new families in India with others who share a similar story. In addition, problems in terms of language occur. Tenzin stressed that he learned a different Tibetan dialect in exile and that his parents sometimes do not understand him on the phone. "*That is hilarious*", he said in one of our conversations (Tenzin, 21st May 2017).

The social media provider "weChat" became important to the exile Tibetans to stay in contact with their family. It used to be quite expensive for them to call their families. Nowadays, they have the possibility to send pictures and to call them for free. Still, they have to be careful what they share. Their parents always want to keep their phone calls short in order not to raise any suspicion with the Chinese authorities, Sonam mentioned (Sonam 52f.).

Sonam also stated that her sister, who also lives in India, got sick once and that she and some other relatives tried to call their parents many times. This happened around the 10th of March, which is the day of Tibetan Uprising inside Tibet in 1959. This day marks a holiday today and people are still protesting on this day. The Chinese authorities were alerted and visited the family at their house. Since then, the family is even more careful when their children call from India, Sonam mentioned (Sonam 71ff.)

Those who made the decision themselves to leave Tibet also struggle with the separation from their families. Tsering, by contrast, mentioned that he did not get in contact with his family

anymore as he was too afraid that his family could get in troubles if the Chinese authorities found out that he had fled to India. He did not even know if his parents were still alive.

These difficult familial circumstances affect the daily lives of the Tibetans often in a negative way and makes them uncertain about their belonging.

“I have lived here [for] more than 20 years and still you are like, you don’t belong anywhere” (Sonam 121).

These questions are also linked to future insecurities and what life will look like in the next five or ten years. Most of the exile Tibetans cannot tell. Those who recently left Tibet often struggle with finding their place in society and adjusting to the new environment. My neighbor in McLeod Ganj who was around thirty, married and a mother of a one-year-old boy once said, *“Our body is here but our mind is not.”* (5th April 2017). She had difficulties with leaving behind her family and making a living in India. Again, she was not sure about her future and if she would be able to provide a secure future for her son.

Yet, thinking about the future is an issue, which is officially not part of the Buddhist belief system. Buddhists are not supposed to think or worry about the future, which leads us to the next dimension of quotidian living experience in exile – the religious and cultural dimension.

3.4.3 Religious and cultural dimension

Hence, some people are in conflict with their Buddhist belief and the values on the one hand and their daily life struggles on the other hand. While Buddhists are supposed to live in the moment and not to worry about the future, many Tibetans are very insecure of what the future holds. They worry about the time when the Dalai Lama passes away, how the Indian government will treat them, if they will be allowed to stay in India and the like. Additionally, they worry about their future on a smaller familial scale for instance if they will go abroad or return to Tibet, how they can manage to care for their parents in Tibet and their children who were raised in exile. Sonam described it as follows,

“I think about future but as a Buddhist we are not, we are supposed to live at the moment and enjoy our life but as a human being we tend to think about our future safety, your future children. If you think in those lines, then we kind of feel a bit lost because we don’t even have a citizenship. You don’t have any legal paper” (Sonam 282-285).

The hope of or belief in going back one day is one aspect, which keeps the community together. Other aspects, which have to be mentioned are clearly the belief in Buddhism and the icon of the Tibetan freedom movement the 14th Dalai Lama. Although he had officially resigned from his political functions in 2011 he still plays a significant political role and many Tibetans regard him as their political as well as religious leader. Historically, the Dalai Lamas had the function of the political and religious leaders of the Tibetan society. However, in order to strengthen the democracy in exile, the current Dalai Lama called for elections and gave up his political role. Nevertheless, he still acts politically. To give an example, when I was in India in 2017, the Dalai Lama travelled to Arunachal Pradesh to give teaching to Tibetans living there or coming from other settlements. This area in the Northeast of India plays a crucial role in the struggle for Tibet. In the eyes of Tibetans, the area lies on the border between India and Tibet but for Chinese and Indian officials it is the Sino-Indian border. Travelling there and talking to Tibetans is clearly an evidence that the Dalai Lama still fulfills political function. Therefore, his role is significant for the Tibetans and the struggle itself. Through him, the outside world learned about the struggle and considerable support from Western organizations and individuals followed (cf. Kauffmann 2015). Tibetans are grateful for what he has done for the community. Many Tibetans feel that the issue of Tibet has to be resolved within his life time or otherwise they will fail to solve it. Criticizing the Dalai Lama is done only carefully and is regarded as negatively, which I will describe in detail below. Tibetans also struggle with the image Westerners have of their society. It is still a glorified and romanticized picture, which sees the Tibetans as non-human mystics. Even younger generations regard Tibet as a place full of glory. Thus, Tibetans are trying to get rid of this image in order to be recognized as human beings.

3.5 Political thinking of exile Tibetans in Dharamsala

“Writing about Tibet is political.”

(Carole McGranahan 2010: 33)

Dharamsala is the center of political activity and the capital of the Tibetan exile community. Many people go there to be part of this political activity and to fight for the freedom of Tibet. In this chapter, I want to provide a picture of the current political atmosphere in Dharamsala. Using the literature on Tibetan exile politics, which I summarized in the theoretical part I analyzed my data collected in the field. This chapter shows what Tibetans in Dharamsala think about different political issues.

3.5.1 The conflict inside Tibet and its impact on the people in exile

This chapter deals with the question how the conflict in Tibet affects the living conditions of Tibetans in exile and subsequently the political thinking of exile Tibetans despite their distance from the place of conflict. The participation in the conflict in Tibet derives from different factors. There is a generation living in exile, which experienced the conflict and saw what is happening in Tibet and to the Tibetans. The stories of the occupation and the conflict are still shared in exile. Furthermore, through new media, people in exile are easily informed about what was happening in Tibet. Tibetans inside Tibet take up the role of *“citizen journalists”* (Tashi, SFT member 457) as one of my interviewees called it and are sending information to the outside world on their own risk. Beside these two factors, Tibetan officials and activists make an effort to keep the people involved in the freedom struggle of Tibet. Thus, the conflict does not only affect first generation Tibetans but also subsequent generations. Collective memory and shared stories play an integral part in this effort. Standard stories of the occupation and the conflict, as well as stories about what life was before the occupation were developed and are transmitted to the younger generations. As mentioned above, these stories often lead to a glorified image of Tibet. Through collective memory, shared stories and new media the conflict is present in every exile Tibetan’s life and has an impact on the individual’s ways of political thinking. The duty to be committed in the struggle is reinforced through education, the teachings of the Dalai Lama and through the Tibetan administration.

The narrative of a lost homeland is present in the exile community and strengthens the national sentiment as well as stories from the situation inside Tibet. Those narratives have an impact on

the living situations of the people in exile and their political thinking. Through new media stories can be shared easily. This leads to stronger feelings of supporting the homeland even for younger generations who have never been to Tibet. The political agenda of the exile Tibetans includes the preservation of their culture and thus their identity as one Tibetan nation as well as the struggle for freedom of Tibet. Whenever news of human rights violations and the like come up Tibetans feel that their existence is threatened which strengthens the feeling of preservation (cf. Weinzimmer 2011). Solidarity among the exile community and the maintenance of strong ethnic networks are at the core of the struggle. This group solidarity is supported by a salient collective memory. This memory consists of the occupation of Tibet, the arrival in exile and the story of successfully building up an exile community with its own government or administration as it is called today. People who were brought up in exile hear these stories from their earliest childhood on and therefore got a sense of doing something for the community (cf. Kauffmann 2015). School kids are told to get involved in the struggle as early as possible and the Dalai Lama still encourages the people to be committed to the cause. Sonam who came to exile without her parents when she was around seven years old describes this duty as follows,

“Being brought up in a TCV school you are often reminded that you have to do something for the cause, that you have to do something for the Tibetan community” (Sonam 191-192).

Thus, she decided after she graduated in Chennai to come back to Dharamsala to work for the community.

Collective memory is an important part of the Tibetan diasporic identity (Kauffmann 23ff.). Collective stories of Tibet, which are shared in the community and particularly in schools often give a glorified image of Tibet to the younger generations who were brought up in exile. The conflict in Tibet reinforces such romanticized pictures for which the exile Tibetans want to fight. These stories and images of Tibet are linked to the strong longing for “going back”.

Even young people mentioned in the interviews that they wanted to die inside Tibet. Those who were born in Tibet and still have family members there have a more realistic picture of the situation there but still consider living there as a possibility in future. The wish to go back is also linked to the traditional duty of taking care of their parents once they get older and need help. Many Tibetans struggle with that as they cannot imagine giving up freedom and democracy and going back to an occupied country. Additionally, they do not speak Chinese, which is necessary to find a job and to make a living in Tibet today.

Thus, the conflict in Tibet shapes the living situations of Tibetans in exile. Hence,

“caring and being informed about homeland conflict is an integral part of belonging”
(Weinzimmer 2010: 24).

The conflict or stories about the conflict concerning the precarious situation inside Tibet holds the community in exile together as they have a common enemy, the Communist government of China. The *“us versus them mentality [...] helps keep the diaspora together”* (Weinzimmer 2010: 27). Tibetans perceive their culture as unique and thus worth to be protected.

The Tibetan national identity is reinforced by collective stories and memories although the biographical backgrounds are different. Still, memories are not only concerned with remembering but also include forgetting, selection and simplification of the past (cf. Palmberger 2008: 102). One example of selection and forgetting is the fact that the Tibetan violent resistance against China is often left out (cf. Ardley 2002) in order to reinforce the image of a non-violent movement as it is now. This tactic helped the Tibetans to get support from the outside world over the decades (cf. Kauffmann 2015). Collective memory within the Tibetan exile community is a defining aspect of the Tibetan identity. Although, Tibetan officials aim for a collective or national Tibetan identity through education the Tibetan community is still very heterogeneous and thus political thoughts are too.

3.5.2 Middle Way Approach vs. Complete independence

Although there is a strong “we-identity” among exile Tibetans there are many different opinions on certain topics. Officially, exile Tibetans see themselves as a unit, which fights for the freedom of Tibet. When it comes to the question of how to achieve this goal, the opinions are divided. The most significant division lies in the question whether people should fight for real or follow a non-violent struggle for freedom. The official policy of the Central Tibetan Administration is the Middle Way Approach (MWA), which calls for a non-violent resistance. The MWA was implemented by His Holiness the Dalai Lama and does not ask for complete independence and freedom from China, but only for autonomy. This means that Tibet would remain part of China but has autonomous rights. The proponents of this approach think that it brings advantages to both sides of the conflict and that it is more realistic. Moreover, they think that the Western world would not support a violent resistance against China and that the Tibetans are too weak to fight against the big player China. Officially, most of the Tibetans support this approach as they follow the Dalai Lama’s policy and believe that he knows what is best for

them. Nevertheless, there have not been any negations with China in the past eight years. Thus, there is not such a goal in sight.

On the other hand, there is the demand for complete independence, which is particularly demanded by the activist group Tibetan Youth Congress, which China has labeled as a terrorist group on many occasions. The TYC is also trying to achieve their goal by non-violent actions such as hunger strikes but they are officially in favor of violent resistance against China.

“So far, our philosophy is based on non-violence but obviously all options could be on the table” (Dorjee, TYC member 9),

said Dorjee, a TYC member in our interview. Many of today’s CTA members and politicians used to be members of the TYC as it is *“a playground for Tibetan leaders”* (Dorjee 94). Nowadays they are officially for the MWA approach as they have to follow the policy of the CTA. Unofficially, however, many still follow the aim of complete independence and consider violent resistance as a possibility in future. A parliamentarian put it in the interview as follows, *“Why not kill others instead of ourselves? You can’t be always nice”* (Norbu 90). By speaking of “killing ourselves” he addresses the self-immolations, which happen inside Tibet but also in exile, which means that they set themselves on fire. While being in flames they demand a free Tibet and the return of the Dalai Lama from exile. Since the first self-immolation in exile around 160 people have self-immolated themselves. Tibetans regard self-immolations as non-violent resistance against the Chinese occupation and see it as a last resort for the people inside Tibet as they are not allowed to protest in the streets and face many restrictions in terms of religious and political practice. Thus, the situation in Tibet is precarious and one of my interlocutor stated that two of his brothers are in prison because they took place in protests.

3.5.3 The CTA and the exile Tibetans relation to it

Besides these two main divisions of what officials and activists want for Tibet there are several other different opinions on the situation in exile. While the CTA is concentrating on preserving the culture of Tibet and building up a stable exile community some are criticizing that the CTA is not doing enough for the people inside Tibet.

“It’s more about getting support and help in exile life not what you can do inside Tibet. So, maybe it’s not in their hands [...] I feel like they are only talking about how to make life in exile better. [...] It kind of tells me we are not going back to Tibet. It’s not possible that’s why we are setting up this system here” (Sonam 348-354),

Sonam stated carefully. Many young people are critical about the agenda of preserving the culture and see it as problematic. They regard culture as something flexible and non-static and criticize the effort of the CTA to preserve the culture.

“When we try to preserve it becomes so rigid that we can’t change it at all. I think that culture in nature is fluid [...] it should change according to time” (Pema 430-432). *“You can have your culture but it should flow”* (ibid. 439).

Additionally, young Tibetans demand that the CTA should do more about burning issues and have uncomfortable talks about topics like rape, sexual harassment and domestic violence. They think that these topics are not addressed by officials. *“If you don’t do uncomfortable talks in the community it will not improve”* (Pema 397).

As mentioned earlier, Pema was one of the only persons who brought up these issues. She is concerned that children get raped particularly in schools, but also within families and nothing happens about it. She criticizes that problems are hidden and that officials do not show any kind of reaction. She assumes that they are too afraid to destroy the image of Tibet and she concedes that *“Tibetans are human beings and we make mistakes”* (ibid. 403f.). The question that arises is what action Tibetans expect from the politicians. When I asked this question in the interviews many did not know what to answer offhandedly and just mentioned that they wanted them to work hard. Some said they wanted them to work hard for the exile community, to fight against unemployment and for democracy. Others put their preference on the people inside Tibet and wanted the politicians to put a greater focus on them. Others said they did not expect anything because every single Tibetan is supposed to be politically committed and to work for their cause, to dedicate the personal life to the struggle for freedom in Tibet. Talking to women they often did not feel represented in the society but only seen as housekeepers and responsible taking care of the children. Thus, they wanted the politicians to bring in serious discussions on women’s empowerment.

3.5.4 The status of women in the Tibetan diaspora

Similarly, gender issues are not addressed or only on a superficial level. Women still do not enjoy the same rights and do not have the same possibilities as men do. Young Tibetans criticize that government members compare the situation of Tibetan women to the worst countries concerning women’s rights in other parts of the world. There has been improvement in exile but there is still a long way to go they say. Women are still regarded as inferior to men. There is

even a term for women, “keyman”, which means women are weaker than men. One of my interlocutors, a young activist, stated that she struggles to be a leader as a woman and often is not taken seriously. Even in schools, girls are told that they are too indecisive to be leaders. Women are not empowered to trust in themselves that they can go into politics or to be leaders of companies or NGOs. Although there are seats reserved for women in the Tibetan administration there is not a single woman in the cabinet. Thus, women are not represented in politics. Also in monasteries, nuns cannot take up the same positions as monks.

Pema mentioned that last year there was a conference on women’s empowerment but most of the participants were men. A woman who wanted to speak about more uncomfortable topics was even silenced, Pema declared. She added that she did not feel represented at this conference and that it was nothing but an eye wash. She criticized that only women from aristocratic families are able to obtain higher positions. Even in NGOs women are still underrepresented. It seems like the issue of gender inequality plays a relatively inferior role to other issues like preserving the culture and fighting against China. Women are not involved in political decision making but are supposed to preserve the culture. One politician stated that it was not possible to put the issue on a higher level as there are other more urging topics to be discussed. For many of my male interlocutors the issue of gender equality for both women and men does not play a significant role. They do not want to concentrate on the situation in exile since their highest priority is the fight for the freedom of Tibet:

“We are here not fighting for democracy [...]. We are here for fight against Communist government China, to regain our country” (Tsering 136-137). *“But we are forgetting why we are here”* (ibid. 139f.).

Tsering left Tibet at the age of around twenty. He is a witness of what was happening in Tibet and experienced the time as if he had lived in a war zone, he said. He decided to leave Tibet in order to share his story and to be an advocate of the Tibetans inside Tibet. For him the main goal is to fight for the freedom of Tibet not for democracy in exile. Everything else is secondary. He even mentioned once that his life and his family in exile are secondary and stated, *“Our political struggle is main priority in life”* (ibid. 350f.).

Tsering sees the biggest challenge of the exile community in growing division, which he regards as a weakness in the struggle.

“Don’t make a division in a community [...] trying to stay together and fight against the Communist government China” (Tsering 106-108).

For him the struggle can be only successful if the Tibetan community stays united in terms of opinions but also place.

“As long as we are strong together and fighting against Chinese regime the Communist government will not win the fight” (Tsering 273f.).

“If we are dividing ourselves religiously and culturally and ideologically, political ideology, then we kill ourselves and our struggle will die” (ibid. 274-176).

He fears that more and more Tibetans are going abroad and that the Tibetan people are scattered around the world, which weakens the cause. While he sees it as problematic that nowadays many are living abroad, others identify it as a potential for the Tibetans struggle. As Tashi, an SFT activist stated,

“I think in movement perspective it’s really huge potential that we are able to reach out, to spread out to so many people” (Tashi 191f.).

3.5.5 The role of the Dalai Lama in the Tibetan diaspora

As mentioned above, the Dalai Lama still occupies a significant political position. Criticizing him is scorned and is uttered only carefully. My interlocutors rarely mentioned any points of criticism. People are too grateful to what he has done for the community to say anything negative about him. One aspect, which was mentioned was that the Dalai Lama sometimes criticizes activists to be too emotional. This was seen as very negative as for example Tsering stated,

“[If somebody] really wants to contribute to our struggle and then our leader says ‘You are doing wrong. You have to be careful in a public form.’ Then, I think that is not correct. Because we have less people to do the Tibetan struggle” (Tsering 318-320).

Tsering fear that less people will fight for freedom and that such utterances of the Dalai Lama do not help the struggle and are unfair as people certainly are emotional when they hear about the situation inside Tibet.

When asked about critical voices against the Dalai Lama the name Lukar Jam was mentioned several times. In 2011, he ran for presidency but did not reach the second round of elections. When I was in India people told me about a controversial posting he made on the social media platform Facebook. It was at the time when the Tibetologist Elliot Sperling had died. He was highly regarded by other scholars, Tibetan activists and also by Lukar Jam. His posting included the remark that he is the one who should have become 113 years old. My interlocutors stated

that the Dalai Lama has this vision that he would become 113 years old and mentioned it in public on many occasions. Thus, they saw a huge statement in this posting by Lukar Jam and perceived it as anything but acceptable. Criticizing the Dalai Lama by making a statement like this made Lukar Jam a persona non-grata in the Tibetan community.

Many fear the time after the Dalai Lama is passing away. Until now, he has kept the community together as they see him as their icon. People fear that the Tibetan community could become divided in the future and those who are in favor of the MWA approach are afraid of violent outbreaks. Nevertheless, many are sure that the freedom struggle will remain peaceful as people will keep the Dalai Lama's legacy alive.

"We Tibetans call the highest regard to His Holiness. Coming up with violence in the movement would directly be challenging his legacy" (Tashi 262f.),

said Tashi, an SFT activist, and added *"I am positive that the Tibetan movement will always be non-violent"* (Tashi 268f.). However, scholars such as Jane Ardley and Mark Owen see a possibility of violent outbreaks in future. When asked about the time after the Dalai Lama's death one politician answered, *"Political scenarios may be more pragmatic, more realistic than now"* (Norbu 88). It was the same politician who indicated that it may be time to not always be nice. To many Tibetan's the cause of Tibet has to be resolved within the lifetime of the Dalai Lama, otherwise there might not be a solution. Thus, the struggle for Tibet's freedom is also a struggle against time.

3.5.6 Sikyong, "the second man"

As mentioned above, the Dalai Lama still plays a highly significant role as a political figure despite the fact that he has officially resigned from this position. The Sikyong or president is much less respected than the Dalai Lama, although democratically elected. As Buddhism occupies an important role in the Tibetan community, their religious leader is equally important not only in religious but also in political terms. In the media, the Sikyong is sometimes portrayed as the substitute of the Dalai Lama. I once saw a picture, which was officially used by a newspaper where the Dalai Lama touches the cheeks of the Sikyong as if he did not take him seriously. While the Sikyong, Lobsang Sangay was supported by many during his first period as president, he now is criticized by many. Some say that he is not humble enough but instead rather self-promoting and concentrating on his own image. Some also claim that he does not respect the Dalai Lama. Moreover, he did not manage to arrange new negotiations with China,

which makes many Tibetans feel upset with him. Still, others say that he is in a tough position and try to find apologies for him. Nevertheless, during his second term of office he lost his reputation among the Tibetans and is rather tolerated than respected. Thus, he is rather the “second man” behind the Dalai Lama. While the Dalai Lama is seen as the heart of the Tibetan society the Sikyong has a rather representative role among the Tibetans. Some even see the whole Tibetan political system as overestimated and regard the democratization of the community of inferior importance to the fight for freedom as everything else.

3.5.7 The question of citizenship

A main issue of exile Tibetans in India is the question of citizenship. Only few Tibetans have taken on the Indian citizenship. This has two main reasons. First, only a certain group of Tibetans is able to receive it. These are the ones who arrived between 1959 and 1979 and their children (McConnell 2013: 972) Another reason is that most of the Tibetans do not want to take it as they do not feel as Indians and as they still hope to return to Tibet one day. Tibetans in India very much stick to their Tibetan identity and many see taking up the Indian citizenship as equal to giving up the Tibetan identity altogether. Thus, in Dharamsala, there is a controversial discussion about taking on the Indian citizenship or not. Even those with a more relaxed attitude fear that the decision of taking on the Indian citizenship would be not accepted by family members and friends.

Most of the Tibetans in exile do not possess a citizenship although the CTA functions as a government. They have a range of documents but none of them attests them that they are Tibetan citizens as there is no Tibetan nation state. Nevertheless, or as a matter of fact, the Tibetans have a strong sense of national identity as Tibetans. Losing their country even strengthened this national sentiment and solidarity among themselves. On the one hand, there are those who say that taking on a different citizenship to have more opportunities and to make life easier does not make them less Tibetan. To their mind it is more important to be committed to the cause than to debate which citizenship to have. On the other hand, there are those who are strictly against taking the Indian citizenship because they feel that Tibetans are not Indians and they should not be on paper. It seems like this discussion is only concerning the Indian citizenship because people are not discussing e.g. gaining US citizenship, which is rather a goal many want to achieve. Others do not understand why there is a discussion about it at all. Nevertheless, many still try to separate themselves from their host country India. Thus, they do not intend to

mingle with Tibetans, which is still seen as unacceptable while being married to a Westerner is equally admired just like taking on a Western citizenship. At this point, the collective identity plays an important role. For the cause of Tibet and their struggle for freedom it is important that they stay among themselves and that the Tibetan identity is strengthened.

3.5.8 Commitment and activism in exile

In Dharamsala there are a range of different activist groups and NGOs as well as different approaches towards the struggle for a free Tibet. While SFT follows the official non-violence policy of the CTA, the TYC is in favor of the complete independence of Tibet and is also ready for an armed fight against China. Although some fear that the number of activists decreasing, the activism landscape in Dharamsala is lively and a considerable number of young people are committed to the struggle for a free Tibet. Activists are eager to *“keep the flame alive”* (Dorjee, TYC member 42).

In Tibet itself, but also in exile the protest in form of self-immolation became renown. In 1998, the first Tibetan committed self-immolation in Delhi and set himself on fire. While being in flames he demanded a free Tibet and the return of the Dalai Lama from exile. Since then, around 160 people have self-immolated themselves. Whenever a protester dies in the flames, Tibetans in Dharamsala gather for a candle light vigil and walk down to the main temple to express their respect for the activist.

It is nevertheless controversially discussed by scholars and Tibetans themselves if self-immolation is not an act of violence and therefore non-Buddhist behavior. Several authors such as the anthropologist Carole McGranahan have published on this topic. McGranahan does not regard self-immolation as a form of suicide as others do but rather a sacrifice in order to

“protest against Chinese policies, a form of religious offering, and communication with the world and [...] other Tibetans” (McGranahan 2018)¹⁶.

Still, many Tibetans see it as a waste of human life in the struggle for a free Tibet. Some even want to see Chinese people dead instead of their own people as a CTA politician stated in our interview. The Dalai Lama neither condemns nor supports self-immolations, but it is clear that Tibetans are under severe pressure and that Tibet has to be freed rather sooner than later.

¹⁶ <http://www.carolemcgranahan.com/self-immolations-in-tibet/>

Besides the question if self-immolations have a positive impact or not there are a range of disagreements among the exile Tibetans. A few have already been discussed in the preceding chapters but some more will be considered in the following section.

In terms of politics and policy making several disagreements came up in the interviews and informal talks. One aspect is that especially young Tibetans want to get rid of the romanticized and mystified image of Tibetans and share their problems within the community with outsiders. Pema, an STF activist, stated that she almost never talks about issues like sexual harassment or rape within the Tibetan community with Westerners. On the one hand, she has the impression that Westerners do not want to know about it and on the other hand Tibetans do not want to share their inner problems and stop her from sharing this sort of information. Tsering, by contrast, is completely against sharing this kind of information as it would support China in their anti-Tibetan policy and as he fears it would stop Westerners from supporting Tibetans. *“People make mistakes. Those mistakes you don’t tell everybody”* (Tsering 212f.), he said and later added, *“They wouldn’t understand”* (ibid. 214).

In general, Tibetans sometimes feel forgotten and alone with their struggle as there is no answer to self-immolations from the international community and awareness and support are getting less. Governments seem to be too dependent on China to stand up for the Tibetan cause, Tenzin stated. *“They do not even dare to invite the Dalai Lama anymore”* (Tenzin 216f.)

Another aspect and point of disagreement concerns the political strategy of the CTA. Many Tibetans criticize the fact that the CTA is discussing eagerly behind closed doors and does not share it with the Tibetans nor with the outside world. Especially young Tibetans and activists feel tricked and do not trust the CTA anymore. However, others stress that people should rather fulfill their duties and serve the cause instead of trying to find out about everything the government does. But again, those see sharing everything with the outside world as sharing it with their enemy China who should definitely not know about their political strategy. In general, the CTA was criticized a lot for its way of governing.

Thus, we got an insight into the quotidian living experiences of Tibetans in exile and the impact on their political thinking. Exile Tibetans live under certain living conditions due to their (non)status as refugees and the policy of two different administrations, the Indian and the Tibetan. They have certain political rights and duties. On an everyday life basis, they have certain challenges to deal with. One of the biggest challenge concerns the future insecurity, which is for many difficult to deal with although Tibetan Buddhists are not supposed to be concerned

about the future. The religion still plays an important role for Tibetans as well as their political leader the Fourteenth Dalai Lama. Besides, the future insecurity Tibetans worry about the time after the Dalai Lama passes away as they feel that he is the one who keeps the community together. All these challenges have an impact on their political thinking. In general, life in exile is very political and people have different opinions on different topics. Besides, activism and commitment to the freedom struggle is very important to the exile Tibetans. The most important goal is or has to be the return to a free Tibet. While some activist groups follow the policy of the CTA and the Dalai Lama and this a non-violent approach for an autonomous Tibet, others propagate for complete independence and are ready for an armed fight against the Chinese oppressor. A lot of young people are committed in the freedom struggle although they have never been to Tibet. Nevertheless, the activist groups, the CTA and the Dalai Lama try to keep people connected to the cause and their home country. A new collective exile identity was formed in order to preserve the Tibetan culture and language and to return to Tibet one day. Although people face a lot of challenges they have been successful in socio-economic terms. Tibetans have their own schools and run their own business. Although, Tibetans are often seen as a homogenous group who strictly follow their religious leader, the Dalai Lama I have experienced in the field that they cannot be seen as such. People have different life styles as well as different opinions in political terms and also contradict the utterances of the Dalai Lama. Especially young people are ready to modernize the Tibetan society and ask the politicians to have uncomfortable talks about problems within the society. They do not only fight for Tibet's freedom but also for women's rights, which is not on the CTA agenda yet. They are well educated and also ask the policy of the CTA, which puts the preservation of the culture above all although young Tibetans do not wish a rigid society where nothing changes. Nevertheless, things have changed during the time in exile. Now, Tibetans have a democratic elected leader who is in the second year of charge, although opinions on him became rather negative in the last few years and the Dalai still occupies a political role. Thus, the Tibetan exile community is a heterogeneous one which consists of different people from different social and regional backgrounds and different challenges and political opinions.

4 Analysis and Contextualization

For the final analysis, I have chosen a few specific topics discussed in this thesis, which I will examine now in more detail. Therefore, I am using utterances and quotes of my interlocutors to illustrate these topics. The main research question asks how quotidian living experiences of the Tibetans in Dharamsala shape their political thinking. Thus, this thesis is about the current political situation in Dharamsala and about the people's political standpoints. To answer the research question, I have shown what life in exile looks like and which challenges exile Tibetans in India face. In the following paragraphs, I am going to analyze the current political situation in Dharamsala using the positions of a few of my interlocutors, which can be quite controversial at some points.

4.1 Exile politics

The central issues of this thesis are on the one hand the quotidian living experiences of Tibetans in Dharamsala and on the other hand the political situation in exile, or rather the political thinking of exile Tibetans. In order to understand the people's political standpoints, it is necessary to have an insight into the people's living circumstances, which impact the political thinking and the political situation in Dharamsala.

In the interest of learning about the living circumstances of my interlocutors, I have spoken with them about their biographic background, about their sentiments towards their current living conditions and about political issues. Political issues concerned the Tibetan administration (CTA), political activism, as well as religious matters as Buddhism is of great importance for the Tibetans in terms of everyday life issues and for politics. In this thesis, it has been shown that the Dalai Lama – who used to be the political and the religious leader of all Tibetans – still occupies a prominent role even though he has resigned from his political agendas in 2011. Furthermore, we need to remember that the Tibetan community is a religio-political society (Ardley 2002: 3f.) as religion and politics are still combined. This means that the Tibetan exile society can also be seen as a moral community (Kloos 2010: 34). He stresses that religion or ethics and politics are mingled and that Tibetans follow the Buddhist ethics of altruism and compassion (Kloos 2010: 28).

The fact that religion and politics are (still) combined, was rarely questioned by my interlocutors as well as the fact that democracy was not initiated by the people themselves but by their

religious and former political leader, the Dalai Lama. Democracy was implemented in the Tibetan exile community because the Dalai Lama wanted this change. The Tibetans living in exile had not asked or fought for it (McConnell 2009: 122).

Tibetan politics are still personalized and centered around the Dalai Lama. Although he resigned from his political office many Tibetans still regard him as their political leader while the president, Lobsang Sangay, does not have the same reputation. Lobsang Sangay is in his second period of office but – as some of my interlocutors stated – lost the Tibetan's respect, even of those who supported him when he first ran for presidency in 2011.

“Me and my wife we supported him [Lobsang Sangay] when he first ran for presidency. We were even in the committee to promote him but now we are quite disappointed with him. [...] He is only self-promoting himself in the media and abroad. [...] And he is not very respectful towards the Dalai Lama. He even said that he is the political leader of the Dalai Lama but I think no one is in the position to lead the Dalai Lama. He is our leader. [...] Sometimes I think that it would be better if he [the Dalai Lama] was still our political leader” (Tsering, 12th June 2017),

Tsering stated in one of our conversations. He mentioned that the Dalai Lama has a far more important position for the Tibetans than the democratically elected president. In a different conversation with Tsering, he even stated that for him democratization of the Tibetan society is not as important as to fight for the freedom of Tibet. Thus, for Tsering, exile politics and democracy in the diaspora are not as pressing of an issue as a free Tibet.

Furthermore, the Sikyong but also the CTA are confronted with a range of criticism. Many exile Tibetans are not satisfied anymore with the politics of their administration. Especially those who fight for the complete independence of Tibet are critical about the policy of the CTA, the MWA and about the fact that there are no more negotiations with the Chinese authorities. Some even blame the Sikyong that he is only promoting himself and is not respectful towards the Dalai Lama as has been shown by Tsering who can be described as a quite political person. Additionally, single politicians do not play an important role for the exile Tibetans like in other administrations. They are neither frequently mentioned in the media nor did any of my interlocutors speak of any other CTA politician.

While the president is openly and frequently criticized it is almost impossible to say anything against the Dalai Lama. People who did are often dismissed by the Tibetan community and are sometimes even seen as enemies of the Tibetan cause which is the freedom of Tibet.

“You have to be very careful” (Tenzin 304), Tenzin warned during our interview. One of the most notorious critics of the Dalai Lama is Lukar Jam who ran for presidency in 2016. Most of the Tibetans I spoke to blame him for unnecessarily creating division within the Tibetan society. Especially those who strictly follow the Dalai Lama dismiss Lukar Jam for criticizing their religious leader. These are also the exile Tibetans afraid of the time after the Dalai Lama’s death. They fear that the community will fall apart and that there will be more controversies and discrepancies within the Tibetan exile society.

“We have less people to do the Tibetan struggle. More and more people are going abroad where they do not think about Tibet anymore” (Tsering 320-22),

Tsering mentioned in our interview. Thus, some fear that less people will be committed to the cause if the Dalai Lama does not guide them anymore. The Dalai Lama himself leaves the choice to the Tibetans if they will need a further Dalai Lama or if they rather strengthen the democracy in exile. Some of my interlocutors mentioned that they wished that their community was more democratic and that they had more elections than only for the presidency. In general, I discovered that especially young people wish for a greater say on a political level while elderly Tibetans still follow the Dalai Lama’s say.

Besides, people are also afraid of how the Indian government will treat them as soon as the Dalai Lama passes away even though he has no official political status anymore.

“One day His Holiness will be gone and how the Indian government is going to treat us then? So, that question is still there. Will they allow us to stay how it is now? Or will they tell us to go back to Tibet or whatever?” (Dolma 364-66).

Dolma’s statement shows that she is afraid of what will happen after the Dalai Lama passes away. Although she mentioned earlier in the interview that she feels that she wants to go back to Tibet one day she fears that she will be forced to go back by the Indian government and that Tibetans in India will lose their residence certificate.

Dolma is one of those who wishes that the Tibetan administration would do more for the situation in exile while others think that Tibetan politicians should rather concentrate on the conditions inside Tibet. The latter still see the exile situation as temporary and wish to live in a stable Tibet one day.

In general, my interlocutors stated that the government often does not meet the needs of the people in exile. Additionally, young well-educated Tibetans suffer from unemployment and

missing opportunities within the community. A CTA politician I spoke to mentioned the economic weakness of the CTA as reason for that.

“The exile community is an economic disaster. Politically and culturally we are successful but not in economic terms” (Yeshe 42),

Yeshe, a parliamentarian, stated. This Tibetan politician sees a lack in economic development as a reason for the current unsatisfying situation in exile, which causes youth unemployment and thus migration towards Western countries such as the USA.

4.2 Exile politics and women

Besides that, many Tibetans – especially young female Tibetans – wish that politicians would address women rights more seriously than they do now. Women do not feel represented in politics and still have to fight against stereotypes like not being suitable leaders. Women are still regarded as inferior to men and responsible for the household and children. In the Tibetan parliament only around twenty percent of the members are women.

When I spoke to CTA politicians it became clear that they see women’s rights and gender issues as less important than fighting for the cause of Tibet or to economically stabilize the situation in exile. A range of agendas was mentioned but women’s rights were only addressed briefly.

Moreover, in activist groups women still have to fight for leading positions and the recognition for this sort of work. Thus, Pema, an SFT activist states,

“The woman as a leader also faces kind of different challenges as well. Oh, you are a woman you cannot, you are not decisive, women need to think a lot, women are emotional [...] I don’t know, this kind of thing. [...] That issue is definitely one of the issue that we need to discuss about” (Pema 302-305).

Thus, the situation concerning gender equality and women’s rights is still unsatisfying for many female Tibetans who try to fight against them. Others – mostly male and elderly Tibetans – however are not interested in focusing on issues like these as they only see the freedom of Tibet as the most important agenda for Tibetans. They feel those issues keep them from reaching their goal.

However, this is only one of the discrepancies within the Tibetan exile community. Others are discussed in the following chapter.

4.3 Discrepancies within the community

Collective memory and collective identity play an integral part within the Tibetan exile community. Nevertheless, a closer look into the Tibetan society shows that political positions are versatile. It has been proven in this thesis that different exile Tibetans represent different political standpoints and opinions. While women wished that Tibetan politicians would address their concerns more seriously, others see the fight against China as the highest priority which is not supposed to be slowed down by any other agendas.

Thus, different individuals and groups of interest represent different opinions and approaches. In the interviews it became clear that the Tibetan community has to deal with certain discrepancies. In general, Tibetans who are not committed to the cause are more or less dismissed. Tibetans are supposed to form an entity in order to fight for the freedom of Tibet in the opinion of the majority of the Tibetan community. Nevertheless, my data shows that there are many contradictions and controversies within the community.

Tsering is very committed to the cause but not participating in any activist group, as he believes that they concentrate on too many other things besides the struggle for a free Tibet. He stated that every Tibetan has to take part in the struggle: *“You have a responsibility of our struggle”* (Tsering 90). He addressed the discrepancies within the community as a weakness. Thus, he decided not to be part of a certain activist group or movement as to his mind there are too many disputes. He stressed in the interview that the community has to stick together in order to achieve its goals. *“Sometimes what they do is they make divisions”* (Tsering 124) and he asked:

“Are you really intending to fight against China? Or [do] you want [to] create a division in our society, in our community? [...] I am not supporting any of those people” (Tsering 134-36)

Fighting for democracy in Tibet or in exile is less crucial for Tsering.

“We are not here to fight for the democracy of Tibet. We are here for fighting against Communist government China, to regain our country” (Tsering 136f.).

He summarized:

“Just trying to stay together and fight against the Communist government China” (Tsering 108).

Also, Tenzin stated, *“In any manner, you can serve”* (Tenzin 83). Not being committed to the cause is seen as very negative. Tsering stated repeatedly that he does not think highly of people who do not work and only hang around in the streets playing “Carrom”, a popular board game.

In summary, commitment to the cause is expected of every exile Tibetan and forms the collective identity of Tibetans. Not only the Dalai Lama or activist groups propagate this but also individuals stress the importance of the Tibetan cause. Notably, some do not fight for democracy in Tibet in the first place but exclusively against the Communist administration of China, which they consider as their enemy as has become apparent in Tsering’s statements. Nevertheless, many others stand up for change within the Tibetan society in exile. Thus, activists fight for more democracy, for women’s rights and raise awareness for sexual harassment, rape and child molestation, which are rarely discussed in public.

Although many Tibetans feel the need to serve the country and to do something for the cause – which they regard as to be best achieved by living within the Tibetan exile community – most of them think about going abroad to live a better life than they do now in India. The following chapter deals with this issue of staying or going abroad or, as a third opinion, going (back) to Tibet.

4.4 Should I stay or should I go?

Many Tibetans struggle with this question, especially those who still have family in Tibet and feel the duty to care for their parents when they get older. Although it was mentioned by every single interlocutor that they want to go back to Tibet one day, this utterance has to be understood in metaphoric terms (Houston and Wright 2003: 230) or in an abstract sense in so far as this wish is embedded in the collective memory of Tibetans in exile. Thus, it cannot be assumed that all Tibetans would actually go back if they had the possibility. Tibetans in exile have this wish because of the collective memory and shared history. They are supposed to go back to this place as soon as it is free, even those who were born in exile and who do not have relatives there. As the goal to return is embedded in the collective identity, it also applied to those people. *“We live in hope. Hope that one day we will go back”* (Tenzin 115), Tenzin summed up.

For both, first and later generations, a real return would be quite difficult. The first generation may have relatives in Tibet but since they fled they are regarded as separatists by the Chinese authorities and are thus suspicious or even seen as criminals. Tsering once stated that he never

tried to apply for visiting his family in Tibet as it would be too dangerous for his family. Chinese authorities would interrogate them where their family member was and why he left.

My friend Tenzin declared that two of his brothers who live in Tibet had been to prison because they were participating in non-violent protests, thus he is too afraid of going back. Many do not want to give up living in a democratic country and having the freedom to speak out about the situation in Tibet and their demands. Thus, exile Tibetans often find themselves in a state of limbo.

I have rarely met Tibetans who really want to stay in India. Tibetans do not feel at home in India or even close to the Indian society and politics. All the Tibetans I spoke to have plans to go abroad or to go back to Tibet. Some plans seem to be vague and far away while others are quite concrete. In my German class I had two students whose husbands are living in a German speaking country and they were planning on joining them. For that reason, they learned the language. Others were only dreaming of going to the USA, to make a career and to come back to Tibet one day to support their parents. Most of the Tibetans I spoke to are well educated and attended university. Nevertheless, they were working beneath their qualifications.

Since Tibetans do not have a proper passport, applying for a visa can be difficult. Many (young) Tibetans suffer from that as they cannot move freely. Tenzin once mentioned during an informal talk, *“I feel like a prisoner. Being a refugee is like being a prisoner”* (Tenzin, 7th May 2017). Exile Tibetans often struggle with inner controversies. Tenzin for example wants to go back to Tibet as every exile Tibetan is supposed to feel this way and as he also has the duty to take care of his mother who lives alone and will need help in the near future¹⁷. At the same time, he wants to be successful in his job. He went to university and has a Master’s degree in economics. He dreams of going to a Western country to do further studies. At the same time, he wants to stay in India as he says,

“The advantage is that you get a lot of time if you know how to use it in India. [...] Because I have many friends in USA, Europe and they told me that they cannot find time. So, I heard this story about two friends who are living under the same roof. One has got evening job and other has got morning job. So, they do not meet under the same roof. Even [though] they are living under the same roof. So, I thought it is probably hard to get time over there, in the Western countries because time is money, they say, right?” (Tenzin 96-101).

¹⁷ On the issue of caring and migration or distance cf. Hromadžić and Palmberger 2018

Tibetans have a certain image of “the West” as becomes apparent in this example. Often it is quite positive or romanticized but in this case Tenzin is afraid of not having enough time for himself anymore. Thus, he hesitates to go abroad although he dreams of doing further studies in a Western country.

At the same time, he does not have a legal status in India and will always face restrictions. Thus, he feels that he will not be happy in either of those places. Also, Dawa states:

“Without country, we do not have much opportunity to do something. Indian government offered us good opportunity but we do not get all the full opportunity like citizens” (Dawa 100-102)

In Tibet, Tenzin will not be able to work in economics, as he does not speak Chinese. In a Western country, he fears that it will be too stressful and that he will be separated from his social network that he created in India throughout the years he has lived there. At the same time, access to education for Tibetans is much easier in India than in a Western country or in China. Nevertheless, he does not have citizenship in India and cannot even apply for it. Thus, he will never have the same rights as Indians do. He is neither entitled to buy land nor to travel freely, or to get a job at the Indian government.

Many exile Tibetans face the same problems and controversies as Tenzin. Only people who came to India between 1959 and 1979 are entitled to apply for the Indian citizenship. Others do not even have a refugee status, as the Indian government did not subscribe the UNHCR declaration. Thus, all these Tibetans have to renew their residence certificate every year. Applying for a visa to go to a foreign country is quite difficult, even for Tibet. Sonam mentioned that she had applied several times to go to Tibet to visit her family but her request was denied every single time. Thus, she does not have the possibility to see her family but feels the duty to take care of her parents when they get older. She also wants to be successful in her job as she holds a Master’s degree in mass communication. Additionally, both Sonam and Tenzin want to live within the Tibetan community and support other Tibetans as well as participate in the cause for a free Tibet. This shows that Tibetans do not only feel responsible for their own family but also for all the other Tibetans. Leaving behind the community is not a possibility for many Tibetans. They are told from a young age that they have to take part in the freedom struggle, be compassionate and help others. Tenzin mentioned also he rather stays in India as *“education is the only weapon we have now”* (Tenzin 233f.).

To summarize, it has been proven that the situation of Tibetans in exile is a struggle for many. In India, they do not have a secure status or future, which they would neither have in Tibet. Most of the young Tibetans consider going abroad to work or study there but as they do not have passports they cannot easily apply for visas. The third option or supposed wish of every exile Tibetan is to go to Tibet one day, which is equally difficult. Thus, most exile Tibetans find themselves in a state of limbo and do not know what their future will look like.

4.5 Subsequent generations and the Tibetan heritage

First generation exile Tibetans often fear that subsequent generations feel less connected to Tibet, the Tibetan culture and the way of life. They share a feeling of loss and forgetting.

“I do not know if my kids, if they would go back to Tibet because they were born here. If they would do higher study and maybe they would go to Western country. So, I do not know if they would go to Tibet. But we always kind of encourage them about the identity of Tibet, the language, that we are Tibetans and we need to go back to Tibet and fight, get back the country” (Dawa 121-126).

Dawa was born in Tibet and has seen what happened to this country. Coming to exile he decided to fight for the independence of Tibet and wants to encourage his daughters to also be committed to the cause and identify as Tibetans as their existence status is threatened. He fears that his daughters may go to the West one day and will forget about their background and their identity. Thus, he and his wife try to keep the Tibetan identity alive and share it with their children in the hope that they will later share it with their children. He also stated that he only speaks Tibetan with them in order for them not to lose their language. Dawa stressed:

“Without knowing Tibetan language, they have no more identity. [...] Tibetan language is very important to perceive Tibetan Buddhism” (Dawa 131-133).

Dawa still has family in Tibet and wishes to return with his family one day. Some exile Tibetans try to keep their children from speaking English too often or to spend too much time with Westerners who come to Dharamsala. Also speaking Hindi, the language of their hosts, is avoided. Younger generations often do not feel the need to learn Hindi anymore as they live exclusively among Tibetans.

Generally, more conservative Tibetans think that there is too much influence from the West which they do not consider as positive. The language plays an integral part for the Tibetans as

they believe that Tibetan Buddhism can only be understood and practiced in the original language. “*Without our language, we are nothing. [...] We could be Nepali or even Chinese*” (Tsering, 22nd May 2017), Tsering stressed in one of our conversations. For him, without language there is no religion and without religion no culture. He is in favor of development but does not want too much change. Thus, he keeps his children from speaking too much English and Hindi.

This is why Tibetan children almost exclusively frequent Tibetan schools where only Tibetan is spoken. Education plays an integral part for exile Tibetans. Tenzin even called it their “*only weapon*” against the Chinese and to survive (Tenzin 7). Education in exile follows a strict curriculum, which aims to reinforce a strong Tibetan national identity. Tibetans are supposed to feel and act like Tibetans, thus be a “*moral community*” (Kloos 2010: 34). McConnell and others (Roemer 2008 and Chen 2012) write that the national identity is formed through generalized education (McConnell 2012: 89).

At the same time, young Tibetans need to speak English to study in India or abroad. Thus, parents cannot keep them fully from speaking English even though some regard it as a danger to their own culture. Overall, most Tibetans I have met spoke English perfectly.

The preservation of their culture and thus their language and religion can also be understood in nostalgic terms. As Angé and Berliner note nostalgia is a “*fascinating site for studying contemporary issues of identity, politics and history*” (Angé and Berliner 2015: 1) and can also be applied in this context. Tibetans in exile refer to Tibet as a lost home which was occupied by a foreign force and which has to be regained. “*We do not have a place called home*” (Dolma 6) stated Dolma in the interview. In order to prevent losing their identity and thus their existence the memory of their homeland has to be kept alive and transferred to their subsequent generations. Nostalgic sentiments form “*exclusionary identity politics*” (Bonnett 2016: 97) which is also true for the Tibetan exile society. It has already been shown in the empirical part of this thesis that Tibetans almost exclusively stay within their own community. Relationships or marriages with Indians are scarce and not regarded highly.

Thus, it became apparent how important it is to Tibetans to preserve their culture. Pema, an SFT activist shows that she as a woman regards this preservation as a forced duty of Tibetan women.

She stated in one of our conversations,

“Sometimes I feel that we as women we have to be even more committed. [...] Or it is our duty to preserve the culture. [...] You see like working at the CTA as a woman means that you have to wear the chupa, you know, the traditional dress. But men do not have to wear a chupa. You know, there is also one for men, like a shirt. [...] Men are wearing a suit. [...] So for me it sometimes feel like it is on us women to preserve the culture or to show that the culture is still alive. [...] But certainly, there has been change and it is good that there is change. Sometimes I feel like we are acting as something which we are not anymore. [...] Certainly, I want Tibet to be free and I want to go there one day but I do not want to live like hundred years back. Many people seem to want that but not me” (Pema, 16th May 2017).

It has been shown that not all Tibetans are interested in keeping a rigorous culture without any change. Especially young people wish for change and the possibility to live in a modern environment. Not everybody is interested in wearing traditional clothes in everyday life. Pema even mentioned that she feels that Tibetans are only pretending to live a certain way of life which she sees as dangerous as it fades out problems within the community which she criticizes are not being addressed.

To summarize, it becomes clear once again that the preservation of the Tibetan identity – first and foremost the language and the religion – has the highest priority for the Tibetan authorities. Influence from the outside, be it from India or the West, is often regarded as negative. Thus, Tibetans aim to stay amongst themselves and to pass on their legacy to subsequent generations. This practice can also be regarded as a nostalgic sentiment since Tibetans share a feeling of loss and yearning for Tibet as well as the fear of their threatened existence. At the same time, young Tibetans wish for change in the society instead of insisting on rigorous culture concepts. Thus, the following question can be asked,

4.6 Quo vadis Tibetan exile community?

In Buddhist belief, this question is not supposed to be asked. Tibetans are not asked to care about the future but certainly do since they find themselves in a quite difficult situation, as has been discussed above. Tibetans ask themselves what the future might hold, particularly where and how they will live in the future, what will happen after the Dalai Lama passes away and so on. These questions came up in the interviews and discussions I had in the field and in this chapter I want to discuss them again.

Some scholars writing on the Tibetan exile have predicted violent outbreaks in the future, which means that Tibetans will deny the MWA in order to fight China in an armed resistance. Owen, for instance, addresses the frustration of young exile Tibetans and their potential for violent action in favor of the Tibetan independence. He writes that young Tibetans are more and more willing to *“take up arms and fight for the Tibetan cause”* (Owen 2014: 154).

I did not experience this tendency in McLeod Ganj although a few utterances pointed into this direction. In this thesis, different characters who have different standpoints towards the Tibetan cause have been presented. Most of them follow the MWA which intends a non-violent policy towards the occupation of Tibet. However, there are several people who are in favor of the complete independence of Tibet and who are ready for an armed fight. *“Why not kill others instead of ourselves? You can’t be always nice”* (Norbu 90). Norbu stated in our interview. Tibetans are tired of seeing their fellow Tibetans suffer or even die. One of the participants of my online questionnaire wrote:

“I don't know how to describe my feelings about self-immolations. It's difficult to imagine how difficult life is in Tibet that people resort to extreme measures like self-immolations to protest. It's the ultimate sacrifice any individual could do for the cause of Tibet but unfortunately the world has been turning blind eye to Tibet because they don't want to confront China” (Participant 23).

Nevertheless, most Tibetans do not want to start an armed fight. They realize that they would be too weak to fight against China. The non-violent tendency became especially clear in the online questionnaire. Another participant declared:

“Through violent way we cannot fight with Chinese because they have huge amount of army. They are 90 % much more army, weapon, everything. And also violent is not a good way” (Participant 7).

Besides that, Tibetans feel that they do not have a secure future. Dolma mentioned in the interview:

“Our future is not very secured in India. So, I think that is why so many Tibetans try to go abroad” (Dolma 6).

As she declares, many Tibetans try to go abroad. Especially those who have children try to provide them with a prosperous future which they feel they will not have in India. Many Tibetans in India ask themselves what their situation will look like as soon as the Dalai Lama passes

away. They feel like he is the one who keeps the community united and who negotiates their residence in India with the Indian authorities.

“When the Dalai Lama passes away [...] we don’t know what happens. How the Indian government will treat us” (Tenzin 8),

Tenzin mentioned in our interview. Besides that, Tibetans in exile perceive a range of factors as a threat to their community. These are – beside the death of the Dalai Lama – the emigration to other countries and the division of the community itself. At an early stage of my research in McLeod Ganj it became clear that emigration to Western countries is perceived as threat for the Tibetan community. Tsering stressed in one of our first conversations that he fears that the struggle for a free Tibet is in danger as more and more Tibetans are going abroad. As has already been discussed, he is afraid that the Tibetan exile community is divided and that not all Tibetans follow the same aim anymore. For him this is the biggest threat to the community. While others wish for more change, more democratizations and especially more rights for women he is only focused on the freedom struggle of Tibet which is not supposed to be delayed by other agendas such as the achievement of gender equality.

4.7 Summary

The political thinking of Tibetans in Dharamsala is shaped by different factors. I have summarized the most important aspects of Tibetan political attitude, which will be discussed below.

First of all, the uncertain residency status shapes the Tibetan’s political thinking as it is present in every-day-life and consequently relevant to politics. Exile Tibetans do not have an official refugee status according to the UN convention as India has not signed the convention. Nevertheless, they do have certain rights and duties similar to those of official refugees. Still, Tibetans in India have to renew their residency certificate every year. Many Tibetans wish to abolish this bureaucratic burden. At the same time, only few Tibetans who are entitled to it have taken the Indian citizenship. Furthermore, the question of residency of many Tibetans in India is linked to the Dalai Lama. The majority of my interlocutors fear that they are not authorized to stay in India anymore as soon as the Dalai Lama passes away or that they will have to deal with severe problems around their residency status.

The matter of residency status is linked to another important aspect of exile Tibetan political thought, namely to the rights Tibetans have or do not have in India. Exile Tibetans are not entitled to buy land and thus to obtain property. This fact creates a difficult situation for many

as they do run restaurants but they do not own these places nor the houses they live in. My interlocutors see this circumstance as one of the most difficult ones they face in exile. Therefore, many want to go abroad to finally own something they can bequeath to their children besides the Tibetan cultural heritage. Most of the Tibetans I met still have the hope to return to Tibet one day and do not try full heartedly to become adjusted to their lives in India, which they still see as their host country and not as their home country. Those who were born in Tibet and have come to India without their families often suffer from that distinction.

At the same time, exile Tibetans cannot just leave India in order to start a new live in a different country. They do not have a proper passport nor a citizenship to apply for a visa or the process of doing so is linked to almost unsurmountable bureaucracy. Many (young) Tibetans I met suffer from that fact, as they wish to go abroad to work or to do further studies. They are often not satisfied with the jobs they have in India which are in many cases not adequate to the education they have. This also leads to identity or personal insecurities and keeps them from moving on in their lives. Others regard the wish to leave India for a Western country as a threat for the Tibetan community as less Tibetans will be committed to solve the Tibet question which they fear will lead to a standstill.

Thus, there is a range of discrepancies within the community. The most prominent division within the exile community lies around the Tibet question itself. Should becoming completely independent or only autonomous and stay a part of China – known as the Middle Way Approach (MWA) be pursued? Furthermore, it has become apparent that a part of exile Tibetans wants politicians to concentrate on the political, economic and social situation in exile while the other part wants them to focus on the situation inside Tibet and demands this to be the only task of Tibetan politicians. For the former group the situation in exile still has to be improved. They wish for more democratization, women's rights, gender equality and the like. Especially young Tibetans blame the society and politicians that sexuality and above all homosexuality and transgender identities are still taboo and that molestation and violence against women and children are not prosecuted adequately. Furthermore, they deplore that psychological disorders and various forms of addictions are not treated well enough and that many Tibetans suffer from these illnesses without having enough access to treatment.

The living circumstances of Tibetans in Dharamsala are still shaped by different challenges and difficulties, which leads to different forms contradictory of political thought and action. Tibetans cannot be regarded as a homogeneous group which silently follows the Dalai Lama's say. They are rather a heterogeneous and diverse community which shares a cultural heritage and certain memories which are at the same time questioned and critically reflected.

5 Conclusion

This thesis has aimed to show what the current situation in the Tibetan exile in Dharamsala looks like, where people struggle and where they are successful. I laid open the concerns and challenges of living in exile and addressed relating thereto political issues since I was interested in the interplay of everyday life and the political discourse. Thus, the central research question was:

How do quotidian living experiences shape the political thinking of exile Tibetans in Dharamsala, India?

To answer this question, I conducted field research in Dharamsala for four months where I was working with various ethnographic research techniques. First and foremost, I used the method of participant observation as I was living and working among Tibetans for four months. In addition, I conducted fourteen qualitative interviews in which I mainly used the method of narrative biographic interviews. Furthermore, I created a quantitative questionnaire which was based on the first results of the qualitative interviews. These techniques helped me to understand what the situation for Tibetans in Dharamsala looks like and how people defray their daily lives, and furthermore, how these living circumstances shape the people's political thinking. For the analysis, I used the method of qualitative content analysis following Breidenstein et al. (2013) and Schreier (2014).

In order to answer the research question, I created a theoretical framework, which deals with the following topics. First of all, I had to define what is meant by exile politics and political thinking. Therefore, I used the notions of Ardley and McConnell. Both of them have conducted research in Tibetan settlements and have created useful concepts on Tibetan politics. Ardley understands the Tibetan society as a religio-political one and thus as a society where religion still plays an as important role as politics do. Even though there are also Tibetan Muslims and those following the indigenous religion of Bon (cf. Kauffmann 2015: 88ff.), Buddhism is the predominant religion of Tibetans. This became especially clear to me when Tibetans were addressing the importance of the Dalai Lama who occupies a prominent role among them although he has resigned from his political office years ago. McConnell adds that the Central Tibetan Administration functions like a government on another sovereign state and is at the same time “a rare example of non-party democracy” (McConnell 2009: 124).

Furthermore, different concepts of migration are important to this thesis and the issue of Tibetan exiles. Hence, I have dealt with the concept of diaspora as well as the notions of exile and

refugees. It is important to define these concepts in order to understand the commonalities and differences.

Diaspora is a concept which is used frequently in social sciences. Nowadays, diaspora studies are not confined to a certain society anymore as they used to be. Diasporas are found and studied around the world. Heiss and Six-Hohenbalken (2011: 44) describe it as community which was formed by forced or voluntary migration from a place of origin to a distinct place which is also the case for Tibetans. According to the two authors, the characteristics of diaspora are a sense of belonging within the diaspora community and transnational networks to the place of origin and other diasporas across national borders. This is also true for the Tibetan diaspora community.

The notions diaspora and exile are often used in the same sense, as I have also done in this thesis, since I do not believe there to be major differences between the terms. Roemer following Shain uses the term in a more political manner as he writes “*exiles are persons who are engaged in political activity*” (Shain 1989 cit. in Roemer 2008: 37). As I am dealing with political issues in this thesis, I mainly used the term exile instead of diaspora.

Furthermore, the notion of refugees comes up repeatedly when dealing with the Tibetan diaspora. Although, they call themselves refugees, they do not officially have this status in India according to the 1951 refugee convention as the Indian government has not signed the document. Thus, in this thesis I only used the term when I was quoting my interlocutors.

Linked to these concepts are the notions of identity and belonging, which are also found in the literature on diaspora and especially in the literature on Tibetan exiles. Authors dealing with belonging claim that they want to go beyond identity constructions as they regard these to be too rigid. Nevertheless, both concepts overlap and are equally important to this issue.

In addition, I have studied the concepts of nostalgia and collective memory as I regard them as further interesting concepts for the issue of Tibetans in exile. During my field research I found that nostalgia is a noteworthy idea to discuss the Tibetan diaspora community. Nostalgia was and is mainly used by scholars of post-socialist studies but they also claim that it is a “*social phenomenon*” (Palmberger 2008: 100) that “*reaches across the world*” (Bonnett 2016: 1). Nostalgia triggers from temporal and/or spatial change, which often comes about in a rapid manner. Thus, nostalgia always refers to a sentiment of loss but it does never refer to the past alone. It is rather the “*result of a new understanding of time and space*” (Boym 2001: xvi). In the case of the Tibetan exile, it is important to note that nostalgia has an empowering capacity and is

able to change the present towards a better future. This is exactly what Tibetans are doing. They do not stick to a romanticized future in a utopian pre-Chinese past but they are eager to change their status quo towards a better future. They actively stand up for change and a more secure future for themselves and their children. At the same time, the conflict in Tibet is very present in the Tibetan exile community and shapes the lives of the Tibetans, especially of those who still have family there. Furthermore, nostalgia is closely connected to collective memory, which is part of every diasporic community. Thus, Tibetans in exile share a collective memory, which is passed on to subsequent generations. Weinzimmer writes,

“while history remains in the past collective memories are the active past which forms our identities” (Weinzimmer 2011: 13) and further stresses that

“collective stories about ancestral heritage [...] help reinforce group solidarity and ethnic identity” (ibid. 2011: 25).

Additionally, conflicts in the place of origin and a perceived or actual threat of existence can *“facilitate greater collective identification”* (Weinzimmer 2011: 3). Thus, collective memory and homeland conflict are central issues of the Tibetan identity and play an important role in terms of everyday life experiences of Tibetans in exile.

The theoretical part of this thesis was followed by the empirical one where it has been outlined what life in the Tibetan exile community looks like and how these circumstances shape the Tibetans’ political thinking.

For the first part of the empirical chapter I have on the one hand discussed the difference between the “first generation” and the “second generation” and furthermore created different dimensions of the living circumstances in exile since I wanted to lay out these circumstances on different levels in order to get a clearer picture. These dimensions include the collective dimension, the personal or individual dimension and the religious or cultural dimension. All these dimensions are interrelated and affect each other.

The collective dimension dealt with aspects which concern the Tibetan exile community in Dharamsala as a whole and on a non-individual level. This dimension addressed the relationship between Tibetans and Indians, as well as the aspects like identity and collective memory. The issue of regaining a free Tibet and of returning there one day is predominant in the Tibetan community and is part of the diasporic identity and collective memory. This part of the thesis also dealt with aspects of residency and relating thereto legal guidelines and bureaucracy. Furthermore, it discussed aspects of gender inequality and sensitive topics like sexual harassment

and child molestation within the community, which are barely addressed publicly or by the Tibetan authorities. Thus, the collective dimension of the Tibetan society in Dharamsala includes aspects of public life I have tried to lay open what this life looks like and how the people relate to it.

Secondly, I discussed the individual dimension of life in exile. This dimension included personal issues and family life. On the one hand, this section was dealing with the aspects of having family in Tibet and what that means to the people. On the other hand, I was addressing family life in exile. Both situations are perceived as difficult by the Tibetans. People shared their stories of flight with me and were talking about their concerns relating their families be it in Tibet or in exile. The separation from the biological family has led to the creation of new social networks and compensation families in exile. For those who have started a family in exile concerns about the future which they regard as insecure were discussed in the interviews. Incidentally, all my interlocutors have shared concerns and insecurities about the future – even though Buddhists are not supposed to worry about the future according to their religious belief. Thus, the individual dimension was discussing mostly future insecurities.

The third dimension dealt with religious and cultural aspects of the exile community. Buddhism plays an integral part within the Tibetan society and is personalized around the religious and former political leader, the Dalai Lama. Most Tibetans believe that Buddhism and the support of the Dalai Lama guides them through their difficulties and insecurities. Thus, the time after the Dalai Lama passes away is regarded as a future turning point for the exile community and the Tibetans in general.

The second chapter of the empirical part studied the political thinking of exile Tibetans. First, I discussed the question of how the conflict inside Tibet shapes the exile Tibetans' lives and their political thinking. In the theoretical chapter, I outlined that homeland conflict has the ability to strengthen the collective identity of diasporas. This is also the case for the Tibetan diaspora and the narrative of a lost homeland and the conflict in Tibet are predominant in the exile society and shape the people's lives insofar that all Tibetans are supposed to take part in the freedom struggle. Furthermore, the Tibetan freedom struggle is seen as a unique case and serves to strengthen the collective identity, which is even part of the educational curriculum in schools.

Despite this strong intent of a “we-identity”, I have experienced that the Tibetan exile community is heterogeneous in its thoughts and demands. This became clear when I discussed different

political topics with my interlocutors. Through the empirical part of this thesis, I laid out where these divergences can be found. The most significant division within the exile community lies in the question whether Tibet is supposed to become completely independent from China or an autonomous part of China. The official policy of the Central Tibetan administration follows the so called Middle Way Approach which aims the latter of these two ways. It was implemented by the Dalai Lama and those who follow this approach are in favour of a non-violent resistance.

Additionally, I laid open how the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA) is seen by the exile Tibetans and what they criticize about it. Again, people expect different actions from the administration. While one part wants them to concentrate exclusively on the preservation of the Tibetan culture and on the situation inside Tibet, others want them to improve the situation in exile. The former group still sees the exile as contemporary and is not interested in further democratization but only wants Tibet to be freed from the Chinese occupation. The other group by contrast wishes for change of the status quo. They want the CTA politicians to address issues such as women's rights, violence within the community, more direct democracy and the like. Thus, it becomes obvious that there are various contradictions and divergences within the exile society.

Furthermore, I addressed the situation of Tibetan women in exile in more detail. Tibetan women are still regarded as inferior to men and are supposed to take up the role of mothers and housewives. They are often not accepted in leading positions and still struggle with inequalities. Especially young, well-educated women fight against this status and are urging politicians to discuss these issues. So far, gender issues are only discussed on a superficial level. Women still do not have the same rights and possibilities as men do. However, these issues are seen as subordinate to the bigger goal of regaining a free Tibet.

Additionally, I discussed the role of the Dalai Lama and of the democratically elected president. It has been proven that the Dalai Lama occupies a profound role within the Tibetan community – also in political terms even though he has resigned from his political office in 2011. By contrast, the president does not enjoy this status and even though he was supported when he first ran for president he has lost his reputation among the Tibetans.

Another aspect dealt with the question of citizenship. Only few Tibetans have taken up the Indian citizenship – even among those who are entitled to it. Generally, most of the Tibetans uttered that they want to return to a free Tibet. It was mentioned quite frequently, even by young Tibetans, that people want to die inside Tibet and not in India. Thus, Tibetans do not integrate

themselves into their host's society in India as to this day their intention never has never been to stay forever. The demarcation from their hosts the Indians and from their occupiers the Chinese is obvious as ethnic endogamy is aimed for among the Tibetans. Mixed marriages or relationships between Indians and Tibetans are scarce.

To summarize, Tibetans have been very successful in creating a new exile society with their own schools, businesses and with their own government or administration. Nevertheless, exile Tibetans still struggle with certain matters. Especially younger generations try to leave and go to Western countries as they do not see a secure future in India. However, as they do not have legal papers for travelling, this intend is often hard to follow which frustrates many of them.

All the daily life issues and struggles discussed in this thesis form the political thinking of Tibetans in exile. However, not all of the exile Tibetans are equally committed in the struggle which leads to divergences within the community.

Future research might engage in aspects such as psychological illnesses of Tibetans like post-traumatic stress disorder. It can be asked what it means for a whole society if psychological diseases remain untreated. Furthermore, "sensitive topics" like sexual harassment, child molestation and rape within the Tibetan exile community could be discussed and enquire how the community copes with these issues. All these aspects were only addressed briefly in this thesis but might be of interest for future research.

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8 Appendix

Abstract

This Master's thesis is an attempt to explore the current life situation of exile Tibetans in Dharamsala, India. The central question of this thesis discusses how quotidian living experiences shape the political thinking of Tibetans in Dharamsala. Based on a four-month field research in Dharamsala, the author provides a bottom-up analysis of their everyday life and political discourses. The theoretical part of this thesis deals with the concepts of diaspora, exile, nostalgia, and collective memory. The empirical chapter introduces and discusses the collected data according to the research question. The final section discusses the results based on the theory and the empirical data. It intends to give an insight into the current political situation in exile and to provide new findings on that aspect. It is postulated that the Tibetan exile community is a heterogeneous society with different everyday life struggles and hence varied political opinions.

Abstract (German)

Diese Masterarbeit zielt darauf ab, die derzeitige politische Lage der Exiltibeter*innen in Dharamsala, Indian zu erforschen. Die zentrale Frage beschäftigt sich damit wie tägliche Lebenserfahrungen das politische Denken der Exiltibeter*innen formen. Basierend auf einer viermonatigen Feldforschung in Dharamsala präsentiert die Autorin eine bottom-up Analyse des täglichen Lebens und der politischen Standpunkte. Theoretisch basiert diese Arbeit auf den Konzepten Diaspora, Exil, Nostalgie und „collective memory“. Der empirische Teil stellt die gesammelten Daten aus dem Feld dar, die der Beantwortung der Forschungsfrage dienen. Das analytische Kapitel, das auch das abschließende Kapitel darstellt, diskutiert die Ergebnisse und bedient sich der Theorie wie auch der Empirie. Das Ziel der Arbeit ist es, einen Einblick in die derzeitige politische Lage in Dharamsala zu geben und damit neue Erkenntnisse zu schaffen. The Autorin argumentiert außerdem, dass die tibetische Community eine heterogene ist, die mit verschiedenen Herausforderungen des alltäglichen Lebens konfrontiert ist und die daher auch verschiedene politische Ansichten hat.