

# Resistance and Suffering: Shared Emotions in the Early Tibetan Diaspora in India

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## Abstract

This article traces forms of resistance in the early Tibetan diaspora (c. 1959–79) in India as both political and emotional practices. It thereby seeks to make productive recent insights of research into the history of emotions for the study of migration and diaspora in general and Tibetan exile in particular. It zooms in on *resistance* and *suffering* as key concepts of Tibetan diasporic public discourse, both constituting complex semantic networks that entangle elements from Tibetan and Buddhist heritage as well as the refugees' historical experiences. The article demonstrates the centrality of emotions to exilic morality and moral renegotiations, by probing into their historical effectivity and change. Furthermore, it will show how these concepts and practices are temporalised. This will uncover the ways in which key concepts such as resistance and suffering establish and negotiate multiple temporal relations to diverse pasts, presents and futures.

*Keywords:* Tibet; migration; exile; feelings; community; time

## Introduction

On 10 March 2019, the yearly commemoration of the Lhasa uprising of 1959, the activist Migmar Dhakyel spoke to a Berlin audience about the significance of that day to Tibetans around the world.<sup>1</sup> She opened with a statement that perfectly captured the centrality of resistance to her Tibetan diasporic identity in one single phrase: 'This very important day, our resistance, our existence'. At the same time, Tibetans in Tibet and around the world had been celebrating Wednesdays (the 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama's day of birth) for the past decade as 'White Wednesdays' (*lha dkar*).<sup>2</sup> Tenzin Dorjee has conceptualised this emergent set of practices as 'transformative resistance', a 'type of everyday resistance, aimed at self-development, self-betterment and self-empowerment' (Dorjee

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2015: 80). The movement, which originated in Tibet and subsequently spread to the diaspora, seeks to celebrate Tibetan identities through cultural practices of dress, language and more, and to raise awareness through non-violent forms of 'civil resistance'.<sup>3</sup>

The centrality of resistance as a key concept of the Tibetan diaspora is no recent phenomenon, however, and dates back to the early days of Tibetan exile. Following the 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama's escape into Indian exile in March 1959, Tibetans from all strata of society and from all over the Tibetan plateau undertook dangerous journeys across the Himalaya to seek refuge in Nepal, Bhutan and India. The Tibetan government in exile (TGiE, later the Central Tibetan Administration, CTA) was established in 1959 as the successor of the Tibetan Lhasa Ganden Phodrang government. Under the authority and instruction of the Dalai Lama, it set out to coordinate the arriving refugees' welfare and to reassemble them into a coherent diasporic community. As Fiona McConnell has shown, the TGiE was largely denied recognition on the inter- and national state level, while simultaneously enjoying a 'tacit sovereignty' through mutual recognition at the level of local polities (2009: 349). On the side of the receiving society, the Government of India created agencies and projects for the rehabilitation of Tibetan refugees and oversaw the leasing of land by local governments for the creation of protected refugee settlements. Simultaneously, however, the Indian legal framework did and does not accord refugee status to the Tibetans, with India not being a signatory of the 1951 UN refugee convention. Instead, Tibetan refugees became 'foreign guests' in India, an operation that B. S. Chimni (2003) has described as endowed with 'strategic ambiguity'. The fact that the TGiE remained largely unrecognised by other nations and that individual Tibetans in exile lack(ed) official refugee status constitutes a double nonrecognition that has deeply marked the diaspora. It has shaped the early exile community's politics, as in the repeated appeals by the TGiE to the UN. But it has also shaped individual acts such as the refusal to adopt foreign passports, which I discuss below.

The first generation of Tibetan refugees, though socially diverse, shared memories of loss and violence stemming from the increasing tensions in Tibet in the late 1950s, the Lhasa uprising of 1959, but also from the perilous journeys into exile and the hardships after arrival. These experiences of forced migration left a lasting impact on each individual. At the same time, these experiences were narrated and understood using an emerging set of recurring concepts. Using

the approach of the history of concepts as laid out by Reinhart Koselleck (2011), I trace these recurring terms and themes as key concepts. These concepts became essential components in the narratives of the emergent diasporic print sphere as well as in public performances of commemoration in a process in which, as Nando Sigona (2014: 376-377) has argued, 'memories of community' serve to build a (new) 'community of memory' in emergent diasporic identities. As Jan Iversen (2011) has argued, '[k]ey concepts cannot be studied in isolation', which means that in order to study them we need to also study their larger semantic networks. As Margrit Pernau and Imke Rajamani (2016) have argued further, the semantics of concepts are not tied to language alone but include other media and, most importantly here, experience and emotion.

Emotions, as I will show, played central roles in these early emergent diasporic subjectivities and their narrations, negotiating not just individual and collective memories, but also the relation between exile and the inaccessible homeland.<sup>4</sup> In turn, the emotional labour of commemorating past and present suffering became a constituent element of political practices of resistance. This article will unpack the emotional semantics of both of these key concepts: suffering and resistance. While the first may be easily legible as a state of feeling – and as such a key concept in Buddhist doctrine – the article will show that resistance, too, became an emotional key concept through the feelings and emotional practices that were associated with it. The analysis of these concepts and their emotional semantics will thus serve as a new lens through which to understand the Tibetan diaspora in the first two decades of exile.

As the commemoration of suffering between past and present already suggests, this historicisation of emotions must also include their temporalisation. As I will therefore show further, emotions are embedded in and generative of 'temporal relations' (see also Baffelli and Schröer 2021), that is, complex connections to plural pasts, presents and futures. These relations emerge as part and parcel of processes of community formation in exile and are key to the 'functioning' of emotions. Analysing the early Tibetan diaspora as a feeling community, therefore, means, as I explain below, attending not only to the community's spatial relations to the inaccessible homeland and to diasporic space in exile, but simultaneously also to its temporal relations to the pre-exilic past, the oppressed present of the homeland or the desired future of return.

This focus on the politics and practices of emotions reveals inclusion and exclusion in diaspora not as a binary opposition, but as dialectically constituted. Exclusion, as I argue following Jesper Bjarnesen (2018), is therefore not only a disenfranchising condition afflicting a migrant community as solely passive objects thereof. Rather, both exclusion and inclusion can be seen also as diasporic stances in the contacts and frictions between host countries and diasporas. This allows bringing to the fore the agency of refugees themselves in practices of exclusion at the heart of resistance, which have remained central to Tibetan diasporic identities until today.

Methodologically, I draw on a broad corpus of archival sources, periodicals and autobiographical narratives from the Tibetan diaspora in India in the 1960s and 1970s, at times pointing to lines of continuity and change in the ensuing decades until the present.<sup>5</sup> In the early Tibetan diaspora, reading and writing were often reserved to the educated higher social classes. The written sources that this work draws on, therefore, often speak from a position of relative privilege. However, even the early exilic print sphere showed a plurality of voices, as the following analyses of letters to the editor or of contesting narratives of resistance show. Studying concepts and emotions historically under the given constraints of a source corpus, hence, does not allow us to lay bare individuals' inner worlds of thought and feeling, even if we wanted to. More interesting to the history of emotions in general and to my purposes here, however, is the question of what emotions *did*; that is, what functions they performed and for whom.

## Diaspora as Feeling Community

As scholarship acknowledges today, emotions are key to the study of migration and diaspora (Boccagni and Baldassar 2015). Avtar Brah's (1996: 180) classic work on diasporic relations to the homeland describes what she has termed a 'homing desire', the shared emotional attachment to a place of origin potentially independent from actual possibilities of return. Lauren Wagner (2012: 6) has further argued for an increased attention to the 'affective state' of what she calls 'feeling diasporic', similar to what Ato Quayson and Girish Daswani (2013: 2) have described as the 'affective economy of diaspora'. These affective states, Wagner (2012) points out, encourage 'diasporic practices', which connect homelands and host countries in emotional and affective ways. Wagner (*ibid.*: 12) here draws on Rogers Brubaker, who has

suggested to analyse diaspora not as reified state or an 'ethnodemographic or ethnocultural fact', but as an 'idiom, a stance, a claim' and hence, a 'category of practice'.

Diasporic practices therefore are, following Bourdieu's (1990) concept of praxeology, socially embedded. In classical praxeology, however, affective and emotional states merely function as causing motivating action. Monique Scheer (2012: 220) has argued instead that emotions themselves are a form of practice, expressed and shaped by (culturally and socially) knowing bodies. This recursive nature of emotions in social groups and their role as both shapers and shaped by these communities will here be analysed using the concept of 'feeling community' (see Pernau 2017a; Rosenwein 2006). Terminologically, 'feeling' in this case incorporates both the cultural semantics of 'emotions' and the bodily/sensorial dimensions of 'affects'.<sup>6</sup> In short, a diasporic community as feeling community comes together through reciprocal operations of concepts and practices that constitute both *feeling* (something) together and feeling (as) *together* (see von Scheve and Ismer 2013).

The historical feelings analysed in this article in the context of the early Tibetan diaspora in India were strongly influenced by religious morality. The study of emotions in Buddhist contexts is still in its infancy and often foregrounds positively connoted emotions such as compassion, kindness or equanimity (Dreyfus 2002; Makransky 2012; for a recent intervention, see Baffelli et al. 2021). Instead, this article will focus on suffering and resistance. While the second of the two is a concept strongly tied to secular contexts, the former, though experiential, is at the heart of Buddhist morality. Diagnosed as endemic to worldly existence, suffering in the Buddhist doctrinal perspective can only be overcome through religious practice, thus serving as both motivation and object of the Buddhist path (Harvey 2013: 29).

## **Resistance as Practices of Voluntary Exclusion?**

When we look back to the past 25 years since we first came into exile, we see that compared to the world's other refugees, our number of 100,000 is small. And although the majority of this number lives in India, amidst its teeming millions, instead of scattering and being absorbed like water in sand, we have managed to preserve our entity and cohesiveness by living in groups of thousands. (Dalai Lama XIV 1984)

The above quotation comes from a statement of the 14th Dalai Lama in 1984, looking back on 25 years of Tibetan exile. Its evocative metaphor

points directly to a central concern of the community of Tibetan refugees in South Asia and beyond: to scatter, or be absorbed, in the host country's society, like water into sand. The fact that Tibetan refugees formed a small diaspora spread across the populous nation of India was inflected by the fear for Tibetan cultural survival both in Tibet and in exile. Central to the diaspora's coherence, however, was not only the fact that they lived 'in groups of thousands', first in transit and road work camps, then in the more permanent settlements that were emerging.

As early ethnographic and sociological fieldwork suggests, the Tibetan diaspora in the early 1960s exhibited a high social cohesion (Saklani 1978: 42). The authority of the Dalai Lama remained intact (Führer-Haimendorf 1990: 59; Woodcock 1970: 414) and the centralised authority of the exile government in Dharamsala soon set the narratives on tacit modernisation and cultural survival (Chhodak 1981; Nowak 1984). At the core of Tibetan diasporic efforts of community formation and cohesion were, therefore, the practices of governance performed by the Tibetan government in exile – acting much like a state within a state, as Fiona McConnell has argued, with 'tacit sovereignty' (2011: 300). These state-like practices included (until today) the payment of a voluntary tax (*dp̄ya khral*) to the exile government, which in turn issued refugees quasi-passports – the so-called 'Green Book'.<sup>7</sup> Though this document was not a recognised passport anywhere outside the diaspora, it was key for Tibetan refugees' access to their exile government's programs such as educational sponsorship or welfare and owned by about 90 per cent of Tibetans in exile (McConnell 2016: 138).

On the flipside of these practices of diasporic citizenship (Brox 2012) are those interacting with the host country's categories of residence or citizenship. And indeed, this is a dialectic negotiation, in which investing the diasporic government with authority is directly linked to refusing to rescind one's official status as a stateless refugee in places of residence. Therefore, even when citizenship was offered, the benefits of a foreign passport were often shunned in the diasporic community. A quote from one letter to the editor of the monthly periodical *Tibetan Review* published in June 1978 exemplifies this well:

It is shocking and depressing to read that Tibetans overseas are adopting new citizenships. If as enumerated [...] Tibetans gain by adopting new citizenship in rights and privileges denied to the stateless refugees, the very purpose of following the Dalai Lama in exile to struggle for an

independent Tibet is defeated. It would have been better to have stayed in Tibet and adopt Chinese citizenship.

Adopting a new citizenship and claiming concern for Tibet and Tibetans, as most of the Tibetans in America, Switzerland, Germany, etc. do, is sheer hypocrisy. A concerned Tibetan should always remain a Tibetan.<sup>8</sup>

The author of the letter argues that being Tibetan in exile is not a simple fact, but an identity and responsibility to be safeguarded and upheld despite the hardships it entailed or precisely through these hardships. Resistance to adopting a new citizenship, in turn, became a vital political practice in the Tibetan struggle. Therefore, the letter calls on Tibetans to disregard the personal benefits of foregoing refugee status and adopting foreign citizenships. To drive the point home morally, the author draws on a strong emotional rhetoric of shock and depression, and attributes hypocrisy and a lack of patriotism to those criticised. As another letter from the same issue stated, '[a]dopting new citizenship for convenience is practical. But it is not nationalistic'. Many similar worries abounded in the diaspora, expressed in concerned letters and editorials as moral exhortation and in contestation to those members of the community who were perhaps less strict in rejecting foreign elements in their identities. A letter to the editor from December 1977 titled 'Fighting the un-Tibetan labels' problematised how Tibetans in exile were 'all-too-ready to adopt and copy distortions of meaning, spelling, etc. as soon as these are introduced, by design or from ignorance, by Western journalists'. Here, too, it was the larger issue of cultural and national survival that made changes in spelling not just a petty wrong, but a grave moral mistake: 'There is a subtle devil behind this tendency, a kind of moral cowardice. One should fight for purity and truth; if one fails to do so, one is selling the past to an enemy'.<sup>9</sup>

Carole McGranahan (2016: 320) has called for analytical differentiation between such acts of *refusal* of citizenship and other practices of *resistance*. She does concede that refusal may be 'genealogically linked' to resistance, because both are connected to claims of social and political action. In her view, the Tibetan refugees' refusal of citizenship in host countries engages or even challenges horizontally a political order that denies Tibetan refugees sovereignty. Refusal as political action in this context is thus 'professing a relationship between equals' (McGranahan 2018: 368, 377). From an analytical perspective, this is very convincing – Tibetan refugees could not refuse but only resist China on the stage of international politics, but they could refuse

citizenship in exile, for which resistance would be the wrong analytical concept.

On the side of actors' concepts, however, in the words of Tibetan refugees themselves, the boundaries between refusal and resistance are more blurred. A dominant constituent element of what the concept of resistance refers to until today were acts of active resistance (*ngo rgol byed pa*) by Tibetans inside Tibet. These range from resistance using violence, as in the case of the early guerrilla resistance fighters (see Conboy and Morrison 2002), to non-violent forms of resistance today, such as the Lhakar movement or to self-harming acts of resistance including the series of public self-immolations since 2009 (Whalen-Bridge 2015; Woesser 2016).

In the diaspora and especially in the early decades of exile, practices of resistance in and of themselves became central in the performance of patriotic love (*rgyal gces*) for inaccessible Tibet, as Margret Nowak's (1984: 137-138, see below) ethnography of the early Tibetan diaspora attested to in the entanglement of patriotic love with the concept of independence. Tibetan refugees did not argue against adopting foreign citizenship for the sake of the diaspora, but, as in the letters quoted above, located the community in the wider context of the Tibetan struggle and the idea of return. As another letter to the editor of *Tibetan Review* reminded fellow readers in the issue of January-February 1976: 'I hope every body will not be surprise[d] to [be] remind[ed of] this matter. And this is in the midst of mind of each and every one, that we have a great load to be lifted and that is FREEDOM. [...] We have come to India not for pilgrimage, nor in a tour visit, but as exiled Tibetans'.<sup>10</sup> And indeed, the Dalai Lama also repeatedly reminded Tibetans in exile of their duty to uphold the Tibetan struggle as a 'sacred task' (*las 'gan rtsa che*), as in the following statement released on the tenth anniversary of the Lhasa Uprising of 1959:<sup>11</sup>

The suffering people left in Tibet look up to us. To them we are a symbol of their hopes and aspirations in the fulfilment of the cherished goal of national freedom. It is for this reason that we have been making every effort to fulfil the hopes and trust that have been placed in us by our fellow countrymen in Tibet. [...] I call upon my countrymen to rededicate themselves to this sacred task. (Department of Information and International Relations, 2016: 28, 29-30).

This statement powerfully underlines the discursive emplacement of the diaspora and its moral obligation towards the homeland. Suffering, as will be analysed in more detail below, functions as the key emotional



concept to clarify the diaspora's position here: It is the very suffering of Tibetans in Tibet that makes the diaspora a 'symbol (*rtags mtshan*) of their hopes and aspirations (*re ba dang dmigs yul*)' and ties it to the 'cherished goal of national freedom (*rgyal khab rang btsan sgrub pa*)'. In the words of the Dalai Lama, this goal, the liberation of Tibetans from suffering and the fulfilment of the 'hopes and trust (*re ba dang yid ches*)' placed in the diaspora, fell to Tibetans in exile as a 'sacred task' – a moral obligation that could not be denied.

An illustration from the diasporic newspaper *Rawang* (*bod mi'i rang dbang*, English subtitle: *Tibetan Freedom*), reprinted repeatedly over the 1970s, drives home this highly emotionalised relation to the homeland framed as a moral obligation (Figure 1). The image shows two figures in Tibetan dress, their hands in shackles that bear the Chinese flag. Tears stream down their anguished faces. One of them has their hands folded, the other holds their hands to their head. In between the figures is a circle and inside it more Tibetan figures described by the text as 'Tibetans who escaped to foreign countries'. They seem at ease and in good condition, well dressed and unharmed, caring for children, reading newspapers together and talking.



**Figure 1.** 'Who is in the eyes and hearts of [our] siblings in Tibet?' *Rawang* 5 (20, 8 March 1974): 6.

The whole image is supertitled: 'Who is in the eyes and hearts of [our] siblings in Tibet?' – or, more literally, the place their eyes will look to (*mig gi blta sa*) and their heart-minds' hope (*sems kyi re ba*). The question is answered by the contents of the circle and by the direct speech below it: 'Please do not forget us, who are hoping and believing so much in you!' The suffering Tibetans of the illustration impress upon those in exile their moral obligation to not forget and to act. The image's caption text (not pictured) further explains that despite their efforts of deception, force and so on, the Chinese have not been able to change the Tibetan's minds 'even by a sesame seed's worth'. And furthermore, the sights and hopes of Tibetans in Tibet remain firmly on the diaspora and the Dalai Lama, calling on them not to be forgotten and to put all efforts into freeing them from oppression and the fearful living conditions.

To conclude up to this point, we can see how, in the early diaspora, public and private figures structured the relation between homeland and exile around acts of resistance, to be performed both in Tibet and abroad. As an element of patriotic (exile) nationalism, resistance was framed as a 'sacred task'. This moral obligation, delivered no less by the Dalai Lama as figure of highest religious and moral authority, gained its weight through reference to a most powerful and morally charged state of feeling: the suffering of Tibetans in the homeland. While iron shackles of oppression incapacitated the majority of Tibetans inside the homeland, they simultaneously obligated the refugees to act. Finding a path to the removal of suffering was, therefore, not only the religious telos of Buddhist practice, but also the patriotic duty of Tibetans in exile. Furthermore, as already mentioned above, emotions were at the heart of the trans-temporal relations that firmly linked exile and homeland across both space and time.

## Temporal Relations

Since the emergence of studies of migration and diaspora as a distinct discipline in the 1990s, various scholars have called for attention to temporality as a feature that can differentiate diasporas from other transnational communities. James Clifford has argued that in the experience of diaspora, '[I]inear history is broken, the present constantly shadowed by a past that is also a desired, but obstructed, future: a renewed, painful yearning' (Clifford 1994: 318). Manuel Vásquez (2008) has refined this argument by identifying what he calls 'trans-temporal

operations', which create links or entanglements between diasporic spaces and their own past, present and future. Diaspora, he writes, 'retrieves or invents a common origin and tradition and commemorates idealized geographic spaces as a way to dwell in an inhospitable present and perhaps bring about a return to the future' (ibid.: 162-163).

Diasporic communities exist in relations. They relate to homelands, to host countries and other parts of the same community or to other diasporas. Likewise, time, as Nikolai Ssorin-Chaikov (2017: 7) has argued, is relational: 'Time is not a substance that "flows" or an area that "begins" and "ends." It is not a thing but a relation between things'. This means conceiving of time not as a space *in which* phenomena and events are located or moving, but rather as a matrix of multiple relations *between* actors and objects, places and concepts. As such, and especially in transnational or migration contexts, time is essential to what Arjun Appadurai (1996: 180-181) has termed the 'production of locality', in which it acquires specific social and local dimensions through which a community emplaces itself in relation to other spaces, communities and times. Time is, therefore, always an emergent and intersubjective aspect of meaning-making and community formation, in which individual experiences and identities – the migrant's or refugee's own localisation in space and time and the trajectories and life-histories relating to and from there and then – arise woven within shared temporal regimes or cosmologies of time from cultural, religious or political domains.

Emotions, too, are temporalised.<sup>12</sup> This means attending to the temporal structures inherent to concepts and emotions in all places and at all times and tracing the culturally specific ways in which time itself was conceived of. Returning our gaze to the Tibetan diaspora, the move into exile was not a total temporal rupture (Hölscher 2013) that stranded Tibetan refugees in the linear 'homogeneous empty time' (Anderson 2006: 24) of a (South Asian) 'modern time regime' (Assmann 2020). Tibetan traditional conceptions of relational time persisted in the diaspora. Temporal relations have long been a fundamental aspect of Tibetan culture and Buddhism, as Peter Schwiieger (2000) has explained. Time, in his words, was conceptualised not as a 'homogeneous succession of events', but rather resembled a 'diaphanous and porous foil', marked by 'holes, through which the "power of the holy origins" could time and again make itself directly and spontaneously manifest in the present' (ibid.: 956, author's own translation).

In terms of the community as feeling community, this matrix of interpenetrating or trans-temporal relations was inflected through

specific emotions varied by age, gender, social class, religious and regional affiliation and so on. The early community of Tibetan refugees therefore relied on an emotional repertoire (including sub-sets for various social and other sub-divisions) connected to long-standing Tibetan cultural traditions. With tradition came the moral evaluation of the constituent emotions, demarcating clearly which emotions were to be fostered, which to be avoided and what their performances meant at a given time by a given actor. Simultaneously, these emotions and their valuations were not set in stone, but also influenced strongly by new cultural contexts and the experiences of escape and arrival themselves. All this meant that Tibetans in exile negotiated temporal relations more complexly than a binary opposition between traditionality and modernity, as Axel Kristian Ström (1997) suggested. The temporalised emotions of the feeling community allowed the diaspora to construct complex temporal relations, negotiating between the Tibet of the past and the imagined Tibet of the future and integrating the diverse and contradictory contingencies of their present.

This emotional repertoire was (and is) perpetuated throughout the community in textual and non-textual documents – speeches, periodicals, books, school books, along with their illustrations, photographs, songs etc. – and embodied as emotional practices in religious ceremonies, commemorations, festivities, education, labour and protest. As a whole, this matrix of emotions was important in the emplacement and relations of the diaspora, both spatially and temporally. Specific emotions referred to specific places: relating to the homeland or exile, to the journey in between or to places yet to be reached via emotions of longing, admiration, fear or hope. And they related to specific times: to the commemorated past before exile, to the brave present in diaspora or to the hoped-for future of return. In these temporal relations, no single emotion stood alone. Often, specific configurations of emotions worked together in specific contexts. Here, one such configuration is selected for more detailed analysis: that of resistance and suffering.

## **Resistance, Suffering and Heroism**

In the early diasporic press, both in Tibetan and English language publications, resistance emerged as a key concept across reporting on the situation in Tibet. The Tibetan resistance movement occupied a central position in the diaspora's perception of the homeland, relayed through bits of news from all over the international press and, most important-

ly, eyewitness accounts of newly arrived refugees. Though peaceful forms of popular resistance were also described, reporting focused strongly on the armed resistance of Tibetan guerrilla fighters. 'Tibetan resistance to the Chinese occupation of Tibet is steadily increasing', opens a piece of 'News from Tibet' in the August 1965 issue of the *Newsletter* published monthly by the exile government in Dharamsala and continues: 'Tibetan refugees coming to India and Nepal report increasing resistance not only from Khampas [people of the eastern Tibetan province of Khams] but from people all over Tibet, in all parts of the country'. Such Tibetan resistance, the article stresses, only occurs because conditions in Tibet have become intolerable, spurring the desperate resistance of Tibetans outmatched by the Chinese military superiority:

The Tibetan people know very well the military might of China, and with the fifteen years of experience under the Communist Chinese regime, any Tibetan can easily calculate the consequences of revolting against China. The situation in Tibet, however, has deteriorated to such an extent that Tibetans are left with no other alternative but to stand up and fight against the overwhelming power of China.<sup>13</sup>

Several aspects of this quote are salient within the wider semantic network of resistance in the Tibetan diaspora: its nature as reaction to the dire circumstances, its being outmatched by Chinese military might, the role of eastern Tibetan Khampas as particularly brave and martial and its wide support across Tibet. Such 'popular' or 'people's resistance'<sup>14</sup> in Tibet was narrated in the diaspora as a phenomenon that unified the entire population in the inevitability of its hydraulic logic of uprising as reaction to mounting pressure. And yet, simultaneously, it was led by a particular image of heroic masculinity projected on the figure of the Khampas as traditional Tibetan warriors and embodied or commemorated in figures of the Tibetan resistance such as Gampo Tashi Andrugtsang (1973).

Key to this was, coming back to the above quote from the Dalai Lama's speech on 10 March 1969 Tibetan National Uprising Day, the suffering of people in Tibet. This suffering was not only constantly and consistently presented as the main motivation for popular uprising and resistance, but could also serve as legitimation for a forceful or even violent resistance. Here, the specific positionality of the diaspora emerges clearly. In the early years of exile, Tibetans were confronted with the moral dilemma of potentially violent resistance. This led to a split in the diaspora's interpretation of Tibetan resistance in Tibet and

the resulting 'sacred task' or responsibility shouldered by Tibetans in exile; a split that was specifically premised on the community's location in India.

For the Tibetan diaspora's majoritarian position, the Tibetan struggle had to be non-violent if it were to remain compatible with Buddhist morality and, hence, in accord with the diaspora's cultural identity premised on the unifying heritage of Tibetan Buddhism. This dictum was dominated by the rhetoric of the exile government and the Dalai Lama's authoritative speech (Brox 2016: 62-63). As the latter repeatedly stressed in his 10 March speeches, only a 'peaceful settlement' (DIIR 2016: 6, 9, 12, 19) could solve the situation in Tibet and thus end the Tibetans' suffering. In contrast to the stereotypes of heroic Tibetan (Khampa) masculinity, this rhetoric presented the Tibetan people as by nature inherently peaceful. Beyond Buddhist morality, this narrative was further explicitly brought into alignment with the concept of Gandhian non-violent resistance. In the context of Indian exile, we can see here a strategic openness of the Tibetan diaspora to incorporate other morality and moralised emotions into its own political practices.

'Non-violence is mightier than violence' wrote the tenth-grader Karma Jamyang in his essay 'Pen is Mightier than the Sword' in the Tibetan Children's Village's periodical *Metok* (spelled in Latin and Tibetan characters, *me tog*, 'flower') in 1979. 'One such common, oft-repeated instance', he further argued, 'is that of Mahatma Gandhi where Indian independence is said to have been gained through non-violence'.<sup>15</sup> And indeed, the diaspora publicly aligned with Gandhian doctrine and the public history of Indian independence. In a report on the observing of Uprising Day a decade before in New Delhi 1969, the *Times of India* reported: 'A procession will start towards Rajghat headed by a life-size portrait of the Dalai Lama. At Rajghat, another prayer meeting will be held and all Tibetans will reaffirm their faith in Gandhiji's doctrines'.<sup>16</sup> The editorial of the October 1969 volume of the exile government's periodical *Sheja* (*shes bya*, 'object of knowledge') (featuring a hand-drawn portrait of Gandhi on its cover) makes clear that this link was not merely public performance, but discursively linked to the Tibetan independence movement. Titled 'From the Weapon of Peace and Truth comes Independence', it explicated Gandhian *Satyagraha* (translated as *zhi lam nas bden pa mtha' skyel gyi las 'gul*, 'movement to peacefully realise the truth') as non-violent resistance and presented Gandhi as a teacher for Tibetans on their 'long road to independence', with his philosophy presented as especially suitable for Tibetan Buddhists.<sup>17</sup>

In this discourse propounded by the diaspora's administrative and religious elite, Tibetan refugees in exile were responsible to realise the mission that the outmatched but valiant Tibetan resistance in the homeland could not. As many other speeches and texts commemorating the resistance in the homeland make clear, suffering was in this rhetoric constantly located in Tibet and not in exile. 'The suffering people left in Tibet look up to us', the Dalai Lama spoke in the quote above and likewise on numerous other occasions. The situation of the diaspora, on the other hand, was only rarely described in such terms. Suffering (*sdug bsngal*) with all its religious overtones as a key concept in Buddhist cosmology and eschatology, was commonly eschewed in favour of other concepts such as hardship and struggle (subtly differentiated in Tibetan as *dka' sdug*, *dka' spyad*, '*bad brtson* - hardship, difficulty, struggle). Consequently, values of effort, perseverance and enthusiasm were stressed for the diaspora, as in the Dalai Lama's statement of 10 March 1976:

Realisation and promotion of the national interest and the national aspirations of the broad masses in Tibet is the cause and objective determining our struggle for Tibetan freedom. [...] If our brethren in Tibet are waging such a glorious struggle, and that too against such odds and risks, surely it behoves those of us who are in exile to work with greater zeal and perseverance and without regret so that our brethren in Tibet are speedily emancipated from the anguished torments, and the common cause of the Tibetan freedom, which is a cherished goal of all Tibetans, is realized. Doesn't it become all the more emphatic when we realize that those of us who are in the free countries of the world are free from the sufferings to which our people in Tibet are being subjected? (DIIR 2016: 47).

This location of suffering was not uncontested. As scholars of the early decades of the Tibetan diaspora have long pointed out, independence (*rang btsan*) emerged as a key concept of diasporic public discourse as the diasporic community settled in exile.<sup>18</sup> Margret Nowak (1984: 32), whose study of diasporic education was focussed on the first young generation of Tibetans growing up in exile in the 1960s and 1970s, identified 'rangzen' (independence) as a 'newly evolving' and polysemic 'root metaphor' that went well beyond the connotations of the English independence in how its second syllable *btsan* (the first, *rang*, meaning 'own') points to a 'particular kind of power [that] is aggressive, compelling, and even violent by nature'. Over the course of her study, Nowak traced how this concept was mobilised in the particular struggles of the diaspora's youth, meaning economic responsibilities,

'encounters with nontraditional modes of thought' and activism for the Tibetan cause and in global politics (ibid.: 105). She concluded that the concept of *rang btsan* combined the utopian relation to a future of return to an independent Tibet with – as long as this future remained unrealised – an ethos of Tibetan diasporic self-comportment. Thus balanced on the positionality in exile, it kept alive the struggle for independence as vital to the Tibetan identity and points directly to Migmar Dakhyel's emphatic expression 'our resistance, our existence' quoted in the opening of this article.

Key to this discursive shift in the diaspora was the Tibetan Youth Congress, an organisation founded in 1970 on the explicit encouragement of the Dalai Lama. The TYC quickly became known for its outspoken criticism of the exile government and what its members perceived as an acute lack of decisive action to solve the Tibet issue. Independence and resistance marked the TYC's rhetoric, including overtones of force and aggression. Here, too, the image of brave Tibetan warriors (and Khampa masculinity) surfaced again – emblematised in the logo of its periodical *Rangzen* (*rang btsan*, subtitle in Latin characters: *Rangzen*), a warrior on horseback – contrasting other narratives in the diaspora of the exiled resistance fighters becoming docile and settled.<sup>19</sup> In the periodical, editors and contributors regularly mused over questions of how militant or peaceful the Tibetan struggle in exile should be.

The English<sup>20</sup> editorial of the 1977 spring issue of *Rangzen* openly asks about the potential circumstances for a permissibility of violence from the Buddhist perspective, under subheadings of 'Buddhism & the Future' and 'Buddhism and the Militant Youth'. The editorial argues that although an inherently peaceful religion, Buddhism is misunderstood and misrepresented by 'recent converts' (that is, outsiders of the community). Understood correctly, the text argues, Buddhism offers a moral framework far superior even to 'modern pacifism': 'If in the face of enemy aggression a man were to desert his wife, child and country', the editorial reasons, 'a non-virtuous act would certainly be committed. Although shooting an enemy invader would be a non-virtuous action, it would be far more non-virtuous to permit the invader to live'. It concludes: 'Thus Buddhism exposes the hollowness of modern pacifism and other similar naive ideas'.<sup>21</sup>

The editorial presents three circumstances for justifying violence: Firstly, violence is endemic to worldly existence, as Buddhism teaches about suffering. To be in the world, thus, means to be affected, to 'get wet' but to be clever enough to 'not drown'. Secondly, violence can be



morally justified or necessitated as a reaction to a previous aggression. And thirdly, the intentionality of this reaction dampens its negative karmic impact, in line with the larger focus of Buddhist morality on the intentions of actions (see Gowans 2013). In the double step of this logic of morality and karma, the morally justified aggression in defence still causes negative karma (the editorial gives the example of murder), but less so than not acting at all would. The TYC thus argued for a Buddhist morality made flexible for defence, reasoning that it was not for nothing that Buddhism was known as the 'Middle Path' – now a middle path between non-violence and violence.

This editorial coincided with a hunger strike 'unto death' performed by seven Tibetans before the United Nations Information Centre, New Delhi, on the occasion of Tibetan Uprising Day and synchronised with a Chinese goodwill mission to India. In its official statement in support of the hunger strike, the TYC framed such protests as the last non-violent option in the Tibetan struggle for independence:

We feel that if this hunger strike succeeds then His Holiness the Dalai Lama and all of us who believe in a peaceful liberation of Tibet are fully vindicated. But if the United Nations chooses to ignore the appeal of the Tibetan people then non-violence will have been dealt a deathblow, and the Tibetan people will have to find resource in a more active and positive path of action in their struggle for independence.<sup>22</sup>

Such hunger strikes or the protests and demonstrations that had become a new element of 10 March Uprising Day towards the end of the first decade of exile at first sight seem to break with the normative moral order of the community. Their highly public performances of anger and aggression all seem to run counter to Tibetan Buddhist morality. But as the editorial discussed above shows, this moral valuation was contested. A key element in this contestation became the concept of the hero.

A highly evocative drawing (Figure 2) of the 1959 Lhasa uprising became a staple of the visual canon of Uprising Day in the diasporic Tibetan newspaper *Rawang* in the 1970s. It shows men and women in traditional dress, armed with nothing but pitchforks, knives or rakes, being shot and wounded by a number of automatic rifles and other modern weapons. While some of their faces appear to depict suffering, even the woman on the frontline of the protest holding her bleeding stomach while ripping apart a Chinese flag has a fiercely angry expression, shared with most other figures in the image. Such drawn and written depictions of the events of March 1959, but also news and



**Figure 2:** 'The fearless Tibetan people protesting against the brutal Chinese in 1959'. *Rawang* 8 (23, 11 March 1977): 10.

tales of the Tibetan guerrilla fighters, established a heroism of the past and Tibetan present that members of the diaspora could then seek to embody in the present of exile.

As a trans-temporal operation, this re-coded or relocated suffering from its exclusive location in the past and the oppressed present into the diasporic present, becoming a necessary ingredient for embodying the ideal of a hero in the Tibetan struggle of resistance or independence. Prime sites for such performance were the protests of Uprising Day, as an eyewitness account from 10 March 1977 in New Delhi described under the headline 'Broken Heads and High Spirits'. After protesters had burned an effigy of Hua Guofeng (Mao Zedong's successor as chairman of the Communist Party of China), they marched forward to break the police cordon keeping them away from the Chinese embassy. The description of the violence that followed harks back graphically to the images of the Lhasa uprising of unarmed Tibetans driven by a righteous anger against an overwhelmingly armed force:

From now on the situation completely deteriorated; the police officers including the D. I. G. [Delhi Inspector General] were unable to control their men. In the pitched battle lasting for about half an hour, both sides

became frenzied with rage. We Tibetans unarmed and on the receiving end began to hurl stones and bricks, in fact anything that we could lay our hands on. [...] It was literally a battlefield.<sup>23</sup>

The protesters were eventually overcome by police forces and imprisoned for several days. The account closes with a description of the return of the detainees, receiving a hero's welcome in the Delhi Tibetan colony, being greeted with ceremonial scarves, tea and patriotic speeches. This demonstrates how the temporal and spatial relations of suffering and resistance could be shifted, no longer reserved to the past and the oppressed homeland, to include the diasporic present. Police crackdowns on the protests and a rhetoric of war and 'battlefield' allowed Tibetan refugees to embody the hero by narrating a suffering framed as similar to the historical uprising and the resistance fighters in Tibet. This, in turn, served to legitimise anger and aggression, because they were framed as reactive in a resistance struggle for survival that was also happening in the diaspora.

The shifting spatio-temporal registers of suffering and their operationalisation in practices of resistance were thus central to the Tibetan diaspora as a feeling community. In addition to the resistance practices of voluntary exclusion towards a host country's citizenship shown above, these new practices of mobilising suffering in exile functioned in friction against practices and structures of another kind of exclusion, then on the side of the host country, as symbolised by the police crackdown. But they also related to the diaspora's quintessential memory of resistance in the past, namely the 1959 Lhasa uprising at the root of exile. In these ways, resistance and suffering sustained, motivated and contested political practices in the early Tibetan diaspora, relating to cultural heritage, the oppressed homeland of the present and the future of the Tibetan struggle for independence.

## Conclusion

'When I was born' writes contemporary Tibetan poet Tenzin Tsundue (2008: 14) 'my mother said / you are a refugee. Our tent on the roadside / smoked in the snow. / On your forehead / between your eyebrows / there is an R embossed / my teacher said. [...] / The R on my forehead / between my English and Hindi / the Tibetan tongue reads: RANGZEN / Freedom means Rangzen'.

The identity of being born a refugee, which Tsundue and other Tibetan artists have repeatedly reflected on, is a challenge particular to

successive young generations of the diaspora (Lokyitsang 2018). Born in exile, young Tibetans are faced with multiple regimes of exclusion and varied challenges for inclusion. As stateless refugees, the majority of Tibetans in exile (but especially in India) still choose against adopting other citizenship. Tibetan diasporic media and literature still frame this as an act of refusal conceptualised as part of the larger Tibetan resistance as a struggle for the homeland. While such acts of resistance can also be read as articulations of an ideology of cultural hegemony, they have remained vital to the diaspora's succeeding generations as practices of inclusion to a community of refugees that refuses to assimilate too much, for fear of losing touch with cultural heritage and the connection to the homeland. Paying close attention to refugees' own practices intersecting with the host country's structures of exclusion can recover an agency on the side of the diaspora that, though limited, is too easily overlooked.

Emotions, as the examples of suffering and resistance have shown, are vital to our understanding here. The perspective of feeling communities uncovers that communities do not just regulate emotions, but that emotions in turn make communities. And further, just as emotions are central in a diaspora's spatial relations between exile and homeland, they are also central to the complex temporal relations that diasporic actors and their concepts establish to past, present and future. Commemorating the suffering of the shared past and the inaccessible present of the homeland and re-appropriating suffering in exile through protest reveal different trans-temporal operations, but ultimately are parts of a larger plurisemantic temporal and emotional matrix that has structured the diaspora since its early days. Over the years, these emotions and temporal relations have developed and reacted to the challenges faced by the Tibetan refugees and have enabled the diaspora to survive as a highly functional social body.

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## NOTES

- 1 Migmar Dhakye 2019, ‘Tibet’s Resistance against Chinese Rule: Today & Tomorrow’, *Shadow Circus, Savvy Contemporary, Berlin* (10 March).
- 2 Italicised Tibetan terms in parentheses are transliterated using the Wylie system. To increase accessibility, common terms, names and the titles of periodicals (such as *Rawang* or *Sheja*) are given in their common (at the time) phonetic spelling.
- 3 Lhakar Diaries. *What Is Lhakar?* <https://lhakardiaries.com/about/>. Accessed November 2021.
- 4 For a more contemporary ethnographic account of the role of emotions in relating between homeland and exile among new arrivals in the Tibetan diaspora in India, see the work of Heidi Swank (2011, 2014).
- 5 Based on the source corpus of my doctoral dissertation (Schröer 2020), comprising a total of 775 documents analysed with 1232 codes in the qualitative data analysis software Atlas.ti. The corpus is composed of both Tibetan and English language material produced in the Tibetan diaspora between 1959 and 1979, including twelve periodicals, diverse monographs, speeches, school textbooks, manuals and legal as well as other archival documents. Transcription of select parts of the corpus, such as the 14th Dalai Lama’s (Tibetan) speeches on Uprising Day and on other subjects including education has furthermore allowed for selective quantitative probing.
- 6 ‘Feeling’ is therefore used in this text to stress the combination of cultural and experiential dimensions, whereas the term ‘emotion’ is rather used when pointing

- to a linguistic or visual concept/trope and its semantics. However, this distinction should not be read as overly strict.
- 7 Central Tibetan Administration. *Green Book (Chatrel)*. <https://tibet.net/support-tibet/pay-green-book/>. Accessed November 2021.
  - 8 Anonymous 1978. 'Complexities of Foreign Nationality'. *Tibetan Review* 13 (June): 24-25.
  - 9 Thubten Tendzin 1977. 'Fighting the Un-Tibetan Labels'. *Tibetan Review* 12 (September): 26.
  - 10 Sonam Paljor 1976. 'Calling Fellow Tibetans'. *Tibetan Review* 1-2 (January-February): 26-27.
  - 11 My analysis is based on comparative readings of both the English and Tibetan language written versions of the 14th Dalai Lama's Uprising Day speeches. The different versions diverge significantly in the first years of exile, however, by 1964 the speeches' Tibetan and English versions had become direct translations by paragraph and by line. Besides these two written versions, which were circulated in the diaspora through periodicals and read out by representatives in the various refugee settlements, the content of the speeches delivered in person by the Dalai Lama in Dharamsala often diverged. Sometimes these diverging versions were reprinted in the Tibetan language newspaper *Rawang*. However, the circulation of the written speeches mainly relied not on the given but the prepared written versions. The Dalai Lama himself called on Tibetans to read these written versions at home, as reported by *Tibetan Review* in March 1976 (4).
  - 12 Margrit Pernau has worked extensively on the temporalisation of emotions (see Pernau 2017b, 2019b, 2019a).
  - 13 Anonymous 1965. 'Increasing Resistance'. *Newsletter* 1 (August): 1-2.
  - 14 Anonymous 1969. 'People's Resistance Amidst Factional Disturbances'. *Tibetan Review* 10-12 (October-December): 7.
  - 15 Karma Jamyang 1979. 'Pen is Mightier than the Sword'. *Metok* (Summer): 12-13.
  - 16 Anonymous 1969. 'Delhi Tibetans to Observe Uprising Day'. *The Times of India* (Sunday 9 March): 8.
  - 17 Anonymous 1969. 'gsar 'god gleng brjod: zhi ba dang bden pa'i mtshon cha las rang btsan' (Editorial: From the Weapon of Peace and Truth comes Independence). *Sheja* (October): 3-4.
  - 18 As reflected also in the terminology of the quasi-passport of Tibetans in exile, the 'Green Book' referred to at this chapter's opening, which is in Tibetan called an 'independence pocket book' (*rang btsan lag deb*) or 'freedom booklet' in Stephanie Roemer's translation (2008: 125).
  - 19 Anonymous 1979. 'Tibetan Guerilla Fighters: From Arms to Farms'. *Tibetan Review* 14 (May): 25.
  - 20 All three issues of 1976, its first year of publication, are bilingual. After that, issues were published either in Tibetan or in English.
  - 21 Anonymous 1977. 'Editorial: The 4th Working Committee Meeting and the Meaning of Freedom'. *Rangzen* 2 (Spring): 1-3.
  - 22 Anonymous 1977. 'Violence Only Alternative'. *Tibetan Review* 12 (February-March): 7.
  - 23 Kesang Tenzing 1977. 'Broken Heads and High Spirits'. *Tibetan Bulletin* 9 (March-April): 20-24.

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