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***Complex Conformities: Tibetan women's life writing and
the en-gendering of national history in Exile***

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Submitted in total fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

October 2016

School of Culture and Communication

Faculty of Arts

The University of Melbourne

Abstract

This thesis examines the ways in which the life writing of Tibetan women in exile negotiates the place of gender in the (re)writing of Tibetan history, within the larger project of ideological nation building. Located at the intersection of literary, cultural and historical studies, this study is concerned with the alternative histories contained within women's life stories and their relation to 'official' Tibetan national history and the structures of power that maintain the gendered nature of the historical archive in the Tibetan exile community. Engaging questions of gender, nationalism and life writing through the lens of postcolonial feminism, I use a historically contextualized close-textual analysis to show how five selected exile Tibetan women's life narratives present previously neglected *national histories* that both challenge and uphold the dominant exile political history of Tibet during the first half of the twentieth century. This research project is thus also an inquiry into our understanding of what constitutes Tibetan national history and the possibility of transforming the Tibetan historical archive, within which women and their histories have mostly remained hidden from view.

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List of Abbreviations

CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CTA	Central Tibetan Administration
DIIR	Department of Information and International Relations
GOI	Government of India
PLA	People's Liberation Army
PRC	People's Republic of China
PWA	Patriotic Women's Association
TAR	Tibet Autonomous Region
Tib.	Tibetan
THF	Tibetan Homes Foundation
TPIE	Tibetan Parliament in Exile
TWA	Tibetan Women's Association
TYC	Tibetan Youth Congress
Skt.	Sanskrit

Acknowledgements

Over the course of this research project at the University of Melbourne, I benefitted enormously from the generosity, knowledge and support of many academics, fellow graduate students, friends and family. First, I would like to thank my supervisors, Professor Nikos Papastergiadis and Professor Kevin Brophy, for their guidance and encouragement. Without their unwavering belief in this project, their insights and advice, this dissertation could not have been completed.

I would like to express my gratitude to the Graduate School of Humanities and Social Sciences and the School of Culture and Communication at the University of Melbourne for the generous financial assistance I received during the course of my graduate studies as well as to the Norman Macgeorge foundation for funding my research in India. Warm thanks to my colleagues and fellow graduate students in Melbourne, Dr Lynda Chapple, Dr Elin Evangelista, Dr Suzanne Hermanoczki, Dr Shermal Wijewardene, Anna Varghese and Tinonee Pym for their friendship, company and support throughout the years.

Most of all, I would like to thank Dr David Templeman of Monash University for sharing his wealth of knowledge on Tibetan history, for his enthusiasm in my research, for countless hours of on-and off-topic conversation, and for years of the most generous support and wonderful friendship. Furthermore, I would like to offer my gratitude towards my parents and my maternal grandmother who have always provided me with the best educational opportunities and encouraged me long-distance from Germany throughout these years. Last but definitely not least, I am immensely grateful

to my husband Peter Donaldson for supporting me through the good and bad times of thesis life, for his intelligence, wit, and warmth. Thank you for making this journey with me.

In Dharamsala, I wish to thank Zamlha Tempa Gyaltzen for all his help during my research trip in 2013/2014 and for introducing me to the staff at the Environment Desk and the Tibet Policy Institute at Gangchen Kyishong. Thanks also to the staff at the Tibetan Library of Works and Archives and to Nyima Lhamo of the Tibetan Women's Association for their valuable assistance. Finally, I wish to thank Adhe Tapontsang for inspiring me beyond words, for giving generously of her time and for encouraging me to create a platform from where Tibetan women's stories could be heard. It is to her and her generation of Tibetan women that I would like to dedicate this thesis.

INTRODUCTION

At the Fourth International Tibetan Studies Association (IATS) seminar at Munich in 1985, anthropologist Barbara Aziz appealed to the scholarly community to re-think and re-examine “the entire range of Tibetan traditions” (1985, 27) to bring into purview the so-far neglected voices of Tibetan women past and present. Despite growing attention to women’s place in history, and to gender history more generally, in a range of academic disciplines since the 1970s, Aziz deplored the general lack of academic insight and interest regarding the lives of Tibetan women in Tibetology. Although certain perceptions about the role of women in Tibetan societies and some positive portrayals of their social status could be gleaned from Western travel writings, and some ethnographic accounts and studies in Tibetan Buddhism, no sustained effort had yet been made to map “Tibetan women’s contributions to this extraordinary civilization: to art, literature, economy, religious thought, and all those events that together make Tibet a special place” (Aziz 1985, 25-26). Aziz’ sentiments are also shared by number of exile Tibetans, including the younger sister to the Fourteenth Dalai Lama and Head of the Tibetan Children’s Village Jetsün Pema Gyalpo (1997), the late Director of Ngoenga School for Tibetan Handicapped Children Namgyal Lhamo Taklha (2005), and life writer Dorje Yudon Yuthok (1995), all of whom point to the scarcity of material on women in Tibetan history and literature:

I regret that so little has been written on the role of women in our society. In fact, one can infer from this that the activities and aspirations of half the Tibetan population have not been accorded the importance they merit. Our ancestors have left us what is probably the richest collection of religious literature in the world. On the other hand, writings on the role of women in the evolution of Tibet over the last 2,000 years are very few (Gyalpo 1997, 204).

Similarly, Dorje Yudon Yuthok voices her regret about the fact that “although some Westerners wrote about conditions in Tibet, they seldom dealt with the life and customs of Tibetan women. As a matter of fact, even in our own literature, little can be found about women” (1995, 15).

As these criticisms indicate, Tibetan women’s stories have for a long time been mostly un-recognized or un-narrated, and therefore unknown, both within the Tibetan community and beyond. This absence of women as authors and subjects in the literature and history of Tibet strongly points to a gendered bias in textual production that discouraged women from writing or having their life stories recorded, and has resulted in very little reliable knowledge about the lives and achievements of women throughout Tibet’s history. According to feminist historian Joan W. Scott (1986) this scarcity of information is the result of androcentric record keeping practices the world over, whereby women’s contributions to society, culture, and politics become effaced in historical production. Reasons for this omission in the Tibetan case might be that, as Joel Gruber notes in his article on Könchok Paldrön, “Tibetan women have rarely, at any point in Tibetan history, been regarded as equals” (2015, 110). Religious belief in woman as the archetypical representation of enlightenment itself notwithstanding, androcentric record keeping practices have nevertheless informed the belief that women’s life stories command “smaller amounts of historical authority than men’s narratives” (McGranahan 2010a, 121), which in turn has mostly resulted in the omission of women’s voices in recognized, ‘official’ Tibetan historical archives. Moreover, while

male life stories¹ have been regarded as reliable sources of cultural and historical information, Tibetan women and their stories hardly seem to have been accorded the same respect; as a result, the influential religious and political histories that have shaped Tibetan understanding of their country's history, have been mostly written neither with women's participation, nor from their perspective.

Tibetan Women in Tibetan Studies

A search for women's voices in Tibetan history is thus intimately connected to a critical examination of the nature of the historical archive and of historiography, including those who command power over the archive, and select which records are to be included and which are deemed 'unimportant' to the 'official historical archive'. Chapter One will therefore provide an in-depth discussion of the nature of the historical archive and the role of gender in historiography as it pertains to my work on Tibetan women's role in history and life writing. Tibetan women's absence in Tibetan official records necessitates a critical examination of past and current scholarly practices that keep women's stories hidden in historiography. As a result of the influence of poststructuralist, feminist and postcolonial theories, many academic disciplines, particularly literary, historical and cultural studies, have long committed to including so-called 'unconventional sources' in their construction of past and present social and cultural realities. However, the use of (secular) life writing by women to inform Tibetan

¹ Some examples of prominent male Tibetan autobiographies are: Autobiography of Ngawang Lozang Gyatso (*Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho*) the Fifth Dalai Lama (1616/7-1682) in 3 volumes, partially translated by Zahiruddin Ahmad; Autobiography of Blo bzang Chökyi Gyaltzen (*Blo bzang chos kyi rgyal mtshan*) the First Panchen Lama (1570—1662); Autobiography of Lozang Palden Yeshe (*Blo bzang dpal ldan ye shes*) the Third Panchen Lama (1739—1780); Autobiography of Tāranātha (1575—1634), partially translated by David Templeman; Autobiography of Tenzin Norbu (*bsTan 'dzin nor bu*) the Third Yolmo Tulku (1589—1644), translated by Benjamin Bogin as *The Illuminated Life of the Great Yolmowa* (2013); Autobiography and Diaries of Si tu Panchen Chökyi Jungnay (*Chos kyi 'byung gnas*) the Eighth Si tu Incarnation (1699/1700—1774).

historical knowledge or indeed to create an alternative historical archive from which to challenge hegemonic historical narratives, is still in its beginning. In this context, Geoffrey Samuel criticizes an avoidance of feminist and anti-colonialist critique in Tibetan Studies, as well as the continuous lack of a more generalized reflexivity with which to think through historical, political, economic and social issues among Tibetan societies prior to and since the watershed years of 1949/50 and of 1959 (2005, 193). I argue that one outcome of this ‘shying’ away from gender research on Tibet has produced somewhat separate discussions of ‘Tibetan women’ in works on Tibetan history, society, literature and religion, which usually limit these representations to highly gendered domains such as the household, including examinations of family structures, marriage patterns, child bearing and rearing and also to monastic settings. Gender relations between women and men, as well as between women on the one hand or gender as an interrogation of *both* masculinity *and* femininity on the other hand, do not feature prominently in these studies.

In fact, in a large number of generalist studies, Tibetan women seem to appear as *addenda* to existing anthropological or sociological collections, with their experiences often subsumed in dedicated sub-chapters. Despite good intentions, this perpetuates the artificial separation between so-called female and more generalized (if not universal) male experiences. This selective approach disregards the fact that “gender cannot be isolated and taken separately from other norms and divisions [as] it always reinforces other discriminations too, beyond gender itself” (Iveković 2014, 21-22). From the standpoint of feminist historiography, any historical analysis that does not take women, and gender more broadly into account, not only lacks nuance and depth, but also runs the risk of misunderstanding the multiple interconnections between gender and other categories of historical analysis such as age, class, identity, race, and ethnicity.

In the wake of the aforementioned cultural turn, many other disciplines have turned specifically to the margins, seeking to create a more inclusive historical narrative. Following Aziz' (1985) outspoken address regarding the gender-blindness in Tibetology, several studies have emerged over the past three decades in the areas of Tibetan Buddhism, sociology, anthropology, and comparative literary studies with the aim of addressing the scarcity of our knowledge about Tibetan women past and present. As will be discussed further in Chapter Two, these studies offer highly valuable contributions towards creating "a usable past" (Gross 1993, 20) and address the omission of women's contributions to Tibetan culture and religion, in order to re-evaluate common interpretations of Tibetan gender images and roles. Ethnographic accounts on a variety of gender aspects have, for example, enhanced our localized and particularized knowledge of women and their relations to religious and political institutions in pre-Communist Tibet, contemporary Tibet and the exile communities. Apart from revealing hitherto unknown aspects of women's roles and status more generally, many of these studies have also complicated some of the more convenient current sociological (mis)representations of gender relations in Tibetan society (Aziz 1978, 1985, 1987; Klein 1995, 1985; Makley 1997; Nowak 1984; Rabgey 2006; Sam 2011; Tsomo 1999; among others).

By far the most fruitful area of inquiry into representation of Tibetan women has been in religious studies, and an increasing number of publications on the role of both lay and ordained women in Tibetan Buddhism are encouraging signs of a more sustained engagement with the marginalized topic of gender in Tibetan religion (Campbell 2002; Grimshaw 1994; Gross 1993, 1996; Havnevik 1989; Klein 1994; Simmer-Brown 2001; Shaw 1994; Tsomo 1999; Willis 1989; among others). Assembling an impressive collection of research on female spirituality, Janice Willis'

edited volume *Feminine Ground* (1989) has indeed been ground-breaking in its sole focus on the feminine principle in Tibetan Buddhism and on women's lived experiences in everyday religion. Apart from historical and text-based interrogations of *ideas about* and *representations of* women in Tibetan Buddhism, this body of research includes the unearthing and translation of women's religious life stories throughout Tibetan history, a field that has seen exciting additions over the last two decades (Allione 1984; Diemberger 2007; Dowman 1984; Havnevik 1999; Jacoby 2014; Schaeffer 2004; among others). Detailing the spiritual achievements of women, these studies have been candid in discussing the obstacles faced by women in pursuing religious lives, mainly due to cultural constructions regarding their gender. Furthermore, these studies have also highlighted the dearth of women-authored spiritual life stories and the relative neglect of women in the overall body of religious life writing that exists in Tibetan literature, and the resulting bias towards male experience that has shaped Tibetan historical writing.

With Janet Gyatso and Hanna Havnevik's seminal edited volume *Women in Tibet* (2005) Tibetan Studies received its first sustained study of Tibetan women. The editors selected contributions in response to Joan Scott's call for a complete "review of the available sources for more information in order to correct the underrepresentation of women" (Scott 1986, 3). Graciously avoiding the common pitfall of reducing Tibetan culture to practices of Tibetan Buddhism, the volume brings together research on Tibetan women in religion, medicine, the performing arts and politics. In their introduction, Gyatso and Havnevik argue that from the earliest periods of historical record keeping in Tibet, women and their (hi)stories have been sidelined in literature and history. The editors further assert that as a consequence there are only very few "women's autobiographies in the entire history of traditional Tibetan literature" and that

“[i]ndeed women are rarely discussed in historical writing at all, except for the briefest mention of someone’s mother or consort, who not infrequently is nameless or referred to only elliptically” (Gyatso and Havnevik 2005, 8). Kurtis Schaeffer likewise concludes in *Himalayan Hermitess* that “[p]recious few writings about women in pre-twentieth century Tibet are available, and even fewer writings by women” (2004, 9). While male auto/biographies were commonly mined for insights into the Tibetan historical and cultural milieu of their subjects (J. Gyatso 1998) to enrich Tibetan religious and political histories, life writings by and of women have rarely been regarded as ‘useful’ historical records or historical archives in and of themselves. Tibetan history has therefore been written mainly—if not exclusively—from a male perspective.

And it is not only the case that women’s roles and realities have not readily been included in Tibetan historiography; certain areas of Tibetan women’s productivity still do not seem to attract the interest of researchers and the public even today. The emergence of life narratives authored by Tibetan women in exile is one such example that has so far not received sustained scholarly analysis, a fact criticized by Hanna Havnevik (2005) and Janet Gyatso (2005, 2015). This neglect is a curiosity given the substantial publications by women within the general literary output in the Tibetan exile communities. With the beginning of exile in 1959, Tibetan writing has undergone tremendous change and with it also the role of women in literature. Nonetheless, for the first decades in exile, life writing and other ‘secular’ genres were still in the minority in comparison to the religious literary output from the Tibetan communities.

Tibetan Literature in Exile

The Fourteenth Dalai Lama has consistently encouraged Tibetans in exile to tell their life stories to help raise international awareness for their community's struggle against Chinese colonization². As Heather Stoddard points out, in the beginning, Tibetan literary activity remained focused mainly on reprinting religious texts and later translating Tibetan Buddhist teachings into English (Stoddard 1994, 149). These English translations provided an avenue to transmit traditional Tibetan religious knowledge to a Western audience, yet overall they proved to be insufficient to bring attention to the political issue of Tibet. Tibetans therefore sought alternative avenues to foster international awareness and increasingly turned to other, non-religious forms of literature. The increasing appearance of Tibetan life stories written or co-written in English from 1960 onwards must thus be seen as the convergence of a need to speak 'truth to power' with the literary self-authorization of non-monastic, ordinary Tibetan women and men to make their stories heard.

During the first two decades after coming into exile, only a handful of life narratives were published in English (Pemba 1957; Norbu 1960; T. Gyatso 1962; Trungpa 1966; Taring 1970). Among them was the first life narrative written by a Tibetan woman, *Daughter of Tibet* (1970) by Rinchen Dölma Taring. The reasons for this initial lack of Tibetan literary publication in English are manifold. Dennis Cusack demonstrates that during the 1960s and 1970s the number of Tibetans with a sufficient command of English "to counter Chinese propaganda about Tibet as a socialist paradise" was still relatively small (2008, 46). Furthermore, class and gender influenced

² Given the permanency of the Chinese presence in Tibet and the move of settlers from Mainland China to Tibet since 1951, I have chosen to adapt the term 'colonization' rather than 'occupation' to describe the current political situation on the Tibetan plateau. As colonization furthermore implies a substitution of indigenous traditions, local and political authority by the authority of the colonizing power, I argue it is a far more precise term to describe Chinese political power in Tibet in relation to the period 1950 and after.

the decision by many Tibetans to write or tell their life stories in the public sphere. Class is a contentious issue that is mostly silenced in the exile community and one which determines the social possibilities of individuals to narrate their histories (McGranahan 2010a; 2010b). Despite the impact of social status on literary production, Carole McGranahan argues that gender “make[s] a bigger difference than class in marking different modes of production or narration of resistance histories” (2010b, 776). While McGranahan’s work focuses on oral narratives by Tibetan resistance veterans, her observations offer broader insights into the limitations created by gender and class that determine Tibetans’ “narrative possibility” (McGranahan 2010b, 769). They are thus helpful in understanding the lack of secular literature during the first decades of exile, particularly the relative absence of women from literary production.

Laurie McMillin identifies a marked increase in and a diversification of literary forms in the Tibetan exile communities from the 1990s onwards, with life narratives written in English constituting the major literary form (2001, 115). Axel Ström (1997) argues that this general rise in exile literary activity was linked to a reform period in Tibet starting in the early 1980s with the ascendancy of Deng Xiaoping. Following a relaxation of travel restrictions for Tibetans living in China, a large influx of political and religious refugees from Tibet settled in the exile communities in India and Nepal, bringing with them a host of stories of life in Chinese-occupied Tibetan areas and the need to make them heard in the transnational sphere.

The dismantling of certain societal structures in exile, and the community’s wish to seek international support has therefore played a major role in the changes to traditional Tibetan literary genres and their forms of production. Stoddard observes in this context that English language life narratives being produced in the Tibetan exile

constitute a significant departure from the traditional genre of Tibetan autobiography (1994, 152-153). As I will explain in more detail in the section on Terminology, my decision to refer to Tibetan women's self-written accounts as *life writing* and *life narrative* is influenced by recent feminist scholarship in auto/biographical studies that distinguishes the autobiographical accounts of women (and minorities) from those written by privileged male authors.

Tibetan autobiographical practices

In its existence over the past 1300 years, Tibetan literature has been “marked by a continual intensification of religious—especially Buddhist—concerns” (Cabezón and Jackson 1996, 15). Within the body of moral and religious instructions, hagiographies—defined as “the writings about holy people” (Robinson 1996, 65)—have played a major role.³ In the Tibetan literary tradition, these consist of biographies of an enlightened person (Tib. *rnam thar*)—‘enlightenment’ referring here to the full liberation from the cycle of transmigration (Skt. *saṃsāra*, Tib. *khor ba*)—and the self-account of such a realized person (Tib. *rang gi rnam thar*). Like much of canonized autobiography in the Western world, traditional Tibetan autobiography follows relatively strict generic conventions that distinguish it from other literary traditions, most notably from the diary (Tib. *nyin deb*) and the historical story (Tib. *lo rgyus*).

In *Apparitions of the Self*, Janet Gyatso (1998) points out that, like Western definitions of autobiographical works, a key criterion is the expectation that the related

³ In using the term ‘hagiography’, it is important to acknowledge the shortcomings of cross-cultural and cross-religious translations. As it is understood in a Western Christian tradition, hagiography, from the Greek (*h*)*agios* (*ἅγιος*; holy or saint) and *graphēin* (*γράφειν*: to write), can strictly speaking not be used as a substitute for the Tibetan term *rnam thar* or be referred to as having the same function in the Tibetan literary tradition, as it has emerged from an entirely different philosophical system. In using hagiography as a translation for *rnam thar*, it is for conventional purposes only and I therefore ask the reader to consider that the connotations of hagiography pertain to the Christian tradition and thus do not exactly equal those of *rnam thar*.

events have truth-value. Related to this is Philippe Lejeune's 'autobiographical pact,' in which the author, narrator and protagonist are believed to be the same person, a generic convention that is considered binding also for most traditional Tibetan autobiographies (Lejeune 1989). The development of self that is characteristic of Western assumptions of the autobiographical subject is inscribed in the teleological narrative that leads to triumph over obstacles and difficulties. 'Proper' or 'classical' Tibetan autobiography is not dissimilar from these Western parameters in that it celebrates an exemplary life "through the suffering of samsara and the joy of liberation" (Schaeffer 2004, 6). The representative status of the subject is here perhaps given even greater importance, as the narrated life is expected to instruct the readership ethically and spiritually (Schaeffer 2004).

In her seminal work on the secret autobiography of the Tibetan visionary Jigme Lingpa, Janet Gyatso highlights the fact that Tibetan full-liberation stories attempt to inspire the readers to emulate the acolyte's spiritual path, because "liberation [is], at least ideally, the Buddhist purpose of life" (1998, 6). The script for Tibetan autobiographies can be found in early Indian Buddhist hagiography, which chronologically relays the subject's renunciation of worldly life, meetings with spiritual masters, subsequent religious practice and meditative insights, all of which mostly lead to a career in a monastic setting and, finally, to the teaching of disciples. Yet even within this fairly rigid framework there remains room to assert individuality from the scripted life story by including information without "didactic value" often in the form of the mundane, ordinary details of everyday life (J. Gyatso 1998, 112). While some writers have distinguished themselves from the majority by deviating from the normative script in certain ways, 'proper' Tibetan autobiography has remained centered on the exemplary life that is being narrated.

For the most part, these works were produced in the centers of political, economic and cultural power—namely Tibetan monasteries—and mirrored the concerns and interests of this (male) *literati* elite. Indeed, a brief survey of the canon of Tibetan life writing reveals that the “supreme example” (Misch 1949, 12) of life narrative belongs to a male Buddhist of property and rank who has reached insight through meditative and ritualistic practices that enables him to give an example of a spiritual life (J. Gyatso 1998; Zangpo 1994; among others).⁴

Khetsun Zangpo argues that the number of practicing and accomplished yogis (including women) in Tibet was much higher than the auto/biographies available to us because a great number lived in caves without disciples and without access to centers of power: “And most of the Tibetan biographical works are not about holy beings such as these [hermits], but about the masters with big names and property who had servants and managers and so on, some who had only done some study and practice, or perhaps who engaged in some rituals or composition” (Zangpo 1994, 26; see also J. Gyatso 1998). The dissemination of a spiritual practitioner’s *rnam thar* was thus directly linked to their worldly power.

⁴ This “desire to create an exemplary self” (J. Gyatso 1992, 469) is complicated by the Buddhist and Bön doctrine of no-self, which has had far-reaching influence on the social and cultural fabric of Tibetan societies. Differently phrased: How does one write about the self within the context of a philosophy that insists on the ‘self’ as “the principal villain” (J. Gyatso 1992, 465)? Informed by the belief in an impermanent and insubstantial self, social etiquette requires a high degree of diffidence in both spoken and written Tibetan. To circumvent the inherent contradiction between religiously informed social and linguistic conventions and the extolling of one’s virtues in life writing, Tibetans used to combine an emphasis on the altruistic motive to guide others on the path to liberation with an abundant use of self-deprecatory language in representing themselves (J. Gyatso 1992, 469-70). While diffidence is intrinsically linked to Tibetan customs and values, it has also become a script to which many Tibetan life writers (merely) pay lip service. Nevertheless, the dissonance between humility and self-aggrandizement embedded in Tibetan life writing creates a tension that cannot be easily resolved; if nothing is believed to be permanent but instead all is considered to be ever-changing and illusory, no unique and stable self exists that can be narrated. Not only has the ‘universal self’ of Western liberal-humanist philosophy therefore strictly speaking no equivalent in Tibetan culture but, as Janet Gyatso lucidly argues, the Buddhist doctrine of no-self in fact “undermines a metaphysics of the individual” (1998, 110).

Changes in Tibetan autobiographical practices

As will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Two, we do indeed find a small number of historical references to women in Tibetan historical writing; however, these pertain to Tibetan queens and influential female figures in Tibet's Imperial period (7th to mid-9th century BCE). Yet after the eleventh century, women in positions of secular or ecclesiastical power neither frequently appear in historical records nor as subjects of *rnam thar*. Women themselves furthermore hardly wrote in the tradition of Tibetan autobiography and only very few male hagiographies include references about acclaimed female practitioners. The emerging trend of women writing their life stories in exile, therefore, constitutes an exciting break with this strongly male-centered literary tradition. Nevertheless, the number of women writers is still relatively small in contrast to Tibetan male writers, and therefore, women's influence within the genre is only just emerging.

Tibet's colonization by China resulted in the dismantling of traditional Tibetan social and political structures. These experiences engendered fundamental changes to the systems of hierarchy that had previously circumscribed the writing of literature and history. One of the outcomes of life in exile has been the democratization of education, which has directly influenced the production and circulation of writings by previously marginalized groups. Since coming into exile, Tibetans from all social strata have "for the very first time" (Stoddard 1994, 152) begun to write their life stories and these newly emerging self-representations complicate the representational subject of traditional Tibetan autobiography. This evidence of a democratization of this traditional genre is matched also by a redirection of its usual contents. By focusing on the events prior to and since the Chinese take-over, "the traditional function of *rnam-thar* or life-

story has been altered radically from describing a journey of a holy being towards enlightenment” (Stoddard 1994, 153). However, as Stoddard remarks, life writing in the Tibetan exile is mainly produced “with the aim of letting the world know the plight of the Tibetans” (1994, 153; see also Fletcher 2007). She further highlights that these changes to the traditional genre offer for the first time in Tibetan literary history a platform for “ordinary lay men and women” (Stoddard 1994, 152).

The radical departure from traditional autobiographies occurring in exile, then, lies in the function of the texts. Rather than constituting a template for reaching enlightenment, contemporary Tibetan life narratives have a distinctly political agenda. Since the early life narratives published in English, these works have developed into an important element in the Tibetan struggle: they make political and human rights claims in a transnational sphere, and supplement official Tibetan exile historiography by offering personalized and localized representations of the social, political and gendered realities of pre-1950 Tibet (Fletcher 2007; McGranahan 2001 and 2010b; McLagan 1996; McMillin 2001). Julie Fletcher compellingly argues that “the construction, collection, recording, translation, and dissemination of life narratives—‘telling stories’—has become, for Tibetan refugees and their supporters, a central form of (non-violent, Arendtian) political action” (2007, 66). To express this new agenda, Tibetans in exile have developed a writing style that takes its inspiration from a variety of genres, including personal and collective testimony, biography, clan and local histories, and anthropological accounts.

According to Carole McGranahan, this new genre of writing about personal and collective history is best identified as “new *lo rgyus*” (McGranahan 2001, 53) and also as *rang gi lo rgyus* (one’s own history/ self-history). Traditionally, *lo rgyus* (literally, a

ting of the years), “present a narrative of events, historical, quasi-historical, or even ahistorical, in rough chronological sequence” (Van der Kuijp 1996, 42-43). As McGranahan (2001) has shown, in exile these *new lo rgyus* tell secular histories from regional, sectarian and gendered perspectives while believing themselves to be part of Tibetan national history. They are told “in the belief [that] they will benefit Tibet, its people, and religion” (McGranahan 2001, 61) even while they often depart from officially sanctioned representations of Tibetan history. *New lo rgyus* are therefore not simply a mixing of genres and modes. They present new ways of narrating historical experience while operating under the constraints of a particular, circumscribed and homogenized past, which will be examined in more detail in Chapter One. By writing for the struggle of their community, *new lo rgyus* balance histories that challenge as well as confirm official national historiography, and are thus confronted with restrictions and expectations in their society and also in international community. Not minimizing the limits these self-written accounts face in the context of the exile community, their departure from traditional modes of Tibetan autobiography nevertheless offers an unprecedented avenue for ordinary, non-monastic Tibetan women and men to gain “a foothold in history” (Burton 2003, 21).

Tibetan women and life writing in exile

Until the 1950s, the possibility to gain entry into Tibetan historiography⁵ and thereby into History has been severely limited. As indicated above, until the dismantling of the traditional Tibetan state and the subsequent flight into exile in the 1950s, McGranahan asserts, “the audacity to speak historically in the first person ... was a

⁵ Although Tibetan does not have a specific term for “historiography”, the description “Science of History” (Tib. *lo rgyus rig pa*) might be an adequate rendering of this concept. I wish to thank David Templeman for discussing this issue with me.

privilege designated by class and gender in that both history and historiography belonged to the elite, and primarily to the religious elite” (2010b, 769). As historical subjects whose voices have hardly been heard in dominant representations, Tibetan exile women’s decision to pen life stories must therefore be regarded as a bold intervention into the traditionally male dominated production of Tibetan literature and history. The growing number of Tibetan women who have followed the first woman life writer in exile, Rinchen Dölma Taring, and who have mostly published their life (hi)stories in English, are testament to the positive changes underway in the exile community, including improved access to education and a (slow) cracking of the traditional domains of male privilege.

These women writers, who have often worked in collaboration with Western writers, human rights activists, or researchers are (in chronological order): Rinchen Dölma Taring, *Daughter of Tibet* (1970); Tseten Dolkar as told to John Windsor, *Girl from Tibet* (1971); Dorje Yudon Yuthok, *House of the Turquoise Roof* (1990); Jamyang Sakya with Julie Emery, *Princess in the Land of Snows* (1990); Jetsün Pema Gyalpo with Giles Grasdorff, *Tibet: My Story* (1996); Adhe Tapontsang with Joy Blakeslee, *Ama Adhe: The Voice that Remembers* (1997), and Adhe Taponstang in David Patt, *A Strange Liberation: Tibetan Lives in Chinese Hands* (1992); Ani Pachten with Adelaide Donnelley, *Sorrow Mountain: The Journey of a Tibetan Warrior Nun* (2000); Diki Tsering with Khedroop Thondup, *Dalai Lama, My Son: A Mother’s Autobiography* (2000); Namgyal Lhamo Taklha, *Born in Lhasa* (2001); Soname Yangchen with Vicki Mackenzie, *Child of Tibet* (2006); Tseyang Sadutshang as told to Yangdol Tsatultsang, *My Youth in Tibet: Recollections of a Tibetan Woman* (2012); Kunsang Dölma with Evan Denno, *A Hundred Thousand White Stones* (2013). These works constitute the full canon of life narratives written in English by Tibetan women in exile identified thus far.

Although some Tibetan women have published their life narratives in Tibetan with subsequent translation into English (Choeden 1978; Sadutshang 2012), the great majority of Tibetan women in exile have chosen to present their life histories in English. This use of English by Tibetan women life writers in exile is motivated by a desire to make the issue of Tibet internationally visible in political and public domains. However, while English is consciously applied to enter a global marketplace, the relationship between Tibetan exile writers and Western co-writers, publishers and their marketing departments requires careful investigation as it points to wider relations of power between the West and the Third World.⁶ While Tibetan women consciously apply life writing to raise awareness regarding the political struggle of their community, their works are also received in a global marketplace that is demanding of life narratives from the margins of political and economic power (Huggan 2001). Upon entering international media networks, these life writings become affected by economic and cultural forces that convert postcolonial life narratives into commodities for a primarily Western readership (Baxi 2000, 40-1, Huggan 2001, 157-8). Stemming from the need to tell their own and the collective story of Tibet to a wider, international audience with the hope to solicit both political, emotional and financial support, these narrated life experiences need to make sense across cultural and experiential boundaries. While Tibetans consciously apply testimony and other forms of life writing to raise awareness for their political struggle, their life narratives are also received in this very global marketplace that is driven by a demand for certain types of life narratives. Their writings are thus affected by economic and cultural forces that convert them into

⁶ The categories of “West” and “Third World” are used in a political and analytical sense and do not refer to strictly defined geographies. While these terms are contentious and imprecise, I have chosen them over the categories “North/South” as they draw attention to histories of colonization and the power over representation. “West” and “Third World” thus retain, in Chandra Mohanty’s words “a political and explanatory value in a world that appropriates and assimilates multiculturalism and ‘difference’ through commodification and consumption” (“Revisited” 505). As the term “postcolonial” denotes the same history of colonization, I will use it interchangeably with “Third World”.

commodities for a primarily Western readership (Baxi 2000; Huggan 2001). This position requires them, as Caren Kaplan suggests in the strikingly similar context of ethnic life narratives, “to participate in at least two different registers at all time, even two separate temporalities” (1988, 148). As this dimension requires a separate methodology and different theoretical angle than the current project, it is beyond the scope of this thesis. However, the complexities of language provides a fascinating avenue for future research, which I seek to discuss in more detail in the published version of this dissertation.

While engaging in testimonial writing for the Tibetan nation and deeply embedded in their community’s struggle to raise international awareness and sympathy for the Tibetan cause, Tibetan women’s life narratives present a *parallel* as well as a *counter-discourse* to the existing line of self-written life stories by Tibetan men.⁷ Due to the very different experiences within their culture, both personal and collective, I argue that women’s writings ‘transmit’ Tibet differently by offering a new and gendered perspective that emerges from the personal and the private to illuminate recent events in Tibetan history, which are distinct from versions circulated by both the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA), as the Tibetan government in exile is known and referred to. Tibetan women’s life histories both challenge and uphold the dominant historical narrative and are thus invaluable sources for the creation of a more inclusive and heterogeneous historical consciousness in the Tibetan exile communities and beyond.

⁷ Beginning with Tsewang Pemba’s autobiographical account, *Young Days in Tibet* (1957), exile Tibetan men have been prolific in penning their life stories. While a large percentage of those self-written accounts are published by Tibetans from the influential upper strata, some ‘voices from below’ are also found in the growing body of secular life writing in exile. One comparative study of both male and female life narratives has been published so far (McMillin 2001); however, the diverse body of writing offers exciting avenues for future research.

Current research on Tibetan women's life writing in exile

Despite the richness of this emerging canon of life writing, only three scholarly publications have so far taken 'gender as a category of analysis' to bear on interrogations of the emerging English-language literature from the Tibetan exile. These are: Laurie McMillin's *Tibet in English, English in Tibet* (2001), Alexandra Schultheis' analysis of Ani Pachen's multi-positionality in "Subjectivity politics in *Sorrow Mountain*" (2006) and Carole McGranahan's discussion of the social and gender barriers in relating women's battle stories from the Tibetan resistance in "Narrative Dispossession" (2010). Though focusing mainly on male writers in the Tibetan exile, McMillin's is the first study of secular writing emerging from the Tibetan exile communities which also includes a discussion of the life narratives by four women, namely Rinchen Dölma Taring, Jetsün Pema Gyalpo, Adhe Tapontsang and Dorje Yudon Yuthok. Collectively referring to them as "new age namthar", McMillin argues that Tibetan exile life narratives constitute "hybrid" texts, which blur the generic lines between traditional Tibetan religious life writing and Western expressions of selfhood (2001, 118). According to McMillin, these texts break with tradition on two accounts. Firstly, by writing new age *nam thar*, their authors negate the Buddhist idea of no-self that underlies a traditional Tibetan religious life narrative. Secondly, by writing in English, they further "represent a kind of tainted Tibetanness" (2001, 123).

McMillin's analysis is focused more on the writer's performance of 'Tibetanness' than an examination of how the texts negotiate essentialized notions of Tibetan identity, culture and history. In contrasting and comparing biographical detail with the content of the texts, she predictably comes to the conclusion that

none of the discussed writers constitutes an ‘authentic’ Tibetan. While her work is the first to engage with the effects of a tightly circumscribed official exilic discourse and Western expectations of peaceful, humble, Buddhist Tibetans on contemporary Tibetan life writing, the monograph only focuses on whether or not writer and text reiterate this idealized version of ‘Tibetanness’. Gender, however, does not feature in McMillin’s study, nor does she engage with negotiations of political and social realities of pre-1950 Tibet in current Tibetan life writings that will be the specific focus of my thesis.

Alexandra Schultheis’ article, “Subjectivity Politics in Sorrow Mountain” (2006), offers a compelling reading of Ani Pachen’s life narrative *Sorrow Mountain* (2000), a text which will also be discussed in Chapter Five. Schultheis argues that an engaged practice of applying the insights from transnational feminism and Buddhist feminism will help us interpret *Sorrow Mountain* not as an instance of idealized ‘Tibetanness’ but “as a contemporary colonial woman’s autobiography that challenges dominant models of the genre” (2006, 4). While *Sorrow Mountain* employs textual and paratextual signs of what Schultheis terms “performed Tibetanness”, the author points out that these are strategic rather than restrictive as they allow the work to circulate in the international market to draw attention to the Tibetan cause. In Schultheis’ reading, Ani Pachen thus achieves historical agency through which she can transcend the narrow identity politics of Tibetan exile discourse and Western demands for exotic otherness. Finally, Carole McGranahan’s article “Narrative Dispossession: Tibet and the Gendered Logics of Historical Possibility” (2010) provides the first dedicated discussion of the multiple social and cultural constraints surrounding the public telling of a life story by a female resistance fighter in exile. In a careful reading of the multiple ‘historical arrests’ that occur in the Tibetan exile community in relation to stories of the voluntary

resistance army Chushi Gangdrug, she raises awareness of the (im)possibility for Tibetan women to publicly circulate *their* battle stories.

Providing insightful readings of selected exile Tibetan women's life narratives in English, the above writings by McMillin, Schultheis and McGranahan are foundational texts for the study of Tibetan women's life writing and oral histories. As the only three studies that have so far focused on aspects of Tibetan women's life writing in exile, they also highlight the scope and necessity for further research. By focusing on the intersections of gender with historical archives and the politics of historiography, my thesis overlaps with these studies but also departs from them in important ways. This thesis argues that exile Tibetan women's life writing negotiates the place of gender in the (re)writing of Tibetan history within the larger project of ideological nation building in exile. Located at the intersection of literary, cultural and historical studies, this study is concerned with the alternative histories contained within women's life stories and their relation to 'official' Tibetan national history as it is circulated by the CTA and the structures of power that maintain the gendered nature of the 'official' historical archive in the Tibetan exile community.

Engaging questions of gender, nationalism and life writing through the lens of postcolonial feminism, I use a historically situated and contextualized close-textual analysis to show how five selected exile Tibetan women's life narratives written in English present previously neglected *national histories* that both challenge and uphold the dominant exile political history of Tibet during the first half of the twentieth century. This research project is thus also an inquiry into our understanding of what constitutes Tibetan national history and an exploration of the possibility of transforming the Tibetan historical archive in which women and their histories have mostly remained

obscured. This constitutes the only study to date that proposes to engage an analysis of women's life writing as history and examines the ways in which it both departs from and supports official exile Tibetan historiography. As such, this thesis will significantly extend the existing scholarship on Tibetan women in exile by offering a platform where Tibetan women's gendered experiences of pre-Communist Tibet can be heard.

I argue that the importance of exile Tibetan women's life narratives comes both from their unanimous support for the national struggle and also from their ability to supplement an elite-produced, male-oriented historiography by *en-gendering* national history. This focus on women's *en-gendering* of Tibetan history rather than a focus on examining the history of Tibetan women during the first half of the twentieth century, is inspired by feminist scholarship that wishes to examine women's status and identity in a broader context, one which acknowledges and highlights the socially constructed and historically contingent nature of both women's and men's social roles in society (Downs 2010; Pomata 1998; Scott 1986; among others).

Selection of Texts and Thesis Structure

As this thesis examines the place of gender in the exile (re)construction of recent historical events, I have chosen to focus on women's life narratives that deal exclusively with life in pre-communist Tibet until the final dissolution of the traditional Tibetan state in the aftermath of the popular uprising and subsequent flight of the Fourteenth Dalai Lama into exile in 1959. My corpus of primary texts therefore comprises the following five life narratives written in English by Tibetan women in exile: Rinchen Dölma Taring's *Daughter of Tibet*; Dorje Yudon Yuthok's *House with a Turquoise Roof*; Diki Tsering's *Dalai Lama, My Son: A Mother's Autobiography*; Adhe Tapontsang's *Ama Adhe. The Voice that Remembers* and Ani Pachen's *Sorrow*

Mountain. The Journey of a Warrior Nun. Published between 1970 and 2000 in Great Britain and the United States, these works offer a variety of gendered representations of life across the Tibetan plateau and different social classes in pre-colonial and occupied Tibet from the beginning of the twentieth century until 1959. The selected writings have mostly been co-written with assistance from English-language speakers, both native and bilingual (Tibetan and English). The following details about how each of the selected life narratives came into being are meant to illustrate the diversity of the canvas; however, the next section does not claim to be an exhaustive study of the varied motivations that led to the writing of each book. This dimension necessitates a considerably different theoretical approach as it asks questions of ownership, the role of the researcher and the women authors and about the power relations between the West and Tibetan subjects. It is as such beyond the scope of this thesis but will be explored in more detail in the published version of this dissertation.

1. **Rinchen Dolma Taring** wrote her life narrative *Daughter of Tibet* with the encouragement from a family friend, John Murray of John Murray Publishing and the help of travel writer Dervla Murphy who had previously travelled extensively among the Tibetan exile communities. The Fourteenth Dalai Lama had granted Taring a four-month leave period from her position of Director of the Tibetan Homes Foundation during which she stayed with Dervla Murphy in Ireland. Fluent in English, Taring requested Murphy to act only as editor to her life narrative.
2. **Dorje Yudon Yuthok** began to compile her life narrative *House of the Turquoise Roof* in the late 1960s in the United States of America, with the help of Michael Harlin, then an undergraduate student at the University of

Pennsylvania. Harlin became both a translator and editor for Yuthok's Tibetan manuscript, however, as Rabgey notes, his editorial suggestions were sometimes dismissed as too chaste. According to a personal interview with Rabgey, Yuthok declared that the details about marriage, divorce and extra-marital affairs were needed for the authenticity of the book (2006, 86).

3. **Diki Tsering's** life history was initially recorded by her grandson Khedroop Thondup, son of the Fourteenth Dalai Lama's elder brother, Gyalo Thondup, as a school assignment (Tsering 2000). Herself illiterate, Diki Tsering initially queried the preoccupation with her life experiences, however, her grandson impressed upon her the importance of recording the life of her youth in Amdo and later years in Lhasa as the Gyalum Chenmo, mother of the Dalai Lama. The life narrative was published in 2000, 19 years after Diki Tsering's death in 1981.
4. **Adhe Tapontsang** had initiated contact with the CTA in order to find a suitable and empathetic writer who she could work with to compile her life history. In 1990, Ngawang Drakmagyarpon therefore introduced Tapontsang to Joy Blakeslee, an American writer specializing in history and human rights. In a series of interviews, Tapontsang narrated her life story Blakeslee who in turn had the interviews transcribed and translated, leaving Tapontsang's oral narrative style intact in *Ama Adhe. Voice that Remembers* as well as original Khampa expressions, rather than translating them into standard Lhasa Tibetan. The writing of the book was encouraged by the Office of the Fourteenth Dalai Lama.
5. **Ani Pachen's** *Sorrow Mountain. The Journey of a Tibetan Warrior Nun* was

the outcome of a joint effort by Hollywood actor and Tibetan activist Richard Gere and Tashi Tsering of *Amnye Machen Institute* with American writer and psychotherapist Adelaide Donnelley. Over the course of two years, Pachen and Donnelley worked on a series of interviews both in Dharamsala, India, and in California, USA, and published the life history with the assistance of translator Tenzin Sherab and a host of editors and research assistants. The writing of the book was encouraged by the Office of the Fourteenth Dalai Lama.

I have selected these five women's life narratives for their detailed depictions of the sociology of family life and gender roles, Tibetan customs and societal structure, as well as for their understanding and evaluation of the recent political history of their homeland. I argue that these accounts offer a wealth of inside knowledge that not only enriches our collective knowledge of Tibet, but also force us to re-think and re-evaluate some common (mis)representations of Tibetan women and their roles prevalent in the official Tibetan exile histories. By foregrounding issues of gender roles and gendered spaces, as well as of class, region, and politics, the texts allow insights into the ongoing negotiations regarding the interpretation and representation of national history in the Tibetan community in exile. My analysis further aims to critically evaluate these texts in pointing out how these five women writers subtly re-interpret historical events and experiences in relation and opposition to the hegemonic view of Tibetan history. This is achieved by reading these five life narratives in conjunction with Tibetan, Western, and Chinese historical documents, other Tibetan life narratives, Tibetan political histories, and Western travelogues to offer a comprehensive historically contextualized textual analysis. I have furthermore opted to use the second edition of *Daughter of Tibet*, published in 1986 as it contains an epilogue that illuminates some important aspects of

Rinchen Dölma Taring's professional and personal journey in exile. For the same reasons, I have chosen to examine the revised edition of Dorje Yudon Yuthok's *House with a Turquoise Roof*, which was published in 1995.

The selection of works has been guided by considerations of the historical time discussed in the works, by genre, language, and most importantly, by gender. From the current available Tibetan women's English-language life writings published in exile, I have selected those that deal exclusively with pre-Communist Tibet and the country under colonization. The life histories narrated by Adhe Tapontsang and Ani Pachen extend beyond 1959, yet I have chosen to end my analysis of their writings with their capture by the People's Liberation Army during the 1950s. Although their memories of Chinese prisons and labor camps provide us with so-far underrepresented depictions of the trauma experienced by Tibetan political prisoners between the 1950s and the 1980s, an in-depth discussion of the gendered dimension of suffering in Chinese camps is beyond the scope of a single textual analysis' chapter and will therefore be the focus of a separate publication. Furthermore, while a detailed study of life narratives that depicts the transition from life in Tibet and the challenges of exile would offer fascinating insights into the complexities of maintaining a nation in exile, this would be beyond the scope of this thesis and also lends itself to future research.

While Tibetans are prolific in negotiating the recent past in a variety of genres, such as film, music, poetry, essays, novels and forms of the autobiographical in both Tibetan and English, I have chosen to focus exclusively on the *genre of life writing*. A great part of the Tibetan literary output outside Tibet engages with questions of national history and the condition of displacement. I argue that life narratives offer the most accessible and comprehensive representations of Tibetan life prior to and since the

Chinese invasion. Life writing also provides some of the most sustained challenges—both overtly and disguised—to the official representation of history as it is postulated by the CTA and its attendant institutions in India. In addition, the life writings so far published in exile span a much greater historical period than any other art form and allow the reader to access personal histories by both women and men from the beginning of the twentieth century until the present.

In terms of *language*, I have selected those Tibetan women's life narratives written or co-written in English and published in exile. The use of English in official Tibetan exile documents and by individual Tibetan writers is motivated by a desire to make the issue of Tibet internationally visible in political and public domains and to educate a non-specialist readership about the recent historical events from a Tibetan standpoint. As such, life writing in English originating from the Tibetan exile communities is an important soft power tool in the exile community's battle with the Chinese Communist Party over historical truth. Tibetan language writings from Tibet have proliferated in recent years and to discuss these in relation to my chosen corpus would add an exciting dimension to the thesis. However, given the very different political and cultural demands and restrictions placed on life writings published in the People's Republic of China, this addition would require a substantial re-negotiation of the chosen methodology and theoretical framework as well as an extensive rewriting of the historical chapters. While I endeavor to include an analysis of Tibetan language writings from within Tibet in the book publication of this thesis, to include an analysis of this material at this point would be beyond the scope and the present argument of the dissertation.

Most importantly, I have chosen to focus on the *female gender* by discussing

women's life stories, even though many more male life writings have emerged from the exile communities. This decision reflects a commitment to address the "glaring neglect" (Aziz 1985, 26) of Tibetan women in the field of Tibetology and its attendant disciplines. Rather than attempting to speak for Tibetan women across time and space and thus adding another layer to some of the circulating generalizations about 'Tibetan women', I hope that my analysis of the selected five life narratives sheds light on the many differences of the women writers' lives, background and experiences. This includes abstaining from using one overarching thematic according to which the individual life narratives are examined; instead, I have followed the varied voices of the authors, even if this meant that the textual analysis chapters do not deliver a unified representation of female childhood, adolescence and adult years in pre-Communist Tibet. Neither do the experiences of these five Tibetan women all fit neatly into theoretical categories of submission to patriarchal oppression, emancipation, or female resistance but may include varieties of some or all of these themes. These female life narratives thus challenge the facile adoption of a particular theoretical standpoint and reading these representations of and by women in Tibet accordingly. Instead, the selected five life narratives question and overturn many stereotypes and expectations of women's lives in a non-Western context and avoid easy categorization. I argue that it is precisely the plurality of these five women's lives that will contribute significantly to our understanding of "the situations of Tibetan women in particular socio-economic milieus, at particular moments in history, and in particular locations" (Gyatso and Havnevik 2005, 1).

In order to bring to light the selected five women's varied experiences in pre-1950 Tibet, I have chosen to organize my thesis in the following way: First, I will discuss important theoretical terms and concepts that pertain to my field of inquiry.

Questions regarding the methodology used to analyze the texts will be discussed in the Section **Methodology**. Following on from this, **Chapter One** will then provide the theoretical framework for the textual analyses by critically reviewing the available literature on nations and gender, the use of history in the consolidation of the national imaginary, the politics of historiography and the exclusion of women from ‘official’, national histories. I will present the available literature as it pertains to my study on Tibetan women and the writing of history in exile. In moving from the general to the specific, this chapter will also describe the situation of the Tibetan nation in exile and examine the struggles over what constitutes acceptable history. **Chapter Two** then scrutinizes the particular rhetoric concerning Tibetan women in a variety of discourses and provides a religious and socio-cultural background for the current representations of Tibetan women.

The close textual analyses of the five primary texts are presented in **Chapters Three, Four, and Five**. Guided by the focus of the private and the public and the oscillation between those often arbitrary divisions, I have divided the life writings according to the life writers’ movements within those spheres. **Chapter Three** discusses the life writings by Diki Tsering and Dorje Yudon Yuthok, who firmly remained ‘intra-mural’, that is within the walls of the home. The analysis therefore focuses on relationships and hierarchies within the house and offers a reading of the various spaces that these women inhabited within the home. By focusing solely on the private, this chapter offers an insight into the largely undocumented existence of women in the household that simultaneously challenges the separation between public and private history. **Chapter Four** examines Rinchen Dölma Taring’s alternation between the private and the public spheres by providing a family history that offers important but neglected facets of Tibet’s national history. Her reinterpretation of Tibetan cultural and

religious tradition destabilizes both contemporary Tibetan versions of the early decades of the twentieth century and Chinese propaganda of that same period. Finally, **Chapter Five** focuses on two women who, on account of the Chinese invasion, left the gendered domain of the home behind and moved into a sphere solely dominated by men: war. Adhe Tapontsang and Ani Pachen's accounts of women's participation in the resistance questions not only ideas about traditional women's spheres; it demonstrates, perhaps most vividly of those five life writings, the politics of historiography in the Tibetan exile, particularly of women who are compelled to live 'extra-mural', outside the confines of gendered spaces and roles.

Concepts and Terminology

This thesis employs some geo-political and theoretical terms that I wish to expand upon in this section to clarify my position in regards to contemporary scholarship on these issues. Specifically, I will describe how I use the term *Tibet* in this thesis and elaborate on my decision to employ the term *life writing* versus the more commonly used *autobiography*.

What is 'Tibet'?

Depending on the political persuasion of the speaker, Tibet evokes a range of concepts and ideas regarding its territory and borders and their political legitimacy. For the Chinese government and some Tibetan scholars, Tibet comprises a territory that roughly corresponds to the central Tibetan province of Ü-Tsang and the Western region of Ngari. This area is commonly referred to as the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR). This area excludes the eastern regions of Amdo and Kham, where Tibetans have traditionally formed a majority. Kham had been integrated into the Chinese province of

Xikang under the Chinese Nationalist government as early as 1910/11 even though its administration was disputed by the locals and mostly ineffective (Lin 2006). After 1950/51, both Amdo and Kham became fully integrated into the Chinese provinces Qinghai, Gansu, Yunnan and Szechuan.

Tibetans in exile, on the other hand, refer to their homeland with reference to the three regions model (Tib. *chol kha gsum*), which includes Ü-Tsang and Ngari as well as Amdo and Kham. This idea of cholka-sum dates back to the Imperial period (7th until mid-9th century BCE) and is therefore closely linked to the rise of Buddhism and its establishment as Tibet's principal religion. The concept is further connected with the reunification of Tibet under the Fifth Dalai Lama and the subsequent establishment of the Ganden Phodrang Government (Tib. *dga' ldan pho brang*) in 1642, which extended its unique combination of spiritual and temporal rule (Tib. *chos srid gnyis ldan*) under the leadership of the successive Dalai Lamas over all three Tibetan provinces. While this concept did exist in Tibet, it cannot be compared to the basis of an overarching form of Tibetan nationalism prior to 1950.

For obvious reasons, the idea of Greater Tibet has gained popularity since the flight into exile. Tsering Shakya (1999) clarifies in this context that since 1959, this common affiliation with cholka-sum is a concept that is

deeply embedded in the political culture of the Tibetan diaspora, where the core of the refugees' political identity lay in the conception of Tibet as the unity of Kham, Amdo and Ü-Tsang. But although the idea enjoys universal support among the exile community, it has no recent historical base and it is difficult to assess the extent of support it might enjoy inside Greater Tibet. (Shakya 1999, 387)

Given the ethnic basis for the idea of Greater Tibet, I have chosen to refer to 'Tibet' from the viewpoint of the unity of Amdo, Kham and Ü-Tsang. If I specifically refer to

the Chinese administered region of Central Tibet (Ü-Tsang and Ngari), I will use ‘TAR’.

Life Writing versus Autobiography

As already indicated earlier, I have chosen to use the term *life writing* rather than *autobiography* to refer to the corpus of exile Tibetan women’s self-referential writing. In order to provide a grounded justification for this approach, I will firstly turn to the key criticisms of traditional Western autobiographical theory and then give a brief overview of the interventions of feminist criticism into the central idea of the autobiographical subject. This will be followed by the insights of postcolonial criticism and their significance for examining Tibetan exile women’s life narratives.

Although autobiography had already been conceptualized as a genre at the end of the eighteenth century and was primarily thought of as a European literary art form, Western theories of autobiography became consolidated only in the mid-twentieth century under the influence of formalism and structuralism (Nussbaum 1989, 1-2). Influenced by German historian Wilhelm Dilthey’s description of the genre as “the highest and most instructive form in which the understanding of life comes before us” (1960, 85-86), Georg Misch (1949) argued that the progressive unfolding of Western history was mirrored in the lives of ‘great men’ who actively participated in shaping political and social life of a given (read: European) society. Influenced by Misch’s theory, subsequent generations of Western scholars considered ‘the proper autobiographer’ therefore to be a (white) man of influence and someone who had undergone a degree of conscious internal transformation (Shumaker 1954; Gusdorf [1956] 1980). In her study of gender and ideology in eighteenth century England, Felicity Nussbaum argues that defined in this manner, autobiography was expected to

provide the description of a teleological life narrative leading to success, triumph over vicissitude, and to personal development (1989, 4, 30).

This notion of selfhood is the product of a convergence of European liberal-humanist philosophy and its idea of universal man with a variety of cultural influences that shaped Western notions of selfhood, including the nineteenth century concept of the self-made man, the idea of radical individuality and the paradigm of the ‘great men of history’ (Smith and Watson 2001, 112; Brodzki and Schenck 1988, 2-5). Underlying this mode of self-expression is the belief that the ‘I’ of autobiography is a unique, free, rational and autonomous self, actively involved in understanding and shaping his or her environment. As all ‘I’s are considered to be rational, unified and agentive, autobiography was thus seen as encapsulating the ‘universal human condition’ through which it allowed “the reader to commune with and discover himself in even the most ‘personal’ of autobiographical narratives” (Lang 1982, 3). These established criteria for what constitutes a ‘supreme example’ elevated autobiography to the position of a representative life story that could be and was read as the master narrative of the sovereign subject and of the achievements of Western civilization. The “straight white Christian man of property as the ethical subject” (Spivak 1999, 176) thus became enshrined as the autobiographical ‘I’, who derives his identity from a history of privilege (Smith and Watson 1992, xvii).

This postulation of the master narrative in early autobiographical criticism had far-reaching effects for subsequent studies of the genre and the assessment and canonization of texts. A number of critics argued that this narrow definition of autobiography, by which the genre boundaries could be simultaneously reinforced and ‘policed’, obviously excluded women and minority writers as well as other varieties of

life writing such as the diary, the letter, testimony, memoirs and oral traditions, which prevented these texts from being seriously studied (Brodski and Schenck 1988; Olney 1980; Jelinek 1980; Stanton 1984; S. Smith 1987, 1990; among others). In particular, feminist criticism is helpful in drawing our attention to the fraught issue of 'the representative subject' in relation to women and minority writers who sought to represent themselves in a dominant discourse. Not only did the idea of the representational and autonomous 'I' exclude women from the dominant discourse of autobiography, their socialization and status in society was in clear opposition and demarcation from that of men, and transgressions into what was perceived a 'male sphere', including that of autobiography, were often censored or ignored. While women did of course write their own life stories, these hardly ever acquired 'representative status' and thus remained mostly understudied until the second half of the twentieth century.

Since the term 'autobiography' has become synonymous with a perspective emanating from (white) male privilege, feminist and postcolonial critics have looked for other definitions to describe self-referential writings by women and people from other parts of the world. Taking into account the relatively recent coinage of the term 'autobiography' at the end of the eighteenth century and the multitude of terms that circulated prior to and since then, Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson propose a different terminology to differentiate between autobiographical practices:

We understand *life writing* as a general term for writing of diverse kinds that takes a life as its subject. Such writing can be biographical, novelistic, historical, or an explicit self-reference to the writer. We understand *life narrative* as a somewhat narrower term that includes many kinds of self-referential writing, including autobiography. ... Life writing, then, might be best approached as a moving target, a set of ever-shifting self-referential practices that engage the past in order to reflect on identity in the present. (2001, 3-4)

Using *life writing* and *life narrative* thus denotes an acknowledgement of the exclusivity of the term *autobiography* and the search for more inclusive terms for the “heterogeneity of self-referential practices” (Smith and Watson 2010, 4) that exist both in the Western world and around the globe.

These considerations are also salient for reading and studying Tibetan autobiographical literature. Although early critics of autobiography avowed the essentially European character of the tradition (Misch 1949; Gusdorf 1954; Pascal 1960), traditional Tibetan autobiographical writings show very similar genre definitions and limits to those elaborated in the context of Western autobiography. As elaborated earlier, the traditional ‘representative’ subject of Tibetan autobiography has been almost exclusively a man of influence and privilege who was revered either for his religious accomplishments or his political achievements, or both. Tibetan women’s autobiographical writing, on the other hand, was rarely accorded the same respect even if the autobiographical subject had achieved similar spiritual insights or worldly achievements. While Tibetan women’s autobiographies might have been read in the context of hagiography, those whose self-life writing did not conform to the generic tradition were neither accorded representative status nor deemed worthy of extensive study or circulation.

My thinking of the marginalization of women in the Tibetan literary canon has therefore been markedly influenced by the concepts of feminist critics who have linked the practice and study of autobiography with the privileging of one particular way of writing a life that is both markedly masculine and defined by a narrow definition of self-hood and patriarchal status (Anderson L 2001; Brodkzi and Schenck 1988; Jelinek 1980; Smith S 1987; among others). Life writing is a mixing of genres and modes from

letters, diaries, autobiographical fiction to testimony, and oral narrative. Given the engagement not only with questions of self-representation, but also with social, historical and ideological contexts, *life writing* offers a more flexible way to describe the writing practices of Tibetan women in exile, while the term *autobiography* fits the parameters of traditional forms of Tibetan life stories and will therefore be used to refer to those male life stories published before the Communist take-over. I will therefore interpret the body of traditional Tibetan self-referential writings as *autobiography* and refer to contemporary Tibetan women's life stories as *life writing*, using the singular *life narrative* to discuss an individual work or text. Given the engagement not only with questions of self-representation, but also with social, historical and ideological contexts, the next section will discuss the methodology used to examine the selected five exile Tibetan women's life narratives.

Methodology

The selected life stories enable the reader to access myriad expressions of Tibetan social and cultural life: from kitchens to stables, from monasteries to government offices, and from wealthy aristocratic estates to humble peasant households. Through this diversity we can begin to understand and appreciate that Tibetan history is indeed not one but many, and that historical experiences are always already influenced by gender, class, and region (Falcone and Wangchuk 2008). In order to give a more comprehensive view of the many intersections of discourses braided (Lionnet 1995) within each of the women's life narratives, I find it necessary to employ an interdisciplinary framework. Though primarily situated in literary studies, my research also intersects with historical and gender studies, and with postcolonial feminist theories.

The adoption of a multi-disciplinary framework is also consistent with the range and scope of questions I address, which cover areas related to gender, historiography and national history. I have been inspired to bring different kinds of readings practices to Tibetan life writing by Janet Gyatso, who argues that to submit Tibetan texts

to untraditional modes of analysis is to bring material into a broadly based discourse. Outside the Tibetan world, familiarity with Tibetan literature is limited to Tibetologists, a few other Asianists, and the circle of modern devotees of Tibetan Buddhism. This literature has yet to be considered in larger thematic terms, on par with other objects of study in the humanities. (1998, xii)

Although Gyatso speaks in this context mainly of Tibetan religious literature, I strongly advocate for the same treatment of secular literature emerging from both the areas within Tibet, as well as from the exile communities. Bringing Tibetan literature into the orbit of literary and feminist studies will thus ensure a broader appreciation of the kinds of life writing emerging from Tibetan women in exile and hopefully ‘feed-back’ to Tibetan Studies to stimulate interdisciplinary conversation and analysis.

Taking up this critical conversation through the study of a sub-genre, namely women’s life writing, I argue that a historically contextualized close-textual analysis serves best my aim to engage with these multiple fields. In this, I follow the practice of New Historicism, or Cultural Poetics, as is preferred by its founder Stephen Greenblatt, which understands literary texts and History to be “mutually imbricated” (Payne 2005, 3).

The New Historicist Practice

After decades of the decontextualized analyses of New Criticism and Deconstruction, New Historicism emerged in the 1980s as an alternative to reading literature by taking into account the larger socio-historical context from which it had

emerged. Rather than a ‘theory’, New Historicism describes itself as a ‘practice’ that brings together both the discordant and the orthodox in a text through an emphasis “on those parts of a text that seem to be at odds with the ways in which the period in which that text originates is usually understood” (Robson 2014, 7). In order to move away from purely aesthetic and formal understandings of a text, this approach therefore requires a thorough understanding of history and the particular historical period from which the text emerges.

Though literary historicism had been practiced since the nineteenth century, New Historicism departed from these earlier approaches by claiming that traditional historicism “flattens and impoverishes texts by reducing them to ‘reflections’ or instantiations of their contexts” (Maza 2004, 252). Greenblatt and other New Historicists thus proposed a different understanding and treatment of the historical context for literary analysis:

The historical evidence . . . conventionally invoked in literary criticism to assist in the explication of a text seemed to me dead precisely because it was the enemy of wonder: it was brought in to lay contingency and disturbance to rest. I do not want history to enable me to escape the effect of the literary but to deepen it by making it touch the effect of the real, a touch that would reciprocally deepen and complicate history. (Greenblatt 1990, 5-6)

To ‘deepen and complicate’ history requires a departure from an understanding of History, and the historian, as objective and as existing outside of discursive constraints. Instead, as Louis Montrose elaborates, New Historicism regards history and literature as mutually influencing narratives:

The new orientation to history in Renaissance literary studies may be succinctly categorized, on the one hand, by its acknowledgement of the *historicity of texts*: the cultural specificity, the social embedment, of all modes of writing—not only those texts that critics study but also the texts in which they study them; and, on the other hand, by its acknowledgement of the *textuality of history*: the unavailability of a full and

authentic past, a lived material existence, that has not already been mediated by the surviving texts of the society in question—those ‘documents’ that historians construe in their own texts, called ‘histories’, histories that necessarily but always incompletely construct the History to which they offer access. (Montrose 1986, 8)

The tension described in the quote’s chiasmus is telling for the New Historicist approach, which attempts, in Stephen Greenblatt’s words, “a full cultural analysis [that] will need to push beyond the boundaries of the text, to establish links between the text and values, institutions, and practices elsewhere in the culture” (2005, 12). Including what lies beyond the text in a literary analysis should not mean, however, to abolish close reading. On the contrary, Greenblatt suggests to practice a historically contextualized close-textual analysis to explicate the full spectrum of the text in context: “texts are not merely cultural by virtue of reference to the world beyond themselves; they are cultural by virtue of social values and contexts that they have themselves successfully absorbed” (Greenblatt 2005, 12). Greenblatt advocates for an appreciation of the interdependency of *all* texts—the literary, the cultural, the social and political worlds we have before us—and thus for the critic’s responsibility to read these in regards to understanding their various interconnections. In a rejection of isolating approaches to textual analysis, a New Historicist analysis then treats literature as neither “timeless, transcendent and autonomous” nor as “a passive reflection but [as] an active force in the historical world” (Maza 2004, 252).

Research Questions

As an active force, literature is also shaped by the boundaries of what is approved of, thought of as legitimate or not while simultaneously influencing ‘the technologies’ that govern a given society at a particular time (Foucault 2002). In order to account for these ‘technologies of power’ embedded in the text, Greenblatt proposes

the following questions to be asked within the framework of a historically contextualized close-textual analysis:

What kinds of behavior, what models of practice, does this work seek to enforce? Why might readers at a particular time and place find this work compelling? Are there differences between my values and the values implicit in the work I am reading? Upon what social understandings does the work depend? Whose freedom of thought or movement might be constrained implicitly or explicitly by this work? What are the larger social structures with which these particular acts of praise or blame might be connected?" (Greenblatt 2005, 12)

Guided by Greenblatt's questions into how the 'outside world' has been absorbed into the literary text, I have formulated the following research question for my close analysis of Tibetan exile women's life narratives:

- How do Tibetan women experience history and themselves as historical subjects?
- What alternatives do they offer to official exilic Tibetan versions of pre-Communist Tibet?
- What concessions do they make in support of the political struggle of their nation?
- How do their stories enlarge the existing historical archive?

Methodological Questions

To answer how and to what degree Tibetan women assimilate, adapt and challenge the narrative of exile national history in their life writing, it is necessary to be familiar with the key events in twentieth century Tibetan history and their representation in Tibetan national discourse. To this end, I have consulted a range of political histories written in English by Tibetan authors, including Tsepon Shakabpa's, *Tibet: A political History* (1967) and *100.000 Moons. An advanced political history of Tibet* (2010); K. Dhondup's, *The water bird and other years: a history of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama and after* (1986); Tsering Shakya's, *The Dragon in the Land of Snows. A history of*

modern Tibet since 1947 (1999); Gyaltse Namgyal Wangdue's, *Political and Military history of Tibet*, volume 2 (2010). This has been complimented by specific publications (both in print and electronic) by the Department of Information and International Relations (DIIR) of the Central Tibetan Administration and critical Western and Chinese histories.

The insights gleaned from these various works will be used to examine the representation of historical periods and events in the selected five Tibetan women's life narratives to understand where personal histories take precedence or, alternatively, recede into the background to make place for an evocation of the national(ist) narrative. While providing new and fresh views of existing historical records, this method will also heighten awareness for the politics of historiography as it is practiced in the Tibetan exile community. In contrasting and comparing these divergent bodies of works, I also recognize how individuals are embedded in, and at times constrained by, the social, gendered and political hierarchies that continue to exert influence over the production and interpretation of Tibetan life stories in exile.

I will also explore to what degree gender shapes both personal and national histories for Tibetan women. To examine how gender norms and symbols have been used to explain and perpetuate social hierarchies and inequalities, I will turn to the materials used in Chapter Two, "Imagining Tibetan Women". The observations from Tibetan and Western writers from such diverse fields as Buddhist Studies, anthropology, sociology and travel accounts are used to examine the descriptions and interpretations of gender and gendered roles in the selected Tibetan women's life narratives. This will allow for a better and more nuanced understanding where (and how) gender has operated as a category of difference in pre-Communist Tibetan

society. It will also sensitize for the possibilities of transgressing gender boundaries and the consequences for women in particular social and historical contexts.

As emphasized above, this reading practice needs to be historically situated so as not to run the risk of constructing a single category of Tibetan women oppressed by a homogenous system of patriarchy. An inquiry that would singularly focus on gender difference is problematic insofar as it assumes that women are a coherent group, both cross-culturally as well as within their specific culture, *prior* to their entry into the social, cultural and familial structures that defined pre-Communist Tibet and would thus privilege gender over all other categories of difference (Mohanty 1988, 64-66). Like Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1988) and others, Sandra Harding express caution over this reductionist interpretation of human relations: “[T]here are no gender relations per se, but only gender relations as constructed by and between classes, races, and cultures” (1991, 179). This minimizing approach to gender disregards how local, cultural, religious, ideological and historical contexts shape relations between men and women, between women and other women as well as between men and other men. While gender inequality is undoubtedly crucial in understanding some of the constraints that Tibetan women faced in pre-Communist Tibet, and still do even today in exile and in Tibet, a reading of their life narratives only in terms of gender difference and male domination is insufficient and even presumptuous. Like everywhere else, Tibetan women are not a monolithic group and it is therefore crucial to examine gender norms and symbols alongside differences in class, education, age, and region.

Finally, my analysis is influenced by postcolonial feminist concerns about the role of Western researchers in reading non-Western women’s life writing. Since our globalized world still “bears witness to the unequal and uneven forces of cultural

representation involved in the contest for political and social authority within the modern world order” (Bhabha 1994, 171), it is crucial for researchers and readers of non-Western women’s life writing to be critical and vigilant of any attempt to fully explain, speak about or on behalf of the ‘genuinely disenfranchised’ (Spivak 1988). In my examination of Tibetan exile women’s life narratives, I have therefore found it essential to adopt a self-reflexive approach that is conscious of “the political effects and implications” of research produced within “the hegemony of Western scholarship” (Mohanty 1988, 64). Practicing a politically invested and self-aware mode of reading that is sensitive to the contentious issue of ‘representing’ marginalized experiences (Stone-Mediatore 2003) will avoid foreclosing Tibetan women’s heterogeneity and the various intersecting discourses that bear on their self-representations. This involves a recognition how issues of race, class, religion, gender and geopolitics influence the production, circulation and reception of Tibetan women’s life writing in exile; as well as the knowledge that Tibetan women’s life experiences are never fully graspable or explainable (Spivak 1987).

In recognition of these intersecting discourses, the next section will present an overview of important background information to the textual analyses. The Literature Review will therefore cover issues of gender, nation and historiography as well as the role of the Archive in preserving hegemonic historical narratives. This will be followed by a discussion of the specific challenges of maintaining a functioning community in exile and of the important role of history and historiography in this endeavor. Lastly, I will examine the opportunities and limitations for Tibetans to influence historical discussion in exile through literature.

CHAPTER ONE

Gender, Nation and Historiography

The literature on nations and nationalism and related questions of gender, is as vast as it is diverse, and a complete review of the existing scholarship is unfortunately impossible within the constraints of this thesis. In line with the major themes of my research project, the first part of Chapter One will therefore include a discussion to pertinent writings on the definition of nation and the gendered nature of nations. In the second part of Chapter One, I will examine the anomaly of a ‘nation-in-exile’ with specific reference to the Tibetan situation. The third part of this Chapter will then address the role of history in consolidating a nation and the consequences for the creation of national historiography, followed by an examination of the creation and maintenance of the official Archive.

1.1 Nations and Gender

Over the last three hundred years, nations have replaced earlier forms of communities—kinship, caste, religion—and nation-states have achieved widespread political prevalence. Though people worldwide continue to define themselves through a variety of identities, belonging to one particular nation has become widely recognized as a form of mass identification in the international arena. While numerous scholarly analyses have enriched our knowledge of the origins of nations, the rise and role of

nationalism in civil conflicts, and the continued importance of both despite greater global connectivity among people, most scholarship in this area treats the role of gender in the creation and maintenance of nations as secondary, or is silent on the issue altogether. As feminist critics have persuasively argued, nations however are deeply affected by ethnic understandings of gender relations. This sub-chapter will therefore analyze different claims to what constitutes a ‘nation’ and examine how ideas about national belonging are intimately tied to questions of gender.

1.1.1 What is a Nation?

Although belonging to a nation is currently the most dominant concept in defining human relations in today’s world order (A. Smith 1999), the nature and origin of nations—when they emerge, what constitutes a nation and what attributes are necessary for a nation to be considered a nation-state—still defy common definition. Certainly, the increasing relevance of transnational networks, mass mobility and global flows have fueled the belief that new forms of community will supersede narrow definitions of national identity and eventually mark the end of the nation-state (Guéhenno 1995; Horsman and Marshall 1994; Ohmae 1995). In contrast, Liisa Malkki claims that rather than denoting dissolution of the national, “globality is understood to be constituted by *interrelations* among discrete ‘nations’” (1994, 41). In fact, Malkki argues further, the international order itself serves “to reproduce, naturalize, legitimate, and even generate ‘the nation form’ all over the world” (1994, 42). Nations have become so thoroughly embedded in everyday life and political discourse that their existence is indeed taken for granted. And because the nation and national identity continue to be such powerful concepts for people worldwide, it is difficult to remember and imagine that they are highly contested phenomena, which have “proved notoriously difficult to define, let

alone to analyse” (B. Anderson 1983, 3). Prasenjit Duara observes in his study on Chinese national history that even “[r]egimes, politicians, and ordinary people within a nation do not often agree on what the nation does or what it should mean” (1995, 3). This section will therefore briefly outline the three dominant schools on theories of nations, namely primordialism, perennialism, and modernism, each of which offer their distinct “grand narrative” to explain the phenomena of the nation and of nationalism (A. Smith 2008, 2-11).

Proponents of primordialism argue that the nation is founded on biological markers of racial purity (Shils 1957) and that the nation consists of “a group of people who believe they are ancestrally related” (Connor 1994, 21). Members thus identify with their nation on grounds of genealogical descent and because they share a particular territory, common language and deep cultural ties. This view is useful in drawing our attention to the deep-seated significance of kinship and cultural ties and can provide an explanation for the sacrifices people are often ready to endure for both family and nation. However, nationalist primordialism cannot account for the cultural and social changes that alter the inherent structure of ethnic communities in their transformation to nations. Most importantly, by emphasizing ethnic and cultural ties, this school of thought neglects the “political, and especially military, action that is required to turn an ethnic group into a nation” (A. Smith 1998, 14). Perennialists similarly view the nation as immemorial with nationalism simply serving as the ideology for an already existing nation; however, they differ from primordialist theorists insofar as they do not claim that nations and nationalism are natural formations; instead, perennialist theorists argue that nations are phenomena that continue to occur throughout the centuries (Hastings 1997).

Currently considered the classical school of thought on nations and nationalism, the modernist school claims that neither pre-agrarian nor “agro-literate” (Gellner 1983) societies organized themselves around the concept of a state or the idea of a homogenous unity. In contrast to nationalist assumptions that nations have been with us since times immemorial, modernist theorists contend that the nation is “only one, relatively recent, historically contingent form of organizing space in the world” (Gupta 1992, 63). Modernist theorists may concede that forms of “proto-nationalism” (Hobsbawm 1983) existed in agro-literate societies, yet they argue nevertheless that “pre-modern political units rarely, and only accidentally, coincided with those of ‘nations’” (O’Leary 1997, 193). The highly stratified nature of these societies resulted in a split between the “high culture” of the religious and aristocratic elites and the “low, vernacular culture” of the majority population (Gellner 1983, 57). It was thus only with the transition from agro-literate to industrial society, and thus with the onset of modernity, when

general social conditions make for standardised, homogenous, centrally sustained high cultures, pervading entire populations and not just elite minorities, [that] a situation arises in which well-defined educationally sanctioned and unified cultures constitute very nearly the only kind of unit with which men willingly and often ardently identify. The cultures now seem to be the natural repositories of political legitimacy. (Gellner 1983, 55)

For modernist theorists, it is the transition to industrialization, and thus the transition to modern society, which produces the economic, political and cultural institutions that enable nation building to take place. For modernists, a human community that wishes to be considered a nation needs to possess: a well-defined territory with clear and recognized borders, a unified legal system, a sovereign state and state bureaucracy, mass public culture and literacy, capitalism, secularism, and the international recognition of its legitimacy over a given territory (Mock 2012, 18).

In *Imagined Communities* (1983), Benedict Anderson likewise stresses the importance of industrialization for the genesis of nations. He argues compellingly that the “convergence of capitalism and print technology” (1983, 49) created the conditions for cross-cultural solidarity, which made it possible for otherwise divided populations to see and speak of themselves in new ways as a nation. In this view, nations were in fact born from appeals to nationalism (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983), which can be defined as an ideological movement that is employed to achieve and consolidate the autonomy, unity, and identity of a particular dominant group (B. Anderson 1983; Calhoun 1997, 2007; Gellner 1983; A. Smith 1983, 1998, 2008; among others). Like the origins of nations, modernist theorists consider nationalism to be a distinctly modern phenomenon.

1.1.2 The question of gender in the theory of nations

Despite the vast amount of scholarship on nations and nationalism, these three major schools of thought are mostly silent on the issue of creating and maintaining national unity through “the sanctioned institutionalization of gender *difference*” (McClintock 1997, 89; emphasis in original). With some notable exceptions (Balakrishnan 1996; Balibar 1990; Mosse 1985), interrogations of national history as a gendered narrative are still notably absent from the majority of theoretical engagements within the field (McClintock 1997; Ranchod-Nilsson and Tétrault 2000; Yuval-Davis and Anthias 1989; Yuval-Davis 1997a; among others). In response to this neglect by mainstream scholarship, feminist critics have highlighted two concerns: the complex relationship of women with nationalist projects, and the intersections of the nation-state with particular gender-regimes (McClintock 1997; Jayawardena 1986; Kandiyoti 1991; Yuval-Davis and Anthias 1989; Yuval-Davis 1997a; 1997b).

As feminist critics have amply shown, nations frequently harness feelings of collective belonging by adopting imagery of the family and the home, with the nation itself often referred to as either Fatherland or Motherland (McClintock 1997). This concept of the nation-as-family is then often used to legitimize and naturalize national hierarchies in terms of an extension of familial relations. As Nira Yuval-Davis and Floya Anthias (1989, 7) have identified, following are the five ways in which women participate in ethnic and national processes:

- as biological reproducers of members of ethnic collectivities
- as reproducers of the boundaries of ethnic/national groups
- as participating centrally in the ideological reproduction of the collectivity and as transmitters of its culture
- as signifiers of ethnic/national differences—as a focus and symbol in ideological discourses used in the construction, reproduction and transformation of ethnic/national categories
- as participants in national, economic, political and military struggles.

As can be seen from the reliance on the ‘woman’ as symbol, boundary marker, and biological reproducer of the nation itself, women’s actual roles in the nation-as-family become part “of an ideological terrain where broader notions of cultural authenticity and integrity are debated and where women’s appropriate place and conduct may be made to serve as boundary markers” (Kandiyoti 1992, 246).

In her seminal publication *Gender & Nation*, Nira Yuval-Davis alerts us to the fact that despite women’s role in the reproduction of nations in biological, cultural and symbolical terms, they are nevertheless “‘hidden’ in the various theorizations of the nationalist phenomena” (1997a, 2). Similarly, Anne McClintock explains that women “are typically constructed as the symbolic bearers of the nation but are denied any direct relation to national agency” (1997, 90; see also Boehmer 2005). Many feminist critics believe the reason for this construction of gender difference in nationalist discourse lies in the transfer of family hierarchies to the nation. In this way, women (and children)

experience the same (or similar) subordination within the nation as they are subjected to in the context of the family (McClintock 1997). Owing to the naturalization of family structures in the nation, Yuval-Davis (1997a) argues that women continue to be associated with the family and the domestic (see also Pateman 1988; Grant 1991). Thus relegated to the private sphere, women have by extension been mainly excluded from the public political domain, which has resulted in their exclusion from the political discourse (Yuval-Davis 1997, 3; see also Grant 1991; Ortner 1974, 1978).

Women's status and roles in the nation and in nationalist discourse is thus ambiguous to say the least; they are imbued with the symbolism of 'bearing' the nation while their membership is simultaneously restricted. As Deniz Kandiyoti cogently remarks, "women are relegated to the margins of the polity even though their centrality to the nation is constantly being reaffirmed" (1991, 429-430). I argue that it is precisely this precarious subject-position *vis-à-vis* the nation and the state that relegates women's stories to the margins of national history. This artificial separation between the public and the private, and the association of women with the latter, has effected the marginalization of women in the shaping of nationalist discourse and the writing of national history. As symbols of the nation, women have mostly remained 'the silent other' in national history. Bringing women's life stories into the purview of history is thus not only a way to break this silence but an attempt to destabilize the categories of difference and exclusion on which nationalist imagery and rhetoric rest.

1.1.3 Alternative Modernities

Since the late 1990s, the modernist theory of nations and nationalism has been the subject of critical and provoking interrogations by scholars from a variety of

persuasions. Ethno-symbolists such as Anthony Smith, for example, have criticized the modernist model for its rejection of ethnicity, as well as symbols and myths, as the “ancient material” on which nations are often built (A. Smith 2009, 8, 26-29). Particularly powerful challenges were issued by a set of theorists who exposed the intrinsic ethnocentric bias of the modernist model of nations (Chakrabarty 2000; Gaonkar 1999, 2002; Guha 2002; Eisenstadt 2000, 2002; Taylor 1999; among others). These proponents of ‘alternative modernities’ have contested the argument that communities everywhere needed to undergo the transition to modernity and be transformed *in the same way* as Western societies before thinking (and speaking) of themselves as nations.

In the modernist view, nations emerged from an engagement with the intellectual premises of the European Enlightenment and must therefore be viewed as the attempt to realize the ‘universal values’ of rationality, progress and liberty in political terms (Gellner 1983; Kohn 1946). Understood in this way, modernity, modernization and nation building has been a process first conceived and completed in Western Europe and exported alongside capitalism to the rest of the world with the rise and expansion of European colonial powers. This theory of modernity is premised on the belief that European modernity, societal and cultural modernization have been transported to other parts without changes to its basic principles. It furthermore postulates the view that all societies will inevitably have to replicate these modern institutions and systems before they can understand themselves, and act as part of a nation. As Timothy Mitchell (2000) cogently summarizes, this conflation of modernization with Westernization is based on an elevation of Western modernity to the degree of universality. This, however, depends “on assigning a different and lesser significance to things deemed purely local, non-Western, and lacking a universal

expression” (Mitchell 2000, xi). Assigning universality to what is essentially a site-specific phenomenon is however based on what Charles Taylor (1999) terms an “acultural” theory of modernity.⁸

Taylor characterizes acultural theory as a “culture-neutral operation” and argues that in this view, “modernity is not specifically Western, even though it may have started in the West. Instead it is that form of life toward which all cultures converge, as they go through, one after another, substantially the same changes” (1999, 154, 169). In response to this ethnocentric view of the creation of nations and nationalism, proponents of the ‘alternative modernities’ model have called for “a far-reaching reappraisal of modernity and modernization” (Eisenstadt, Riedel and Sachsenmaier 2002, 2). In contrast to the teleological narrative of modernization, this school of thought proposes a view of modernity as “a worldwide phenomenon and that the modern was not produced from within Europe alone” (Mitchell 2000, xii).⁹ Although Western modernity remains an important vantage point, and a powerful discourse, from which to interrogate institutional, societal and cultural changes around the world, it should not and indeed

⁸ In this view, the process of modernization based on rationality is thought to eradicate differences among populations and free societies from the limitations imposed by traditional customs and religion. Yet this notion of an inevitable development towards modernity imposes a false uniformity on the diverse encounters between non-Western cultures and the so-called culture-neutral symbols and institutions of societal modernization (Gaonkar 1999; Taylor 1999). Basing his argument on the idea of multiple modernities, Gaonkar’s elucidation of “the unavoidable dialectic of convergence and divergence” (1999, 16) is useful in problematizing the facile adoption of one universal history of modernity. Convergence is mainly linked with the adoption of market economy, the bureaucratic state, and democracy while divergence is usually connected with the “cultural expressions of modernity” (1999, 16). Gaonkar complicates this simplistic dichotomy by drawing our attention to what he terms “site-specific creative adaptations” (1999, 16) on the axis of societal modernization. Although he claims that non-Western societies are not free to choose from the institutions and intellectual premises of Western modernity, Gaonkar maintains that their creative adaptations far surpass the invention or adjustment of “functional equivalents” for modern institutions. Rather, creative adaptation is the “site where a people ‘make’ themselves modern, as opposed to being made modern by alien and impersonal forces and where they give themselves an identity and a destiny” (Gaonkar 1999, 16). Gaonkar’s idea of creative adaptation provides an important starting point for investigating the multiple strategies by which non-Western people adopt agency and challenge assumptions of a teleological path towards universal modernity for all societies. In support of this view, Chakrabarty calls for an alternative understanding of modernity, which, instead of regarding the absence of rationality, discipline and secularism as residuals of a pre-modern past, “is constituted by tensions that relate to each other asymptotically” so that there cannot be “any one unitary history of its becoming” (1997, 81).

⁹ Famous proponents of multiple modernities theory include Arjun Appadurai, Partha Chatterjee, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Ranajit Guha, Shmuel N. Eisenstadt, and Charles Taylor.

cannot be elevated to the only possible way of ‘becoming modern.’ On the contrary, Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar puts forward that “at each national and cultural site those elements [of Western modernity] are put together (reticulated) in a unique and contingent formation in response to local culture and politics” (1999, 15). Modernity, as Taylor (1999) suggests, is not one but many.

The formulation that modernity should be considered in the plural has been pertinent for opening up the conversation on the nature of the Tibetan state, indeed the Tibetan nation and of nationalism, as a number of publications on this issue illustrate (Barnett and Schwartz 2008; Tuttle 2011). As McGranahan has lucidly commented, “[c]ontemporary Tibetan history has been hijacked by the nation-state” (2001, 2). All major exile Tibetan histories depict pre-Communist Tibet as a *de facto* nation-state and this attempt at fitting the Tibetan polity into the Western discourse of modernity and the nation, forms the basis for the Central Tibetan Administration’s claim of Tibet’s illegal annexation by Communist China. However, defining Tibet as a nation and a state is anything but straightforward within the framework of current modernist theories of nations.

Not only are nations defined by their employment of the concept of the congruence of the political and the national (Gellner 1983), but also by the modern institutions and systems through which members of a given nation are governed. In the wake of the dissolution of the Qing Empire in 1911/12, the Thirteenth Dalai Lama initiated a range of modernizing trends that were designed to bring Tibet into the modern era of nation-states. These included a revision of legislation, a restructuring of the Army, the signing of bilateral treaties with other, recognized nation-states and an attempt at defining Tibet’s national borders. As will be elaborated in more detail later in

this Chapter as well as in Chapter Four, most of these efforts were short-lived, leaving Tibet's international status largely undefined. Tibet's unique state system—the combination of religion and politics (Tib. *chos srid zung 'brel*) with the institution of the Dalai Lama as the highest authority in temporal and spiritual matters—on the other hand, remained intact. From a modernist viewpoint, Tibet's social and political structure on the eve of the Chinese invasion does therefore not conform to the idea of a modern nation. As many scholars have interjected, the Tibetan case is however more complicated than that (J. Gyatso 2011; McGranahan 2001, 2010a; Stoddard 1994; among others).

Arguing for Tibet as a nation based on deep-seated ethnic ties, Stoddard, for example, highlights the uninterrupted existence of a distinct Tibetan civilization from the 7th century AD onwards, which was largely defined by both the specific natural environment and “its relations with its northern (Mongol) and eastern (Chinese and Manchu) neighbours” (1994, 123). Many other historians of Tibet agree with Stoddard's evaluation and call for a revision of Tibet's assessment as a nation and state in the current international debate. In her work on Kham and the Chushi Gangdrug resistance army, McGranahan further complicates this argument by questioning the modernist theory as an adequate model to grasp and explain the complexities of the Tibetan nation and state prior to 1950 (see also J. Gyatso 2011; Kellam 2003; Spence 1993):

the incommensurability of Tibetan forms of sociopolitical community with the European nation-state has led to an internal crisis of the nation—the difficulty of simultaneously imagining unity and managing diversity within the community. For example, in line with the imposition of twentieth century external expectations for the Tibetan nation-state, the internal parameters of Tibet have been adjusted and homogenized. As the desire and need of Tibetans to participate directly in global systems grew, premodern connections between country and territory were recalibrated in modern terms. (McGranahan 2001, 28-29)

Attempting to force the Tibetan nation into the rigid modernist framework does not allow for an alternative understanding and practice of modernity: in the Tibetan case, this means, for example, a move towards modern institutions combined with the conscious affirmation of a governing system that combines religion and politics. In order to be heard in the international political arena on questions of Tibetan sovereignty and to be taken seriously in regards to their claim of Tibet's illegal colonization by Communist China, the CTA has, by necessity, adopted the Western discourse of the modern nation and the nation-state. This, as McGranahan posits (2001, 2010a), has had grave implications for the way Tibetans in exile can imagine and narrate their recent history. The next section will examine the particular complexities of Tibet as a nation-in-exile and the challenges arising from this liminal position for Tibetan historiography.

1.2 A Nation in Exile

To forget and—I will venture to say—to get one's history wrong, are essential factors in the making of a nation ~ Renan (1882)

By definition, nations should not be in exile. As Liisa Malkki (1995b) argues, in the modern age of nation-states, culture and identity are conceived in fundamentally territorial terms and the very concept of 'nation' is anchored in territory. In *Myths and Memories of the Nation*, Anthony Smith further emphasizes that this territory cannot be "any land" but rather must be "an historic land, a homeland, an ancestral land" (1999, 150). However spurious the narrative supporting this "spatial convergence" between nation and territory may be, the idea of 'one land, one people' is such a "powerful hegemonic discourse" (Antonsich 2009, 791), that a nation in exile is considered "a contradiction in terms" (A. Smith 1999, 149). With the nation taking precedence over

all other forms of allegiances in our world today, being ‘out of place’ disrupts and threatens the idea of nation and national identity as pure, whole and natural.

Living as refugees or exiles complicates and challenges the naturalization of “nation-ness” (B. Anderson 1983) by subverting collective identity and history based on those “time-honoured distinctions between nationals and foreigners” (Arendt 1973, 286).¹⁰ As exiles or refugees no longer belong to one and not yet to another nation, they exist in a liminal space outside the known classifications of nation, national identity, and citizenship. People ‘out of place’ are, however, problematic because they are perceived as both symbolically “polluting”, and politically “dangerous” to nations and their borders (Douglas 1966; Malkki 1995a, 1995b). Victor Turner’s discussion of “liminal *personae*” during rites of passage and his concept of their “structural ‘invisibility’” (1964, 5), is illuminating for the categorization of exiles and refugees: “transitional beings are particularly polluting, since they are neither one thing nor another; or may be both; or neither here nor there; or may even be nowhere (in terms of any recognized cultural topography), and are at the very least ‘betwixt and between’ all the recognized fixed points in the space-time of cultural classification” (1964, 6). External to the order of nations, refugees and exiles fit this description of liminal *personae* well. However, while people who are the subjects of rites of passage only inhabit this state of marginality temporarily in order to transition from one fixed state to another, refugees and exiles experience their liminality as a protracted state and without a change of social status necessarily imminent. Their existence outside the legitimate category of nationhood is therefore mostly one of *both* liminality *and* loss.

¹⁰ This evaluation corresponds with Mary Douglas’ observation of rituals and pollution in *Purity and Danger* (1966) and Victor Turner’s discussion of liminality in rites of passage in „Betwixt and Between: the Liminal Period in *Rites de Passage*” (1964).

Edward Said describes the enforced dispersion from a homeland as “fundamentally a discontinuous state of being” (2000, 173) in which the ties to one’s culture, geography and imaginary are severed. This rupture with the homeland leads a great number of exiles and refugees to frame their existence through “the ‘de-selving’ *dis* prefix or *less* prefix: dispossessed, disoriented, dislocated, dismembered; stateless, nameless, landless, homeless, and powerless” (Hajdukowski-Ahmed 2008, 38). Apart from the apparent loss of home and security, this process of ‘de-selving’ is often portrayed as denoting a break between exiles and their culture. In *Purity and Exile*, anthropologist Liisa Malkki argues that besides their homeland, exiles are perceived as having lost “a kind of imagined cultural authority to stand for ‘their kind’ or for the imagined ‘whole’ of which they are or were part” (1995a, 6). The reason that they are so easily regarded as “torn loose from their culture” (Marrus 1985, 8) is fundamentally connected with the privileging of territory as the primary locus for culture, national identity, and history.

The assumed ‘natural’ connection between people and polity with a given territory lies in the fact that the latter are places imbued with cultural meanings; they are powerful sites where physical space, collective memory and myth overlap to create what Anthony Smith terms *ethnoscapes*, “landscapes endowed with poetic ethnic meaning through the historicization of nature and the territorialisation of ethnic memories” (1999, 16). In this way, territory becomes integral to both the nation and its destiny, and as such it is assigned a central role in the shaping of collective culture and national identity. It has often been assumed that with the dispersion from the homeland, people are literally uprooted from their central locus of identity. Discourses of nation and nationalism therefore tend to present exiles and refugees as bereft of any specificity of culture, place and history. Departing from the view that exiles and refugees represent

“the abstract nakedness of being nothing but human” (Arendt 1973, 300), Malkki evocatively conjures up a very different image of exile and displacement: “in uprooting, a metamorphosis occurs: The territorializing metaphors of identity—roots, soils, trees, seeds—are washed away in human floodtides, waves, flows, streams, and rivers. These liquid names for the uprooted reflect the sedentarist bias in dominant modes of imagining homes and homelands, identities and nationalities” (1995a, 15-16). While this uprooted-ness is still perceived as the ultimate human tragedy by a number of scholars, a different reading of exile regards the fragility of life outside the homeland as a powerful antidote to essentialized notions of culture and identity.

Indeed, the state of ‘betwixt and between’ has also come to signify a different logic in which creolization and cosmopolitanism tend to replace the narrow categories of nation and citizenship. Arjun Appadurai reminds us here that:

[a]s groups migrate, regroup in new locations, reconstruct their histories, and reconfigure their ethnic “projects”, the *ethno* in ethnography takes on a slippery, nonlocalized quality ... The landscapes of group identity—the ethnoscares—are no longer familiar anthropological objects, insofar as groups are no longer tightly territorialized, spatially bounded, historically unselfconscious, or culturally homogenous. (1996, 48)

The experience of ‘deterritorialization’ (Appadurai 1996) has resulted in a restructuring of identities and forms of belonging, whereby ‘the refugee’ or ‘the exile’ has come to be celebrated as a figure of hybridity and transnational belonging (Appadurai 1996; Bhabha 1993; Gilroy 1990; among others). Holding the possibility for an existence that is marked by “non-exclusive practices of community, politics and difference” (Clifford 1997, 302), the experiences of exile and displacement have been re-conceptualized as an alternative to what Paul Gilroy termed “ethnic absolutism” (1990, 115). Gilroy explains that ethnic absolutism is “a reductive, essentialist understanding of ethnic and national

difference which operates through an absolute sense of culture so powerful that it is capable of separating people off from each other and diverting them into social and historical locations that are understood to be mutually impermeable and incommensurable” (1990, 115).

He argues further that the danger that lies in categorizing people according to “unchanging essences of ethnic and national distinctiveness” can be effectively challenged “by dispersed peoples for whom nationality, ethnicity and the nation-state are perhaps not so tightly associated and for whom the condition of exile becomes a privilege rather than a handicap” (1990, 116). Whilst deterritorialization may indeed lead to a “subversive reshuffling of nationalist verities” (Malkki 1995a, 15), for many, being in exile is, however, not experienced as a privileged condition.

1.2.1 Striving to be Emplaced

Indeed, these current celebratory debates often overlook the fact that a number of exile or refugee communities strive to be emplaced (Brennan 2001, 674). In the continuous struggle against social disintegration and the threat of assimilation into the new social and natural environments of the host society, exiles often seek to strengthen their collectivity. This is because exiles are people with “destinies outside the time/space of the host nation”, who are essentially “not-here to stay” (Clifford 1997, 255). As Said reflects, displacement may therefore add to “an exaggerated sense of solidarity as well as a passionate hostility towards outsiders” (2000, 178). James Clifford (1994) highlights in this context that the very concept of exile expresses a sense of unity and solidarity for a particular group as well as a strong feeling of difference to being just another ‘ethnic neighborhood’ within a pluralist society. Even if these groups

are settled within alien nation-states that maintain the plurality of the exiles' origin, Clifford argues that exiles and refugees with a strong sense of affiliation to their homeland will generally resist assimilation while often seeking to strengthen a collective identity derived from the shared history of displacement and the identification with a specific origin.

Clifford's observation holds true for a large number of Tibetans in exile, particularly for those located in Nepal and India where the majority are classified as refugees rather than citizens who have only few international or national rights guaranteed to them.¹¹ In fact, most Tibetans experience their existence outside of Tibet as involuntary and often describe themselves as waiting in exile until the conditions inside their homeland have changed (Frechette 2004; Rabgey 2006). This would include either the reinstatement of the current (or future) Dalai Lama to his former position or a significant loosening of Chinese control over Tibetan affairs. Many observers of the Tibetan communities have noted that exile has therefore served to heighten national attachment for many Tibetans, a sentiment which the Central Tibetan Administration actively fosters (Frechette 2004; Klieger 1989; Lopez 1998; among others).

1.2.2 The Tibetan Exile

Exile has proven to be both a condition of devastating loss and profound change in the Tibetan community. Since the early wave of refugees in the months following the failed Uprising on March 10, 1959, the transition into what could arguably be called 'modernity' has been reflected on many levels. The maintenance of a community after events of "profound historical catastrophe" (Hamilton 2010, 300) such as the

¹¹ Neither India nor Nepal has ratified the Geneva Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (1951).

colonization of Tibet by China beginning in 1950 and the subsequent flight into exile by the Fourteenth Dalai Lama and most of his government ministers in 1959, has not been an easy or singular task for the CTA. In order to provide the community with a certain sense of ‘oneness,’ the Tibetan exile leadership has made rigorous efforts to preserve Tibetan culture and religion in exile through a variety of institutions. Above all, the CTA has recognized the need for the construction of a common past and shared history of displacement through which the community is able to establish “an imaginary coherence on the experience of dispersal and fragmentation ... and restore an imaginary fullness or plenitude, to set against the broken rubric of [their] past” (Hall 1990, 394). This chapter is thus an investigation into the creation of Tibetan national history in exile; a history that promotes a collective unity based on an idea(l) of ‘Tibetanness’ through which Tibetans may, as Kimberley Dukes argues, “claim a form of belonging that both transcends nation-state borders and furthers a diasporic nationalism” (2005, 32).

Despite the small number of Tibetans who live outside their homeland, the exile community is relatively visible in the mass media worldwide. To a large extent, the exile community derives its visibility from the prominence of their spiritual leader Tenzin Gyatso, the Fourteenth Dalai Lama, who has been touring the world to meet with state leaders and address the situation of Tibet at government meetings since the 1960s (Frechette 2004). The status of their leader has had a tremendously positive effect on the international perception of Tibetans. Moreover, the community’s commitment to non-violence benefits their political struggle and ensures a solid base of international sympathizers. The continuous emotional and financial support from foreign governments, individual donors and international aid agencies has helped Tibetans to sustain their political struggle over a period of now fifty-seven years and has been

paramount in their attempt to re-create a nation-in-exile. Adopting a “process of enclavement” (Klieger 1989, 55), the CTA has restored a number of traditional religious and cultural organizations, and established new political institutions to encourage community building and to assist with the preservation of all aspects of Tibetan culture.

In order to critically discuss the complexity of writing national history in exile and to examine the processes by which a dominant narrative emerges, I will provide a frame for the discussion about the nature and use of national historiography. Firstly, I offer a concise overview of the historical background to the Tibetan exile and the institutions that have been formed in the exile community in India. Moving on from here, I will examine the need to maintain a community in exile and the resulting historical narrative put forth by the Central Tibetan Administration. Furthermore, I will investigate who frames the discourse in exile and how counter-narratives are contained in the production of national history. Lastly, I will look at the role of life writing in the distribution of official history and as a catalyst for the emergence of so-far marginalized Tibetan voices.

1.2.3 Historical Background to the Tibetan Exile

When the People’s Republic of China (PRC) was proclaimed in 1949, relations with Tibet were tenuous at best and China exerted no political authority over the Tibetan government in Lhasa. Over the centuries, the affiliation between China and Tibet had been defined by the so-called ‘priest-patron’ relationship (Tib. *mchod-yon*) that had been established during the Mongol Yuan dynasty (1271—1368 CE) and confirmed by succeeding Chinese emperors (W. Smith 2008, 6). This priest-patron relationship was conceived as an equal exchange of spiritual knowledge and political protection between

Tibetan religious leaders and Mongol (and subsequently Chinese) emperors. Moreover, the relationship was purely a personal one between the Tibetan religious leader and the Mongol/ Chinese emperor. As Zahiruddin Ahmad (2012) outlines, during the Ming dynasty, this relationship had waned almost completely and therefore spelled an effective breach in the priest-patron system. It was not until 1721 that the Qing dynasty (1644—1911) extended a more formal control over Tibet and reinforced cultural and political patronage over Tibetan affairs by stationing two Qing representatives (*Amban*) in Lhasa (Jian 2006, 55).¹² The presence and varying influence of Chinese representatives in the capital notwithstanding, Tibet had over centuries been an integral political entity and was ruled by a combination of religion and politics whereby the institution of the Dalai Lama united both spiritual and temporal power (Nowak 1984).¹³

Yet far from representing unified governance throughout the provinces Ü-Tsang, Kham, and Amdo, this unique religious-political structure “governed its subjects through a range of hierarchical practices that varied throughout the regions of Tibet” (McGranahan 2010a, 41). The great distances between the administrative center in Lhasa and the eastern provinces Kham and Amdo called for a flexible enactment of authority with the effect that Tibetan society “was determined through a broad set of

¹² Melvyn Goldstein argues that the power exercised by the two Ambans in influencing Tibetan politics “appears to have varied considerably in accordance with ... their personality and competence ... and the nature of the political situation in China and Tibet at any point in time” (Goldstein 1997, 20-21; see also Jian 2006). Though the institution of the Ambans remained a symbolic emblem of Qing power until 1912, the Chinese officials “abandoned financial and military powers to the Tibetan government” as early as 1847 thus marking the “effective end of direct Qing administration in Tibet” (W. Smith 2008, 8).

¹³ Under the Fifth Dalai Lama Ngawang Losang Gyatso (1617—1682) the provinces of Tibet—Ü-Tsang, Amdo, and Kham—became effectively united with the help of Mongol chieftains. After the unification of the provinces, the ‘Great Fifth’ established the Tibetan Government at Lhasa in 1642. The Dalai Lama was henceforth both temporal and spiritual leader of ‘Tibet’. Until the successive Dalai Lamas reached maturity, the Tibetan government was ruled by the Regent and judicial power was shared by a two-fold structure of ecclesiastical and secular offices. The lay section of government exclusively consisted of male members of the aristocracy and the monastic offices were dominated by the Gelugpa sect of the Dalai Lamas. This power structure neither allowed for appointments based on personal achievements nor for the implementation of modernizing changes, one of the reasons held responsible for Tibet’s colonization by China in 1950. For detailed overviews and analyses of pre-exilic and exile Tibetan governmental structures, see Klieger (1992), Roemer (2008), and Shakya (1999).

connections combined with a shifting center—periphery relationships of influence and allegiance” (McGranahan 2010a, 40). The reinforcement of Lhasa governance was particularly difficult in the Tibetan Borderlands and skirmishes along the borders between Kham and China were frequent. Yudru Tsomo elucidates, “[s]ince the early eighteenth century, the Western regions of Kham were under the loose control of the Lhasa government, while the eastern regions fell under the nominal jurisdiction of Sichuan Province” (2006, 31). While parts of Amdo and Kham were thus under Chinese suzerainty, they were effectively administered and ruled by local chieftains and warlords who “owed nominal allegiance to the Central Government [at Lhasa]” (Shakya 1999, 209).

After the collapse of the Qing Empire in 1911, the Thirteenth Dalai Lama Thubten Gyatso (1876—1933) issued a statement of independence in 1913, which proclaimed that he “intended to exercise both temporal and ecclesiastical rule in Tibet” (Goldstein qtd in Goldstein 1997, 31). Although the Chinese Nationalists continued to assert their territorial claim over Tibet, the republic was both too “internally divided and military weak” (Shakya 1999, 2) to exercise any control over Tibet. And so, despite the internal conflict, Tibet could maintain its *de facto* independence until 1949 (Goldstein 1997; Shakya 1999). This short period of independence came to an end with the Chinese Communist Party assumption of power in 1949. Within weeks of the inauguration of the People’s Republic of China, Radio Beijing began to broadcast the Chinese government’s intentions to “liberate” Tibet from foreign imperialists. In March 1950¹⁴, the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) began to infiltrate the north-eastern regions of Tibet—the provinces of Kham and Amdo—and by October 1950, the PLA had defeated the ill-

¹⁴ Zhai (2006) argues that Mao’s resolution to occupy Tibet as early as 1950 was influenced by Britain, India and Pakistan’s recognition of the PRC.

prepared and vastly outnumbered Tibetan border defenses (Goldstein 1997, 45). In response, the Lhasa government appealed to the United Nations (UN), India, Britain and the United States of America for help against what they perceived as Chinese aggression towards their independent country. However, as the Lhasa government had not continued to engage in international relations after the death of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama, its status as a recognized modern nation had not been secured. As with previous pleas to obtain UN membership, Lhasa received only “noncommittal replies” (Goldstein 1997, 42). In spite of their “lofty rhetoric about freedom and self-determination”, neither Britain, the United States, nor India placed the Tibetan appeal on the UN agenda but instead yielded to “Chinese sensibilities” (Goldstein 1997, 34, 40) so as not to jeopardize strategic self-interests in the region.¹⁵

With no international help forthcoming, the Lhasa government entered negotiations with the Chinese Communist Party and sent an official delegation to Beijing. The delegates were allegedly placed under house arrest and coerced to sign the “The Agreement for the Peaceful Liberation of Tibet” on May 23, 1951. As the Tibetan representatives had been sent without official government seals and therefore without the necessary power to ratify the agreement, “the Chinese manufactured seals and forced the delegates to affix them to the document” (Powers and Templeman 2012, 43). The treaty stated that Tibet had been an inalienable part of China and that it was to be

¹⁵ Following the invasion, the Lhasa government sent a direct appeal to the United Nations Headquarters on 13 November 1950, urging the international community “to intercede on our behalf and restrain Chinese aggression” (qtd in Shakya 1999, 53). To give its appeal more credence, Tibet approached India to raise the issue at the United Nations (UN). Due to its geographical proximity to Tibet, newly-independent India was most directly affected by the conflict. The Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru was, however, not prepared to antagonize China through a show of support for the Tibetan appeal but rather maintained that the conflict could be settled amicably between the two countries. Nehru was supported in his non-interventionist stance by Britain. When the U.S. signaled their willingness to come to the Tibetans’ aid, Indian fears that US American involvement could bring the Cold War to the Himalayas prevented any positive intervention in Tibet (Shakya 1999, 71). Britain supported India’s non-interventionist stance on the matter and advised the UN that Tibet’s legal status as an independent country had so far not been satisfactorily established.

re-united with the “big family of all nationalities of the PRC” (qtd in Shakya 1999, 449). The agreement also stipulated that Tibetans were to exercise regional autonomy, the existing political system as well as the status and power of the Dalai Lama would remain unaltered, they would continue to enjoy religious freedom and their education in written and spoken Tibetan was to be further developed. Chian Jian highlights that although the whole agreement gave the impression of a contract “based on equality”, the obligations impressed on the Tibetan side were “permanent and irreversible” while “the PRC’s commitment to respect and coexist with Tibet’s existing political, social, and monarchic systems was conditional and provisional” (2006, 61). Should the Lhasa government therefore fail to ensure its compliance with the reforms and hinder Tibet’s incorporation into the Chinese government, the PRC threatened with war (Powers and Templeman 2012, 43).

While controversies continue to surround the (un)lawful signing of the convention, the affixed seals to the agreement nevertheless offered the Chinese leaders the necessary legitimization for the invasion and colonization of Tibet and the agreement was publicized internationally as a successful act of diplomacy. As no statements were issued by the Lhasa government or published by individuals repudiating the Seventeen Point Agreement at the time, the international community understood the lawfulness of the convention to be an established fact. Although a comprehensive execution of the Seventeen Point Agreement was the overall target of the Chinese Communist Party, Mao adopted a policy of measured reforms so as not to antagonize the Fourteenth Dalai Lama and the Kashag (Jian 2006, 62-63; see also Shakya 1999, 93). Yet despite the rhetoric of “gradualism” (Jian 2006, 63), relations between Chinese and Tibetans quickly deteriorated. The incompatibility of worldviews, political and social expectations, as well as cultural miscomprehension resulted in growing opposition

against the Chinese invaders but acts of resistance varied throughout Tibet. As early as 1951 discontent was evident in anti-Chinese posters which appeared in Lhasa describing the Communists as the “enemy of faith” (Tib. *bstan dgra*).¹⁶ In 1952, the newly-founded organization “The People’s Representatives” (Tib. *mi dmangs tshogs ’du*) organized anti-Chinese rallies in Lhasa and petitioned the Chinese authorities to restore the power of the Dalai Lama. The organization enjoyed wide support among all social classes but was soon “forcibly suppressed” (Powers and Templeman 2012, 438).

While the Chinese Communist media celebrated ‘the liberation of Tibet’, very little knowledge about both non-violent and armed Tibetan resistance against the colonization reached the outside world. Contrary to the promise of Tibetan social and cultural independence and respect for the authority of the Lhasa government in local matters, Kham and Amdo were soon subject to harsh, repressive measures, with monasteries looted, private property confiscated and people forced into communes. Early communalization and the destruction of religious sites in these areas led to acts of sabotage and sporadic fighting from 1952 onwards, to which the occupiers responded with force and imprisonments (McGranahan 2010a). By 1956, armed resistance erupted widespread in various parts of eastern Tibet and by 1957 the Khampa resistance had turned into “a nationwide rebellion” (Shakya 1999, 166) forcing many eastern Tibetans to seek refuge in Lhasa. On June 16, 1958, a number of Khampa refugees founded the voluntary resistance army under the name of Chushi Gangdrug (Tib. *chu bzhi gangs drug*), “Four Rivers, Six Ranges”—the ancient name for the region Kham. Supported by the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), the Chushi Gangdrug formed an effective opposition to the PLA and continued to fight the PLA until 1974 when the Tibetan

¹⁶ See Tsering Shakya (1999) for a comprehensive account of the interim period in Lhasa between 1950 and 1959.

resistance fighters were asked to lay down their weapons by the Fourteenth Dalai Lama.

With decreasing likelihood of Sino-Tibetan co-existence, large numbers of people from central Tibet had joined the resistance movement by the beginning of 1959.¹⁷ As a result, the Chinese officials exerted growing pressure on the Dalai Lama and the Lhasa government to quell the resistance. Tensions rose in the capital and when rumors spread that the PLA had plans to abduct the Fourteenth Dalai Lama during a visit at the military headquarters on March 9, 1959, the crisis exacerbated. Several thousand male and female demonstrators gathered in front of the summer palace, Norbulingka, on March 10, to prevent the Fourteenth Dalai Lama from attending a banquet at the Chinese military headquarters in Lhasa. On March 12, an estimated 3,000 Tibetan women took to the streets of Lhasa to protest the colonization of Tibet by China and submitted petitions to the Indian Consulate-General and the Missions of Nepal and Bhutan (Butler 2003, 42). The people determinedly demonstrated against the Chinese colonization until March 17 when the PLA shelled the Dalai Lama's residence and captured the Potala, Tibet's major and emblematic national building, causing approximately 18,000 Tibetan casualties. Unbeknownst to the demonstrators, the Fourteenth Dalai Lama had already escaped to India in the night of March 17.¹⁸ Protected by Chushi Gangdrug forces, with an entourage comprising some members of his immediate family and government officials, he reached India on March 30. After being granted political asylum by the Government of India, he revoked the Seventeen Point Agreement and inaugurated the Central Tibetan Administration in exile on April 29, 1959. With the Fourteenth Dalai

¹⁷ In *Arrested Histories: Tibet, the CIA, and Memories of a Forgotten War* (2010), Carole McGranahan gives the so far most detailed examination of the Chushi Gangdrug army and the marginalization of this resistance movement in Tibetan exile historical discourse.

¹⁸ Since the invasion and subsequent colonization of Tibet in 1950 by the PLA, the political territory of Tibet has been subsumed under the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR), which roughly corresponds to the central Tibetan province of Ü-Tsang and the Western region of Ngari. This excludes however the eastern regions of Amdo and Kham, which have become part of the Chinese provinces Qinghai, Gansu, Yunnan and Szechuan.

Lama's escape to India, the Chinese colonization was final and Tibet ceased to exist as an autonomous entity.

To this day, no rapprochement between the Chinese Communist Party and the Central Tibetan Administration has taken place and Sino-Tibetan relations have deteriorated further when Tibetans inside Tibet demanded greater political and religious rights in 1989 and 2008 respectively. Due to this volatile situation, around 2,500 Tibetans make the illegal and hazardous journey over the Himalayas into neighboring countries every year. Current census data by the Central Tibetan Administration indicates that around 128,000 Tibetans are currently living in exile with the majority settled in India (CTA 2016, n.pg.). Of those, many try to establish themselves around Dharamsala in the North Indian state of Himachal Pradesh, in close proximity to their spiritual leader and the various institutions of the CTA. The next section will give an overview of the nature of those institutions and the uses to which they are put in order to foster community building among Tibetans in exile.

1.2.4 Setting up a Nation in Exile

Since the 1959 revolt and the subsequent flight of the Fourteenth Dalai Lama, the Chinese government has adopted a hardline approach towards the Tibet issue, so that repatriation has since been difficult to imagine. In contrast to many Tibetans who believed that exile was going to be a brief interlude, the Fourteenth Dalai Lama understood as early as 1959 that “[w]e will have to remain in exile for a longer period than expected. We will have to settle mentally as well as physically” (T. Gyatso qtd in Avedon 1997, 72). The newly inaugurated Central Tibetan Administration therefore soon negotiated with the Government of India (GOI) to transition refugees from the

initial transit camps to more permanent settlements.¹⁹ Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru was anxious not to aggravate China and sought to defuse the politically sensitive concentration of refugees along the border. He therefore agreed to the establishment of settlements with “on-site agriculture, industry, and handicraft production” (De Voe 2005, 1120) across India.²⁰

Though colloquially referred to as ‘refugees’, only Tibetans who settled in India before 1962 have been granted refugee status under the international treaty law and were given asylum by the Government of India; those who arrived after 1962 are considered stateless nationals who have the right to reside in India. With their political situation so precarious and undefined, it has been paramount to establish a comprehensive network of cultural and political institutions that could look after the ever-growing numbers of Tibetans in India and across other South Asian nations. In response, the Bureau of His Holiness the Dalai Lama in New Delhi was founded which was to function as the Tibetan link with the Indian government and the various international non-governmental organizations and relief agencies that had begun sending financial and human aid to assist Tibetans in exile. Following an initiative by the Government of India, the Central Tibetan Administration relocated from Mussoori to the remote hill station Dharamsala in the state of Himachal Pradesh in 1960. After the relocation process was complete, a constitution for the Tibetan community in exile was drafted and enacted in 1963.

According to the Fourteenth Dalai Lama and his ministers, the Central Tibetan Administration presents the continuation of the Ganden Phodrang and therefore serves

¹⁹ The Central Relief Committee, formed by a coalition of opposition party members in the Indian government, received most monetary assistance from the Indian government with only few international donors involved.

²⁰ The larger settlements were at Bylakuppe and Mundgod in the state of Karnataka, Chandragiri in Orissa, Chaglang and Tezu in Arunachal Pradesh as well as Dharamsala in Himachal Pradesh and Leh in Ladakh (Phuntso 138-139).

as the legitimate representative of the Tibetan people both inside Tibet and in exile. In its self-understanding, the CTA is a popularly and democratically elected government (CTA 2016, n.pg.). Overseeing all matters of health care, education, religious and general welfare since 1959, the CTA acts as the central authority for the exile community. With the Fourteenth Dalai Lama as its central figure, it has extensive reach across the exile community. Since its reinstatement in 1959, the exile government has intended to “maintain the essential structure of Tibetan government” (Saklani 1984, 270) while extending the societal and political modernization processes initiated at the beginning of the twentieth century under the Thirteenth Dalai Lama.

As early as 1960, the Fourteenth Dalai Lama suggested an elected parliament and insisted on a clause in the constitution that he could be impeached. In the 1970s, affirmative action was established for women representatives in the exile government. More changes were introduced, such as the formation of ministries, a judiciary system and elections for the office of prime-ministership in 2001. In the continuous move towards secular governance, the Fourteenth Dalai Lama finally devolved his political powers as the Head of the Central Tibetan Administration to a democratically elected prime minister in 2011. The prime minister is directly elected by the Tibetan populace and heads the Kashag, which, together with the Tibetan Parliament-in-Exile (TPiE), serves as the legislative organ. Furthermore, the Government of India has granted the Tibetan Supreme Justice Commission limited jurisdiction over Tibetan refugees.

In her comprehensive study of government structure in the Tibetan exile, Stephanie Roemer (2008) argues that despite the absence of any formal executive power, the Central Tibetan Administration has successfully implemented a range of measures that attempt to unify and bind Tibetans. She identifies the “green book” (Tib.

rangzen lakhdeb) and the voluntary tax as the most visible strategies with which the CTA fosters national sentiment and ongoing support for the political struggle. In all these areas, the Central Tibetan Administration works closely with the Government of India, which in turn sees the CTA as “responsible authority ... regarding all matters of the exile Tibetan community” (Roemer 2008, 125). Although statelessness presents Tibetans with a number of difficulties, the CTA discourages the taking of Indian or Nepalese citizenship because it is “considered as a renunciation of Tibetan cultural and national aspirations” (Goldstein 1975, 180). The green book acts therefore as a symbol for political and cultural collectivity among Tibetans; and while not internationally recognized, possessing a green book “has a considerable impact on the psychological situation of the exiles” (Roemer 2008, 126). Yet some critics have highlighted that despite the comfort many Tibetans draw from this symbolic form of citizenship, it also increases the dependence of the refugees on the exile administration (Frechette 2004; Goldstein 1975; Roemer 2008).

As Roemer outlines, this citizenship is contingent on the voluntary tax and a refusal to pay the “voluntary freedom tax” has both material and emotional consequences (2008, 127-9). Ann Frechette further states that while the CTA has no measures to enforce payment of the voluntary taxes from the exiles, it “encourages them to do so by making access to international resources contingent on tax payments” (2004, 159). Financial aid can thus be used as “a negotiation tool and control mechanism” (Roemer 2008, 128) through which the exile leadership ensures a certain political deference and compliance with officially sanctioned cultural and social norms (McLagan 1996). Despite these subtly coercive measures, Roemer (2008) points out that for the majority of exiles, the psychological benefits of belonging to a defined

group outweigh the material benefits that are attached to the green book and the voluntary freedom tax and make the compulsion to comply with these rules acceptable.

The observations by Frechette, Goldstein, and Roemer suggest that Tibetans in exile comply with the rules and regulations of the Central Tibetan Administration because it provides them with an alternative concept of citizenship through which national belonging and identity can be reconstructed. As Lobsang Rabgey (2006) further argues, the concept of ‘the nation-state’ is therefore still imperative in the study of the Tibetan exile because it is real in the community’s political and social imaginary. It remains relevant because of the degree to which many exile Tibetans turn to the Central Tibetan Administration to perform state functions and provide political and cultural leadership. McGranahan also points out that this authority hinges arguably to a large degree on the fact that the Central Tibetan Administration is a direct continuation of the previous government in Lhasa and thus receives its legitimization from the Dalai Lama’s connection with both administrations (2001, 9).

Though the CTA understands itself as “a free democratic administration”, the comprehensive authority of the present Dalai Lama is indisputable. Outside the refugee community, he is “an internationally recognized figure who stands for reason and nonviolence in the face of Chinese oppression” (Hess 2009, 54). For Tibetans, he is not only their political leader but also the incarnation of the Bodhisattva of Compassion Chenrezig (Tib. *spyan ras gzigs*), the protector of the land of Tibet and considered to be the progenitor of the Tibetan people. Although he has devolved political power and now acts only as the spiritual authority for Tibetans, the Fourteenth Dalai Lama continues to be seen and represented as “the primary architect of Tibetan exilic discourse” (Hess 2009, 53) by Tibetans and their supporters alike.

The symbolic power of the Central Tibetan Administration is thus genuine and germane because Tibetans in exile regard it as the legitimate representation of the Dalai Lama's political will, and behave as if it effectively represented a legal and functioning Tibetan state (Rabgey 2006). The relationship between the CTA and the individual members of the Tibetan community therefore bears comparison with Carole Nagengast's definition of alternative state power, which is able to "define the public interest, establish meaning, and define and naturalize available social identities" (1994, 116; see also Frechette 2004) despite an apparent lack of international recognition or even territory. However, despite its attempts to approximate statehood, the Tibetan community in exile nevertheless disrupts the "time-honored links between people, polity, and territory" (Malkki 1995, 2) so crucial for its recognition as a nation. A direct consequence of this unsecured status is "the perceived need for internal cohesion" (McGranahan 2001, 4) and a primary technology for creating and maintaining cohesion is the production of national history.

1.3 History as a Weapon

The importance of the past tends to become overwhelming when the nation is in peril ~
Bentz (2006)

Nations "without a past" are a contradiction in terms (Hobsbawm 1996, 255). History in fact is so essential for securing recognition for the nation that "[o]ne of the first things that new nation-states do is to write the history of the 'nation'" (Gupta 1992, 70). This is underlined by the fact, as Anne-Sophie Bentz argues, that for a nation "to exist now and in the future, and to be able to give proof of the legitimate nature of its existence, it must have a past, which is to be regarded as its national history" (2006, 56). Nations are

therefore *legitimized* by appeals to a common past, which is employed to achieve and consolidate the autonomy, unity, and identity of a particular community. This development also reinforces internationally accepted standards for the production of history, in which “standard historiographical procedure since the nineteenth century appears to have required the taking of a prescribed center (of a state formation, a nation-state) as one’s vantage point” (Pandey qtd in McGranahan 2001, 2-3). In Prasenjit Duara’s words, there seems to be a shared certainty that “a history belongs to a nation” (1995, 3). History, in other words, is one of the most important means by which an ethnic community is turned into a nation.

In the case a nation sees itself in danger and may even fear that its very existence is threatened, the presentation and circulation of its history to the world becomes its most crucial legitimizing proof (Bentz 2006, 53). As a government that had effectively lost its country, the CTA immediately set itself the task of fighting the forceful colonization of its territory by Communist China. From 1959 onwards, the exile leadership thus saw itself not only confronted with the emotional and material settlement of thousands of newly-arrived Tibetans, but also with the need to prove to the world “that the Tibetan nation had always existed as an independent nation” (Bentz 2006, 58). To offer an insight into the difficult task of writing national history in exile, the following section will briefly discuss the contending historical narratives by the CTA and the CCP. This will be followed by a more detailed analysis of the production of history in exile, including the influences of Western romanticizing on the exile discourse. Lastly, I will consider the role of the Archive in the construction of national history.

1.3.1 Battling over History

Ever since the rejection of the Seventeen Point Agreement by the Fourteenth Dalai Lama in 1959, the exile Tibetan leadership has relied on their representations of History as a paramount tool in gaining international recognition for the illegal colonization of their homeland by Communist China. As the Chinese government has equally used the international arena to publicize its view of Sino-Tibetan relations, both sides are locked in competition to legitimize their respective representation of Tibetan history and the current events as authoritative. According to the Chinese government, Tibetans have been under Chinese sovereignty since the thirteenth century and are considered one of the fifty-six minorities that form an integral part of Chinese society. Before its re-unification with the ‘Motherland’, Tibet was furthermore not an independent nation but a feudal society under a theocratic system. The Tibetan version claims that its government, though a combination of religion and politics and with hereditary posts, had been “independent, democratic, popular” (Thirteenth Dalai Lama qtd in Shakapba 2010, 542). Tibet had been, to all intents and purposes, an independent state from 1913 until the Chinese take-over.

These brief interpretations of Tibetan history demonstrate that Chinese and Tibetan claims are incompatible, and driven by mutually exclusive ideological persuasions. Consequently, the ensuing contestation over historical ‘truth’ prohibits, as Robert Barnett observes, any debate over these issues because “it is not a process in which arguments either to facts or to interpretations are put forward by each side with the intent that the most persuasive argument wins. It is more the presentation by each side of strongly held collective imagining that is persuasive only to those who already share that imagining” (2001, 271). In reading Chinese and Tibetan histories, it becomes

evident that both parties are guided by certain ideological assumptions and will not deviate from these official narratives. In *Reinventing Modern China*, Huaiyin Li points out that almost all contemporary Chinese historians “have claimed the authenticity of their respective representations of the past without seeking to hide their political commitments” (2013, 4). According to Sinologist Albert Feuerwerker, the writing of modern Chinese history

is primarily an ideological exercise and emotional release, repeated over and over again, the function of which is to harness and channel the real political and economic frustration encountered in China’s nineteenth-and twentieth century experience in the interests of a new historical integration under the auspices of the Chinese Communist Party. (Feuerwerker qtd in Powers 2004, 13)

To comply with the “revolutionary narrative” (Lin 2013, 16), Chinese historians highlighted peasant rebellions, class struggles, and revolutions or re-interpret past events so that they fit within the parameters of Chinese Communist ideology. This charting of China’s development along Marxist-Leninist lines has resulted in the insertion of “peasant rebellions into Tibetan history to construct a narrative that conforms to the standard periodization of Chinese Marxist historiography” (Powers 2004, 13). This approach reflects Mao’s dictum ‘to make the past serve the present’ (*gu wei jin yong*), which legitimizes the streamlining of past events according to the ideological principles of the Party.

This observation is by no means confined merely to Chinese historiography but also applies to the majority of Tibetan exile historical writings. While China tailors history according to Marxist historiography, Tibetan exile discourse follows the trajectory of the modern nation-state model. In order to make the claim of Tibet’s illegal colonization persuasive in the international sphere, the Central Tibetan Administration stresses the centrality of the Lhasa government, its governance over the Tibetan people

since the seventeenth century, and the territorial integrity of the three Tibetan provinces. Exile publications emphasize the central role of Buddhism, the institution of the Dalai Lama, and their role as unifiers for Tibetans across the plateau as well as common language and customs that differentiate Tibetans from Han Chinese. Furthermore, Sino-Tibetan relations are generally downplayed and often limited to the patron-priest relationship between the Dalai Lamas and the Chinese emperors, emphasizing the egalitarian nature of this relationship. To support these claims, the CTA and its attendant institutions translate Tibetan political and religious forms into a framework of Western institutional norms and dominant liberal ideas of democracy and human rights (Frechette 2004; McGranahan 2001).

Both sets of representations form an important part of the collective imaginings of Tibetans and Chinese as peoples. As John Powers persuasively argues in *History as Propaganda* (2004), these representations are as much intended for local consumption as they are important for both governments in their ‘ideological battle’ over the recent historical events. Both sides produce a sizeable amount of their historical representations in English and thus appear to target an international audience (Barnett 2001; Powers 2004). Powers notes that for Tibetans in exile, “these texts are not merely academic exercises ... they are clearly intended to be persuasive, and it is hoped (and often assumed) by the authors that if the intended audience reads and considers the historical analysis it will certainly conclude that Tibet was an independent country prior to 1950 and that China’s rule is illegitimate” (2004, 7).

As the two governments use considerable powers of persuasion to influence those yet undecided, it becomes clear to the observer that both sets of representations may not be an adequate reflection of the historical events. Precisely because the two

versions have such high emotional currency amongst Tibetans and Chinese respectively, is important to consider the making of national history as a social and political process, not a neutral delivery of what “really” happened in the past. Rather, historiography reflects the political, social and cultural place from which it is enunciated alongside the particular constraints of those who specify the methods of inquiry, the “topography” of interest and the types of documents to be consulted (de Certeau 1988, 58). The next section explores how the Tibetan historical discourse has been shaped in exile and what kind of authoritative narrative has emerged from Dharamsala.

1.3.2 Reinterpreting the Past: Tibet and the Discourse of Shangri-la

For Tibetans, the stakes involved in the battle over the past, present and future of their homeland are extraordinarily high. It comes as no surprise that in this particular situation, the writing of history is a highly political and politicized act that operates under restricted possibilities for open critique. Tibetan history is as much produced to create homogeneity and coherence among the exiles as it is to circulate a counter-discourse to Chinese representations. To achieve an inclusive narrative that also fits within the parameters of the modern nation, the exile leadership presents the following narrative: Tibet had been an independent state with recognizable national borders, which enclosed the three traditional provinces of Ü-Tsang, Amdo, and Kham. This territory had been unified since the seventeenth century and was governed by a central authority at Lhasa, the Ganden Phodrang government with the Dalai Lama as the undisputed head of state. Buddhism was not only the religion of the Tibetan people but influenced all aspects of life and politics. Consequently, Tibetan society was dedicated to non-violence, the protection of life, social and gender equality. When Communist China invaded in 1950/51, Tibetans cooperated with the Chinese for several years;

however, when coexistence became impossible, individuals rose peacefully against Chinese rule and the Dalai Lama escaped to India. Since then, the legitimate government of the Tibetan people has been reinstated in exile and pursues a strictly diplomatic, non-violent struggle against Chinese rule in Tibet. Over the last fifty-four years, this history has been successfully promoted and so, “the Tibetan mirror of history has turned increasingly clouded with time” (McGranahan 2010a, 9).

Since the Central Tibetan Administration discovered available transnational networks of activism in the 1980s, all major print and electronic media controlled and disseminated by the Department of Information and International Relations (DIIR) have consistently publicized Tibetans “as a happy, peaceful people devoted to the practice of Buddhism, whose remote and ecologically enlightened land, ruled by a god-king, was invaded by the forces of evil” (Lopez 1998, 11). Official publications of the Tibetan diasporic community unanimously stress the uniqueness of Tibetan place, which is brought into greater regional context by saying that “[f]or most of Asia, Tibet’s environment has always been of crucial importance. And so for centuries Tibet’s ecosystem was kept in balance and alive out of a common concern for all humanity” (Atisha 1991, 9). This much-publicized Tibetan awareness of the interrelatedness of nature and people gives rise to the representation of Tibetans as ecologically aware since time immemorial: “The Tibetan traditional heritage, which is known to be over three thousand years old, can be distinguished as one of [the] foremost traditions of the world in which ... humankind and its natural environment have persistently remained in perfect harmony” (Gelek Yuthok 1992, n.pg). Tibetan society is moreover not only represented as environmentally friendly but also as non-materialistic.

In his first autobiography *My Land My People*, the Fourteenth Dalai Lama states “Our country is certainly rich in minerals. We never exploited them because we had not enough desire for worldly riches” (1962, 224). Arguably, the reason for this collective feeling of responsibility for the environment and life in general lies in the Tibetan practice of Buddhism: “Tibetans have a great respect for all forms of life. This inherent feeling is enhanced by the Buddhist faith, which prohibits the harming of all sentient beings, whether human or animal” (T. Gyatso 1987, n.pg.). Official exile publications not only present Buddhism as the national religious faith but in fact as defining for Tibetan nationality:

The pervasive influence of Buddhism and the rigours of life amidst the wide open spaces of an unspoilt environment resulted in a society dedicated to peace and harmony. We enjoyed freedom and contentment. ... Tibet’s religious culture, its medical knowledge, peaceful outlook and respectful attitude to the environment contain a wealth of experience that can be of widespread benefit to others ... What people need is that sense of inner peace and hope that many have remarked among Tibetans, even in the face of adversity. The source of this lies mostly in the Buddhist teachings of love, kindness, tolerance and especially the theory that all things are relative. (T. Gyatso in Donnet 1994, viii)

In this narrative, Tibetans are innately nonviolent, environmentally friendly and women enjoy a higher degree of equality than in other Asian societies. Toni Huber argues that these types of reflexive, politicized notions of Tibetan culture and identity are distinctly modern and the use of these ‘new identity images’ is the strategic response of a Tibetan cosmopolitan elite who aligned exile rhetoric with already existing transnational discourses:

Tibetan exiles have reinvented a kind of modern, liberal Shangri-la image of themselves, which has its precedents in two different sets of discourses, the first of which is the product of the three powerful “-isms” of early modernity: colonialism, orientalism, and nationalism. The second set derives from liberal social and protest movements that originated mainly in the industrialized West, but which are now transnational in scope and appeal: environmentalism, pacifism, human rights and feminism. (2001, 358)

However, this narrative is not an adequate reflection of the political and social realities prior to 1950 as it subsumes “pre-exilic regional and sectarian identities ... for the sake of social and political survival” (Harris 1999, 184). The “homogenized and hegemonic Lhasa-centered” historical narrative (McGranahan 2010a, 17) that is circulated by the CTA sidelines all deviations from the official narrative and critiques them as backward, divisive and harmful to the political struggle. In this way, Tibetan history in exile has both been simplified and sanitized: it externalizes conflict so that it only exists in connection with China and enshrines the idea that Tibetan society forms a unified, homogenous entity (McGranahan 2010a; McLagan 1996). In *Prisoners of Shangri-La* (1998), Donald Lopez argues that a number of Tibetans nevertheless challenge this idea of a unified Tibetan nation. Even today in exile, some Tibetans continue to define themselves by referring specifically to one of the three traditional regions rather to the supra-regional model of Tibet (Lopez 1998, 197).

During the first decade in exile, regional alliances were in fact so pronounced that in order to counter the threat of a schism in the community, a campaign was launched in 1971 that lobbied for laying aside all existing provincial differences in favor of adopting the notion of a greater Tibet, *cholka-sum*. However, as mentioned in the Terminology section, though the idea of ‘Greater Tibet’ is a historical one, it has become popular mainly since the flight into exile. The supra-regional model is further challenged by the fact that despite democratic reforms in the exile community, pre-existing class, regional and religious divisions still have great salience in exile policy making. As the majority of exiles are from the central Tibetan areas of Ü and Tsang, social and political forms as they existed in Lhasa and central Tibet have over time become established as normative for the community at large. This has led to the

marginalization of eastern Tibetan forms of polity and social conventions. McGranahan points out that since coming into exile, “central Tibetan norms were recast in exile as a shared, pan-Tibetan identity. This conversion of the particular to the general, of a specific regional identity to a homogenous national identity, is one means by which regional identities were criticized and devalued” (2001, 4).

As the exile leadership wishes to establish unity through homogeneity, narratives of dissent and alternatives to the dominant history are unwelcome and viewed with suspicion. Although some Tibetan historians have begun to openly recognize the resistance movement as part of Tibet’s modern history, the CTA portrays the resistance as a brief, unsuccessful and unfortunate undertaking and discourages public commemorations of the Chushi Gangdrug (McGranahan 2010a). The immensely successful circulation of a sanitized past has gained the Tibetan exiles considerable financial, emotional and, to some extent, political support from groups within India and abroad. Although idealized representations of Tibet, its people and religion have been circulating since the eighteenth century, they became more prevalent with the flight of the Fourteenth Dalai Lama into exile. As a direct consequence to the negative stereotypes that circulated in Western media about China after World War II, Tibetans came to be regarded as spiritual, defenseless victims who suffered under the materialistic and aggressive Chinese (Lopez 1998). But it was not until the 1980s that Western popular Tibetophilia gained momentum: With the Nobel Peace Prize awarded to the Fourteenth Dalai Lama in 1989, the Tibet Year in 1991, Hollywood blockbusters like *Little Buddha* (1993), *Kundun*, and *Seven Years in Tibet* (both 1997), the flight of the young Seventeenth Karmapa from Tibet to India in 2000, worldwide interest in Tibet was intensified “by a convergence of specific historical events and the particular interests and needs of a segment of the populations of Western countries (hunger for

spiritual advice, feelings of alienation in Western technological societies and concern about human rights and environmental issues)” (Diehl 1997, 151). Donald Lopez (1998) saliently points out that as a direct result, the image that Tibetans *are* kind-hearted, that Tibet as a place *is* ecologically unique and Tibetan Buddhism *is* spiritually transformative, has gained widespread currency with both Western and non-Western audiences. With ample repetition, “these adjectives become innate qualities, *immune from history*” and create the singularity which not only constitutes contemporary knowledge about Tibet but in manifold ways creates Tibet (Lopez 1998, 10). Exemplary for this present-day essentialism is the following quote by American Buddhist scholar Robert Thurman:

The tradition of nonviolence, optimism, concern for the individual, and unconditional compassion that developed in Tibet is the culmination of a slow inner revolution, a cool one, hard to see, that began 2,500 years ago with the Buddha's insight about the end of suffering. What I have learned from these people has forever changed my life, and I believe their culture contains an inner science particularly relevant to the difficult time in which we live. (1998, 225)

This current idealization of Tibet has resulted in much emotional support for Tibetans. The CTA has therefore taken to propagating Dharamsala as the authentic and traditional Tibet, turning it into “the most vigorous proponent of Shangri-La in existence” (Klieger 1989, 3). With so much emotional and financial support hinging on these images of Tibet, the exile leadership naturally takes pains to preserve this idyllic version of past and present.

In order to ensure the official version of history remains authoritative within the community and for foreign consumption, the Central Tibetan Administration discourages and actively silences alternative national histories, a practice Carole McGranahan has termed “historical arrest” (2001, 2010a). As Derrida reminds us,

“[t]here is no political power without control of the archive, if not memory. Effective democratization can always be measured by this essential criterion: the participation in and access to the archive, its constitution, and its interpretation” (1996, 4, note 1). For Tibetans in exile, this has far-reaching consequences for the possibilities of writing about pre-1950 Tibet.

I argue that Tibetans who wish to publish their life narratives in English are confronted with a set of specific expectations of what constitutes Tibet. This presents a number of difficulties for Tibetans who wish to solicit their life narratives for the political struggle. Stoddard emphasizes that a “considerable number of new books written in Tibetan ... have been censored or banned from publication [by the Central Tibetan Administration] because they do not conform to the desired image of traditional Tibetan society. Any serious discussion of history and of possible shortcomings in the society before 1959 is taboo” (1994, 152). Tibetan exile writer and scholar Dawa Norbu recounts that his open criticism of some of the Dalai Lama’s policies was perceived as ‘blasphemy’ and even resulted in death threats (D. Norbu qtd in Powers 2004, 129). Tibetan writer and blogger Jamyang Norbu similarly affirms that the political elite in exile does not tolerate critical alternatives to the national history but that instead, an “ugly climate of fear and suspicion” pervades Dharamsala which is maintained by “threats and intimidation” towards individuals who “voice opinions deviating from the official narrative” (2004, 23).

As compliance with exile history, historical arrest must be seen in terms of what Spivak calls the “strategic use of a positivist essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest” (1987, 3). Adapting Eric Hobsbawm, it becomes evident that what has become sanctioned as Tibetan history is “not what has actually been preserved in

popular memory, but what has been selected, written, pictured, popularized and institutionalized by those whose function it is to do so” (1983, 13). In other words, what is remembered and “forgotten” in national history is intimately linked to questions of power, hegemony, and gender. Importantly, this is also linked to questions of what can and cannot be preserved for future generations in the so-called ‘official Archive’.

1.4 The Role of the Archive in Historiography

Although Jacques Derrida concedes that “nothing is less clear today than the word ‘archive’” (1996, 90), many theorists acknowledge the archive to be both a repository of historical materials in a variety of forms as well as a signifier for specific knowledge production in both academic and political domains (Blouin and Rosenberg 2011; Manoff 2004). In *Archive Fever*, Derrida traces the etymology of the word ‘archive’ to the Greek *arche*, which comprises, among other meanings, both the idea of ‘origin’ as well as of ‘commandment’ or ‘rule’ (Rand 2010). Over time, this latter ‘jussive’ meaning has been lost in the common usage of the word ‘archive’, giving precedence to the former, ontological term. In its practice, however, Derrida suggests that the jussive element is firmly anchored in the structure of the archive where it “pertain[s] to questions of legality and the distribution of political power” (Rand 2010, 207).

The political power associated with the archive is defined by its location, which Derrida traces to “the Greek *arkheion*: initially, a house, a domicile, an address, the residence of the superior magistrate” (Derrida 1996, 2). In turn, the politically powerful, i.e. the superior magistrates, become the custodians of the archive, its *archons*. From their guardianship they derived the type of “publicly recognized

authority”, which imbued them with “the hermeneutic right and competence ... to interpret the archives” (Derrida 1996, 2). By virtue of being empowered to select, interpret and protect particular archival materials and disregard others, Derrida postulates that the archons were “considered to possess the right to make or to represent the law” (1996, 2). While the selection and preservation of archival material has been subject to (changing) social and political realities, the power over the standard, ‘official’ archive has nevertheless frequently remained in the hand of the politically powerful (Bowker 2010; Manoff 2004). Alongside the political, social and economic changes that distinguished *pre-modern* communities from *modern* nations, the State emerged as the most powerful authority who was able to monopolize both the making and the enforcement of laws as well as the shaping of a collective national consciousness through, for example, the safeguarding of ‘collective memories’ in national archives and museums (Brown and Davis-Brown 1998, 19-20).

As Francis Blouin and William Rosenberg show in *Processing the Past: Contesting Authorities in History and the Archives* another common idea of archives that spans Europe and other parts of the world is the belief that what is preserved in ‘official’ or ‘national’ archives stands for legitimately ‘authentic’ records. This in turn ‘sacralized’ the institution of the archive itself as well as “its ‘authentic’ values and ‘authoritative’ beliefs” (2011, 17). This meant that “[e]ven as particular forms of government changed, archives endured as repositories of basic transactions, a symbol of historical continuity, order, and truth” (2011, 17). As a result, the archival records, and therefore archives themselves, strengthened “the governing institutions that created them, constructing and reproducing social structures, political institutions, and values” (Blouin and Rosenberg 2011, 17). In our efforts to understand the power of and over interpreting the past and present via the selection and preservation of

historical materials, it is therefore illuminating to examine the records preserved in ‘official’, i.e. national, archives and how these have determined historiography. I argue that it is both paramount to read these records *with* as well as *against* the grain to become sensitized to the powers that determine what is being included and what omitted in the story about the past.

In their work on the intersections of archival and historical research, Blouin and Rosenberg argue that “from the mid-nineteenth century through the mid-twentieth century, [Western] historians and archivists occupied what might be thought of as the same conceptual and methodological space. The authority attributed to holdings in the archive underlay a set of arguments about authoritative history that were based on what was mutually understood by historians and archivists as objective and scientific” (2011, 6). Focusing mostly on ‘great, heroic men’ and the strict presentation of ‘facts’ in the tradition of German historian Leopold von Ranke²¹, the creators and custodians of (national) history took inspiration from political, military and diplomatic events. In their rigorous pursuit to achieve a scientifically sound and logical assemblage of ‘hard’ facts, nineteenth-century historians and archivists thereby sought to distance their practice from what they understood as ‘amateur history’ and its association with women writers and the domestic (B. Smith 1998). This artificial separation of ‘worthy’ histories from ‘quotidian’ stories excluded historical accounts from within the home and the private sphere and focused instead on the so-called political public sphere; as a result, the majority of stories of women (as well as of non-elite men and minorities) were neglected in the grand narrative of history. The elevation of ‘public’ accounts and the omission of other, non-dominant narratives consequently shaped an

²¹ Considered the founder of modern “objective” historical scholarship, Ranke declared that the historian should not judge the past for the purpose of the present or the future but relate only ‘what had really happened’ through the study of evidential records found in contemporary, official archives.

extremely elite, masculine story masquerading as *neutral* and *universal* history (Downs 2010, 4).

In the second half of the twentieth century, Marxist, feminist, postmodern, and postcolonial critics started to expose ‘positivist’ claims by traditional (Western, male) historians that theirs was a profession of objective, unbiased observation that told the past ‘as it really was’ (Chakrabarty 2000; Derrida 1996; Guha 2002; Spivak 1988; Lerner 1979; Lyotard 1984; Scott 1986; among others). These new schools of historians questioned the methods and practices of conventional, Eurocentric historiography and discredited the discipline’s reliance on metanarratives and discourses that rested their authority on grand narratives (Lyotard 1984). By purposefully focusing on what had been forgotten, ignored and indeed silenced in traditional history, these cultural critics and historians sought to create a more inclusive, heterogeneous record that would help to restore to history the voices of, for example, working class people, colonized people, people of color and of women. In particular, the work of feminist critics and historians has been paramount in questioning the epistemological certainties on which the historical discipline rested.

Exposing the privileged maleness of the tradition, feminist historians the world over have shown over the last forty years that “[t]raditional historiography has excluded women not only inadvertently, but sometimes programmatically from ‘universal’ or ‘general’ history” (Bock 1989, 7). To counteract these silences in the official archives, feminist critics and historians pursued a dual approach, that of “restoring women to history” and “of restoring history to women” (Bock 1989, 7). This entailed a critical examination of what had so-far been regarded as historically important and unimportant material (Bock 1989) as well as a radical rethinking of the

limits of the official archive and the circuitous logic that was the basis for women's marginalization in historiography: *because* women's life stories were often concerned with domains other than politics and the public sphere, they were not included in authoritative archives as representative historical evidence; *because* women's stories were not found in recognized archives, many traditional (male) historians did not consider them "legitimately 'historical' material in their own right" (Burton 2003, 24). If we therefore take seriously the aim to read and write an inclusive history in which women are equally recognized and their experiences included, it is essential to expand what *counts* as historical archive; this rests on the acknowledgement of the importance of women's memories from a range of domains including the domestic "as a constitutive, rather than just a supplemental, archive of the past" (Burton 2003, 26).

In their efforts to restore women to history, women's and gender historians drew on a large variety of hitherto unrecognized material such as oral history, letters, diaries, memoirs and aspects of material culture (Burton 2003, 2005; Butalia 2000; Lerner 1979, 1997; Shapiro 1994; Scott 1986; Spivak 1985, 1987, 1988; Steedman 1986, 1998; among others). These hitherto neglected sources offer fascinating insights into women's lives and experiences through examinations of traditional and modern work environments, organized religion, sexuality, family structures and public institutions. At the same time, scholars engaging in this 'recovery' needed to resist the temptation to generalize across time, cultural and geographical lines to create a universal history of 'woman' and her omission from the historical records. Instead, feminist historians need(ed) to engage in a culturally sensitive, historically situated analysis of women's varied existence and experience. This included considering a plethora of records to balance historical knowledge about elite women in different societies with those who went undocumented for so long in official historiography as

well as to sensitize for the particular insights emerging from women's spaces and cultures (Shaver Hughes and Hughes 2015). In the pursuit to find women's voices in existing records, to include so far marginalized documents by making memories of house and home into legitimate historical material, it is possible to write an inclusive history, which, in Antoinette Burton's words, "interrupt[s] the binary logic of the discipline that segregates primary from secondary sources and privileges the archive as some originary—and therefore somehow pure—site of historical knowledge or evidence" (2003, 26). Instead, women's stories in all their forms should be read and studied "both as archival sites and as history-in-the-making" (Burton 2003, 26), as counter-archives to conventional, official archives from which they have so long been excluded and as significant historical material in their own right.

CHAPTER TWO

Imagining Tibetan Women

Like in all nationalist discourses, women are an important part of a nation's political and social imaginary. It is therefore not surprising that the ideological battle between the Central Tibetan Administration and the Chinese Communist Party over the 'truthful' representation of Tibetan history has also brought Tibetan women into the arena of male conflict. In "Miss Tibet, or Tibet Misrepresented?", McGranahan argues that Tibetan women are caught between Tibetan, Western and Chinese representations of the Tibetan

nation and “as the ‘guns’ turn to the woman, she becomes not just a female on display but a figure in the drama of constructing and contesting modern Tibet” (1996, 168). Initially, the CTA was “not enthusiastic about promoting the exile Tibetan struggle in the light of women’s rights, as it feared discussions about gender inequality of the traditional Tibetan perception” (Roemer 2008, 111). This began to change during the 1990s when the Tibetan Women’s Association (TWA) received growing international rapport and since then, official exile Tibetan publications have begun to endorse and even highlight a feminist discourse.

In fact, since the staged demonstration of five Tibetan women delegates at the Fourth United Nations’ World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, it can be argued that Tibetan women and their rights have been appropriated for the overall Tibetan struggle; this, however, has had the consequence that “Tibetan activists ‘politicised’ women’s right in the sense that they linked women’s rights to a nationalist cause for sovereignty, rather than to a social goal of gender equality” (Pike 2001, 92). The following chapter will therefore address the various historical (mis)conceptions about Tibetan women and trace ideas pertaining to Tibetan women from a religious, social and cultural perspective, including the observations of Tibetan historical and cultural sources, as well as Western scholarship.

2.1 Women in Tibetan Buddhism

The religious imagery in Tibetan Buddhism presents a compellingly egalitarian view of women. Images of female enlightened Buddhas abound and positive female iconography constitute a major element in Tibetan Buddhist art and meditation practice (Klein 1985, 111). Symbols liberating to women are an integral aspect of Tibetan

Buddhism and the doctrine of Buddhism endorses the possibility of spiritual Enlightenment for both sexes. There seems to be clear evidence that Buddhist doctrine “affirms women’s capacity to achieve liberation” (Tsomo 1999, 7); yet how far do these positive indicators mirror Tibetan women’s actual position in Tibetan Buddhism?

Given that Tibetan Buddhism presents a major field of inquiry in Tibetan Studies, it is not surprising that many of the existing studies on women examine the interplay between Tibetan Buddhist doctrine and practices according to their incorporation of the feminine and the actual consequences for female identity and women’s social position arising from them. The following sub-chapter examines studies concerning the feminine in Tibetan Buddhism and critically interrogates socio-cultural ideas about women that have been influenced by Buddhist thoughts and mores.

2.1.1 Women in Buddhist literature

Buddhism like other major religious tradition, has been criticized as “an overwhelmingly male-created institution dominated by a patriarchal power structure” where “the feminine is frequently associated with the secular, powerless, profane, and imperfect” (Paul and Wilson 1985, xix). Indeed, many negative and contradictory conceptions of women can be found in the scriptures throughout all schools of Buddhism. Influenced by late Vedic and Brahmanical texts, the canonical Buddhist texts (the Pāli *Tipitaka*) incorporated pan-Indian ideas about the feminine and the qualities of women as inferior, as “temptress or evil incarnate” (Paul and Wilson 1985, 4). In the later Mahāyāna literature, women are ambiguously constructed and we find textual evidence from “the most negative attitude towards women’s spiritual potentials, to granting her a religious role equal to that of man’s” (Havnevik 1989, 27). Mahāyāna

literature is also ambivalent regarding the possibility of Enlightenment for women; while some *sutras* acknowledge that women can attain Buddhahood, other texts deny women to reach Enlightenment without having first been born as a man (Havnevik 1989, 28). Hanna Havnevik outlines that a number of popular and widely studied Mahāyāna *sutras* negate the importance of sex for reaching Buddhahood by referring to “two levels of truth, the conditioned (*samvrtisatya*) and the unconditioned (*paramarthasatya*). People with ordinary wisdom see a difference between man and woman, but those who grasp the teaching of Emptiness, understand that this difference is illusory” (1989, 30). This insight became a particularly important feature in Buddhist Tantrism.

The type of Buddhism that was first introduced to Tibet from India in the seventh century CE and that was to dominate the religious landscape on the Tibetan plateau from the eleventh century CE onwards was a mixture of Indian Mahāyāna and Buddhist Tantrism, or Vajrayāna as it is referred to in the Tibetan context. In contrast to Theravāda and Mahāyāna Buddhism, Vajrayāna has adopted many female enlightened beings, protector deities and Bodhisattvas. These have become an integral part of ritualistic and meditative practice and have arguably greatly influenced the Tibetan Buddhist worldview.²² For example, the Goddess Ārya Tārā (Tib. *rje btsun sgrol ma*) is considered “the saviouress, who protects her people” (Havnevik 1989, 33) and is venerated throughout the Buddhist Himalaya by women and men alike. *Dakinis*, literally ‘space-goers or sky dancers’, are female enlightened beings that may take human forms “from crone, to virgin or sexual consort”, who are invoked in order to

²² Vajrayāna (Tib. *gsang sngags rdo rje theg pa*—‘The Secret Mantra Diamond Vehicle’) comprises a series of practical teachings, which claim that Enlightenment is attainable in one lifetime. In this tradition the fullest range of human senses is employed as tool towards Enlightenment rather than being abandoned. This tradition utilizes various Tantras, texts that contain a combination of yoga, sexual rituals and meditation (Campbell 1996, ix).

“clear obstacles on the religious path, and to provide insight into the nature of mind” (Campbell 1996, x). Other major female deities are Palden Lhamo, presenting our own state of internal and external self-perfection and considered the national protectress of Tibet, as well as Vajrayoginī, emblematic of our pure state of Enlightenment and revered as one of the most important meditational deities in Vajrayāna practice.

This positive female iconography and the textual emphasis on the possibility of Enlightenment for women has led a number of practitioners and feminist scholars of Buddhism to praise Vajrayāna as ‘liberating’ for Buddhist women (Allione 1984; Shaw 1994; Willis 1987). In *Passionate Enlightenment* (1994), Miranda Shaw interprets the role and social recognition of women in Tantra by using religious texts compiled between the sixth to tenth centuries CE, which, she argues, “encourage a sense of reliance upon women as a source of spiritual power ... [and] express a sense of esteem and respect for women” (1994, 11). Taking this evidence of exaltation of the feminine in Tibetan Buddhist imagery, we might infer that this positive imagery has had beneficial effects on women’s social realities (Klein 1985, 111). Yet as José Cabezón’s reminds us, “[a]lthough symbols liberating to women are an important part of the Buddhist tradition throughout its history, no symbol can be accepted as a positive one *prima facie*” (1992, xii).

Indeed, the exalted status of the feminine in iconography and early Tantric texts notwithstanding, a number of scholars maintain that Vajrayāna Buddhism is a patriarchal system that has not transferred these positive indications onto the lived experiences of Tibetan women in society (Campbell 1996; Gross 1987, 1993; Seele-Nyima 2000; Tsomo 1999). To deduce women’s history and the constructions of gender relations merely from philosophical tenets presents us with a partial and highly

abstracted view. In order to assess iconographic gender symbolism in its social context, scholars have turned to the small number of Tibetan women's hagiographies to examine whether the exalted status of the feminine in Buddhist philosophy had any real social significance for women.

Of the 150 religious life narratives known in Tibetan religious history, only four or five have been authored by women and approximately one dozen has women as their subjects (Schaeffer 2004, 9). Two of the most well-known and widely read female hagiographies are *The Life of Yeshe Tsogyal* and *The Life of Machik Labdrön*. Both women are said to have been tantric practitioners and consorts of famous spiritual masters. Machik Labdrön (~1055—1149) is also revered as the founder of the Mahamudra Chöd lineage. Other Tibetan women practitioners, whose life stories have been translated during the last two decades in an effort to unearth women's religious accomplishments, include the highest female incarnation Dorje Phagmo (1422—1455/1467), the Himalayan hermitess Orgyen Chokyi (1675—1729), religious master Jetsün Lochen Rinpoche (1865—1951) and treasure revealer Sera Khandro (1892—1940). Havnevik emphasizes that these women practitioners were exceptional, who became, due their determination and spiritual pursuits, “the equals in prestige and reverence to their male counterparts” (1989, 36). Yet despite the existence of these outstanding female Buddhist practitioners, their writings and biographies have not always been recognized or accounted for in Tibetan Buddhist annals let alone in Tibetan historiography.

Tsultrim Allione's collection of biographies of female practitioners of Tibetan Buddhism, *Women of Wisdom* (1984), aims to fill this lacuna by providing the reconstruction of a female lineage. Focusing on difference, Allione focuses on female

identity shaping factors such as marriage, motherhood, domestic violence and the restrictions of family life, and points to the discrepancy between philosophical elevation of the female and women's actual subordination in Tibetan society. In conclusion, she nevertheless emphasizes that the biographies of Tibetan nuns and *tantrikas* can inspire women today by proving to them that other women "have succeeded in remaining true to their own energies without becoming fixated on their sexual gender and have, with this integrity, reached complete liberation" (1984, 23).²³ In Havnevik's view, it is important to understand that these women's life histories mark them as different from most other people in that "they disregard social conventions, the opinions of husbands and family, and they often wandered alone in the vast desolate areas of Tibet" (1989, 36). While we know relatively little about the social and cultural impact of these women's spiritual biographies, particularly on the lives and aspirations of Tibetan women, they are nevertheless evidence for women's ongoing contributions to the religious and cultural landscape of Tibet throughout history. And although these outstanding examples cannot be taken as representative of Tibetan women's experiences per se, they are invaluable sources of information on the particular localized and historical opportunities and limitations bearing on women of their time.

Moreover, these recent studies of Tibetan women practitioners show that the religious path was indeed open to women throughout the centuries, yet the scarcity of women's religious life narratives also attests to the difficulties and hindrances women

²³ Other translations of female religious biographies together with critical commentaries include the two translations of Yeshe Tsogyel's biography: *Tarthang Tulku's Mother of Knowledge* (1983) and Keith Dowman's *Sky Dancer* (1984); *Machig Labdron and the Foundations of Chöd* (1996) by Jérôme Edou; Hanna Havnevik's thesis on Jetsün Lochen Rinpoche entitled „The Life of Jetsün Lochen Rinpoche“ (1999), Kurtis R. Schaeffer's *Himalayan Hermitess: The Life of a Tibetan Buddhist Nun* (2004); Hildegard Diemberger's historical work centering on the translation of Chokyi Dronma's first biography in *When a woman becomes a religious dynasty: The Samding Dorje Phagmo of Tibet* (2007) and most recently Sarah Jacoby's translation of Sera Khandro's namthar in *Love and Liberation: Autobiographical writings of the Tibetan Buddhist Visionary Sera Khandro* (2014).

encountered in leaving their traditional gender roles to pursue a spiritual life. The dearth of women authors in the religious canon points to a gendered bias in textual production that discouraged women from writing or having their life stories recorded and those who penned their experiences, acted “against prevailing cultural norms that did not consider women’s lives worth documenting” (Jacoby 2014, 182). One of the reasons for this neglect of women’s spiritual accomplishments can be found in the (male) religious establishment. Although Mahāyāna texts support women’s spiritual practice, the monastic institutions in Tibet, as elsewhere in Buddhist cultures, served “as a site for rationalizing women’s subordination, that being the direct result of the overt androcentrism, if not misogyny, of monastic celibate discipline” (Gyatso and Havnevik 2005, 12). Even Vajrayāna with its abundance of female deities neither “actually accorded special honour to human women generically” (Gatos and Havnevik 2005, 12). June Campbell argues in this context that Tantric mythology and practice subordinates women to men insofar as “the *dakini* is first and foremost the sexual consort of the male lama” (1996, 122) helping him to attain the understanding of non-duality and emptiness (Skt. *śūnyatā*, Tib. *stong-pa nyid*).²⁴ Janet Gyatso and Hanna Havnevik add to this observation by highlighting that in contrast to the veneration of male tantric practitioners or high lamas, female consorts were often disrespected or ignored in Tibetan society (2005, 12-13).

Representations of the significance relating to women in Tibetan Buddhism seem to conveniently overlook actual gender inequalities in the religico-political hierarchy and neglect to account for the fact that most Tibetan women (and many

²⁴ A lama (Tib. *bla ma*), literally ‘Superior One,’ refers to a spiritual leader in Tibetan Buddhism. It was traditionally used for heads of monasteries or accomplished practitioners of Tibetan Buddhism. A lama can be a reincarnation (Tib. *sprul ku*) or someone who has earned the reputation in his/her current lifetime through practice and study.

Tibetan men) had no access to the liberation paths of the Vajrayāna. Karma Lekshe Tsomo (1999) reiterates that while women were commonly seen as nurturers and sustainers of the lineages and the doctrine, they were not necessarily regarded highly as practitioners and teachers in their own right. Given the philosophical emancipation and even veneration of the feminine, how can we explain the actual disparagement of women in everyday life?

As mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, there is clear evidence that Buddhist doctrine “affirms women’s capacity to achieve liberation” (Tsomo 1999, 7). At the same time, however, we can simultaneously find textual support for women’s inferiority. In the early Buddhist *sutras*, women are mostly described as greedy, lustful, evil, deceitful, fickle, and dangerous to men, particularly to ascetics and celibate monks (Wilson 1996). These devaluing attitudes of women have been transported to Tibet and were possibly incorporated with already existing indigenous misogynist attitudes to create a host of negative gender stereotypes (Havnevik 1989, 144-45). A clear indication of the pervasiveness of these tropes is the most commonly used word for ‘women’ in Tibetan literature, which translates to ‘low/ inferior birth’ (Tib. *skye dman*), underlining the Tibetan view that full liberation is only possible through the attainment of a male body. According to Gyatso and Havnevik, the term has been in use since at least the eleventh century and has become “the standard word in both writing and speech for ‘women’” (2005, 9) over the last several hundred years, providing a striking example of the interplay between androcentric religious bias and gender discrimination. The Tibetan word *bud med* for ‘woman’ has a variety of translations, including someone who may not be left outside the house at night or a home maker (Das 1902). However, as the term is not used in religious literary contexts, it can be argued that it was *skyed man* and not *bud med* that influenced Tibetan cultural attitudes towards women

through Buddhist literature and since my thesis focuses on literature, I have focused on the term *skyed man* in explaining Tibetan attitudes towards women and femininity.

Popular Tibetan literature, such as folk tales, songs and poetry is yet another example whereby we can appreciate how the disparaging early Buddhist views of women have influenced cultural ideas of women in general:

La littérature populaire tibétaine est l'héritière de traditions mêlées, indigènes et étrangères. Elle n'a retenu des femmes, à travers ces concepts différents, parfois contradictoires ou simplement hésitants, qu'une image passablement stéréotypée et essentiellement bouddhiste: quand elles ne sont pas une leçon ou un principe de morale déguisé d'un masque féminin, silhouettes aussi fréquentes que peu consistantes, les femmes sont mauvaises, c'est-à-dire sensuelles et enflammées par tous les appétits, éternelles perturbatrices de la malheureuse sérénité des hommes et de leur chasteté naturelle bien connue. Elles sont causes des pires calamités et mettent en péril le salut des hommes qu'elles approchent et qui se laissent prendre à leurs pièges. (Chayet 1993, 159-60)

Popular Tibetan literature has inherited a mix of indigenous and foreign traditions. On the subject of women, with its various contradictory or indeed vague concepts, this literature has held on to a stereotyped and essentially Buddhist image. When not being employed as a lesson or a moral principle disguised in a feminine mask (figures which are as common as they are inconsistent), they are represented as bad women, that is to say, sensual and aroused by every appetite. They are the eternal disruptors of men's serenity and well-known natural chastity. Women are the cause of the worst calamities, endangering the life of each man they approach who lets himself get stuck in their trap. In sum, and judging rather brutally, in Tibetan literature, the female archetype oscillates between the slut and the idiot, with the majority opting for the slut. (My translation)

In their introduction to *Women in Tibet*, Gyatso and Havnevik stress that negative perceptions of women having “bad karma”, “low status” and “poor abilities” pervade Tibetan society and, “operate actively to restrict women's liberty and opportunities” (2005, 9-10). In order to examine the impact of gender stereotyping for Tibetan women, I will now turn to a brief examination of the opportunities and limitations of religious and lay women in pre-Communist Tibet.

2.2 Women as Buddhist Practitioners

In pre-1950 Tibet, it was generally considered a great honor as well as meritorious to give away a son or daughter to the monastic order. Although a sizable community of nuns existed prior to the Chinese invasion, nuns did not receive the same amount of respect or community support as did the monasteries and found themselves “at the bottom of the religious hierarchy” (Havnevik 1989, 143; Taklha 2009). In the following description, Casinelli and Ekvall record the limited career paths for nuns of the Sakya School during the middle of the twentieth century: “The life of a nun had few attractions. Monks always served as abbots of the nunneries and hence only lesser positions were open to the nuns. No nuns were sent out of Sa sKya proper, and the most a nun could aspire to was becoming a personal servant of the royal family, usually of its unmarried daughters” (1969, 297).

Although life in a convent could offer the opportunity to obtain some basic instruction in reading, writing, and prayer instructions, nunneries never “resembled or functioned as Buddhist universities ... [because they] did not have the economic resources, the organizational structure, or able teachers to impart higher education” (Havnevik 1989, 51). Nunneries subsequently remained relatively insignificant in comparison to monasteries throughout Tibetan religious history.²⁵ Moreover, in contrast to the rigorous study that monks were undergoing, the education of nuns was severely limited, their curriculum mainly concentrating on memorizing prayers (Taklha 2009, 21-22). The rationale behind this disadvantage in studying the scriptures of Buddhism lies in the presumption that “nuns are a lesser store of merit and thus less efficacious in performing ritual services for the laity” (Gyatso and Havnevik 2005, 10). Nuns’ ritualistic prayers therefore mainly serve the purpose of gaining the merit to be reborn with a male body.

²⁵ A notable exception is Samding nunnery, the seat of Dorje Phagmo.

Society's perceptions of nunneries and of nuns were heavily influenced by the negative gender stereotypes mentioned above. Women's perceived bodily impurity, for example through menstruation and childbirth, as well as their imputed emotional instability led to the perception that their decision to follow a spiritual path was not necessarily derived from altruistic motives. Havnevik's study of Tibetan nuns in India and Nepal offers a modern day example of such bias, in which she recounts that the motifs of female novices are viewed as somewhat less 'pure' than that of male adepts and are often regarded to stem from more mundane concerns, such as the escape from arranged marriages or household duties (1989, 151; see also Grimshaw 1992). Women's alleged passionate and capricious nature is seen as justification for the introduction of more vows for nuns and a number of restrictions regulating their contact with monks. Consequently, women were (and continue to be) excluded from a number of religious rituals and sites because, as anthropologist Toni Huber observes, access to sacred spaces was powerfully linked to "Tibetan notions of essential gender differences and the body" (1999, 120). This had direct impact on the roles open to women within the religious hierarchy and how their motivation to join the monastic order came to be viewed.

It becomes therefore apparent that despite the soteriological promise, social perceptions of the female sex derived from Buddhist scriptures, restricted women in their pursuit of spiritual advancement. As a result, the lived experience of nuns was characterized by more labor, less education and social recognition, which ultimately meant less power. The next section will investigate whether laywomen experienced a similar degree of restriction in their lives in pre-1950 Tibet or whether her status was indeed as 'high' as Western observers and exile Tibetan publications present it.

2.3 Socio-cultural representations of Tibetan Women

Over the last two centuries, Tibetan women have been described in Western academic and popular literature as independent and strong individuals, raised to play an active and responsible role in society. While Chinese literature has portrayed Tibetan women as oppressed by the hierarchical power structures of both feudalism and Tibetan Buddhism, Western travelers, officials and scholars mainly praised the relative equality between the two sexes. Given these diametrically opposed views and the political stakes involved in Tibetan women's representations, this section will critically examine the claims and observations of non-monastic women across different social classes and compare them with anthropological data.

Prior to the Communist invasion, Tibetan women's social position had been portrayed as having been comparatively high to women in other Asian societies, particularly to those of China and India (Ekvall 1960; von Fürer-Haimendorf 1990; Saklani 1984; Schuler 1987; Subba 1990; among others). Subba, for instance, states that "women, especially the mother, held a very high position in the traditional Tibetan society" (Subba 1990, 110). Schuler concludes from his ethnographic fieldwork in ethnic Tibetan areas of Nepal that "it is assumed that their status is high" since "Tibetans do not seclude women, they have no caste system, no mysterious, pervasive notions about pollution, no food taboos. Tibetan women are both visible and vocal" (Schuler 1987, 4). Similarly, Janet Gyatso characterizes the "Tibetan female" as "notably more assertive than some of her neighbours" (1987, 50). Tibetan exile publications have adopted and adapted these positive representations to create an image of pre-Communist society as one in which "women ... enjoyed extraordinary liberties and a status not so different from men" (Aziz 1985, 78).

It is certainly true that in the eastern region of Kham, women sometimes wielded influence in local governments and led tribal men into wars over tribal feud and territory. Women such as Tsering Drola, Khangsar Yangjan Kandrol, and Chimi Drolma, fought battles against other Tibetan clans and against the armies of the Chinese Nationalists. Dawa Lokyitsang emphasises that “the women in these historic narratives were the exception, not the norm” (2014, n.pg). Similar to accomplished female spiritual practitioners, these women were remarkable precisely because “they defied the gendered norms of their time period that were dictated by their communities; challenging communal beliefs and those in power” (2014, n.pg). Rinchen Dölma Taring (1986) asserts however that largely, laywomen and nuns had no access to positions of power or authority within the governing bodies in Tibetan areas. Since Tibetan society practiced primogeniture, women were furthermore able to take over chieftainship or the affairs of estates only if there was no male heir.

While positions of political leadership were generally off limits to women, they “could and did own shops, enter into trading contracts, and retain the profits for themselves” (Redwood French 1995, 32) even though it was more common that they were part of an existing family business. Matthew Kapstein notes in this context that women from a variety of social backgrounds traded and some also held a strong position in the market even though “larger-scale commerce seems always to have been man’s business” (2006, 199-200). Kapstein generally acknowledges the limitations of women’s involvement in society by stating that “skilled trades, such as medicine, fine art, and astrology, were essentially male preserves” (2006, 200). Prior to 1950, access to education was divided along gender and class lines. While most Tibetans were illiterate at the time of the Chinese invasion, the lack of educational opportunities for women in traditional Tibetan society also stemmed from the fact that large parts of the

curriculum concentrated on Buddhist philosophy and arithmetic, both of which were designed specifically for male students who would enter the government service.

Losang Rabgey argues that social mobility in general was reserved mainly for the male part of Tibetan society; as the prime inheritors of land, men became more prominently associated with the landscape, and thus the public sphere, while women's place was within the home because "[m]uch of the space beyond the domestic arena, including the family's fields, was traditionally off-limits to women in many parts of Tibet" (2006, 93). As becomes clear from these examinations of women's available roles in society, the vast majority of lay women were closely tied to the domestic sphere (Taklha 2009). Although the amount of work and the labor distribution varied according to the social standing of the woman concerned, pre-Communist Tibetan society was marked by a fairly rigid, spatialized division of labor that associated women with affairs "inside" the household and men with prestigious ritual and political affairs "outside" the household (Makley 2007). As Charlene Makley has shown, this separation rested on the interconnection of sexual difference and gender hierarchy and was justified by appeals to the above mentioned law of embodied karma, "a sexual-karmic polarity" (Makley 2007, 288). In order to showcase Tibetan women's position in society, Tibetan exile government publications reinterpret and generally downplay the existence of a sexual division of labor in Tibetan society:

Many believe that we are the most fully-emancipated women in Asia. Since most Tibetans have been farmers and herdsmen, we have worked with our men in the fields and tended the flocks as they did, so that there has hardly been a difference between the work of men and women...In cities and towns women conducted trade, and many women could assume the work of their husbands when the men were away. (Gorap 1994, 92-93)

By suggesting gender-neutrality in labor and women's capacity to engage in all types of work, this quote works to positively distinguish Tibetan society from other surrounding cultures in which women were kept in seclusion or which enforced a rigid division of labor between the sexes. What is missing from this interpretation was the double burden for women who were both running the household *and* working in the fields (Aziz 1985, 1987). Their responsibilities inside the house such as child bearing and rearing, the provision of clothes and food for their extended family was extended by tending the animals, sowing and harvesting. Women therefore tended to work much longer hours than their male relatives. Aziz questions why, although "no Tibetan—no one—will deny the essential role a woman plays in the economic success of her household ... why she nevertheless lacks a stronger voice, and why her prestige is so low compared with any man's" (1987, 93).

Social status and class contributed greatly to a woman's workload and the opportunities she encountered. As well, the variety of marital arrangements impacted in different ways on women's position and status, and therefore on the power she wielded within the household. Tibetan marital customs included monogamy, polyandry, and polygyny and descriptions of the different types of marriages have featured prominently in Western and Chinese writing on Tibet to highlight the exoticism of its culture. Tibetan exile publications concede that these types of marriage forms existed prior to 1950, yet in a concerted effort to present Tibetan society as modern and progressive, the official website of the CTA states that the latter two marriage forms were by no means common arrangements: polyandry and polygyny were only "accepted in some regions to sustain family and social networks and to keep estates undivided, without infringing the rights to which men and women were accustomed" (CTA 2001, n.pg). In most cases, polyandrous marriages were arranged with two or three brothers marrying the

same woman. The Austrian mountaineer Heinrich Harrer ([1953] 1997, 175), who found shelter in Tibet during World War II, explains for example the existence of polygyny with the high number of monks in the country and highlights the advantages of these alliances as follows: “it is not so important which of the brothers is the father of the child. The great thing is that the property remains in the family”. The Tibetan system of male primogeniture was the prerequisite for a family lineage to continue and to keep the family estates and wealth together. In case a family had no son, it was customary to elevate a son-in-law (Tib. *mag pa*) to the status of the male heir.

Charlene Makley (1997) states that Western and Tibetan exile descriptions hailing the equality in Tibetan marriage related mostly to monogamous marriages rather than to polyandrous and polygynous marriages, which were prevalent in many parts of the country. Monogamy was prevalent mainly in pastoralist community, possibly because “pastoralist property consists mainly of livestock which can be worked efficiently by one monogamous family unit” (Butler 2003, 16). Pastoralist women seem to have enjoyed greater independent mobility and were more influential in family-decision making processes. This position was aided by the dowry that pastoralist women brought into the marriage and which they could keep in the case of a divorce.

In contrast, anthropologist Robert Ekvall elevates women in polyandrous arrangements above monogamous wives. He notes in his field observations from 1939:

Finally, if assigning a higher position to woman is any criterion, the nomads are notably above the farming Tibetans. In both instances the women are amazingly industrious, but among the women have much more to say about the management of affairs and have a definite claim to a share of the family wealth. This may be because . . . the women have such an important place in the nomad economy; they are so indispensable in the management of the capital wealth of the tent that they have gained greater power and voice in affairs. The women of the farming communities have a similarly important role in the agricultural routine, but they do not have similar status. (1939, 78)

Other scholars agree with Ekvall's conclusions about the relative power of wives in polyandrous marriages (Aziz 1978; Bell 1928). Makley (1997) and Rabgey (2006) qualify the importance of women by pointing out that in all types of marriage arrangements and across all social classes, husbands were regarded as the heads of the household. Even if differences in status and position definitely occurred between, say, aristocratic and peasant women or between polyandrous and monogamous family units, *in relation* to their male relatives, females had less authority. According to Rabgey this difference in power is also an indication of the value attached to female work *in relation* to work undertaken by men (2006, 120-122). Thus, the position and power of women in Tibet undoubtedly varied across different social strata and geographical location. Yet in all their diversity, women's roles were nevertheless based on an intrinsic division of labor and public visibility along gender lines and women's opportunities were "in all events far more limited than those open to men" (Kapstein 2006, 200).

It is for this reason that a number of contemporary scholars of Tibetan Studies oppose the positive images of the status and influence of Tibetan women that are circulated by the Central Tibetan Administration and its attendant institutions; instead, critical voices maintain that the social and political system of pre-Communist Tibet was highly stratified and often excluded women, and that this rigid structure has to a great extent been re-enacted in the political administration in exile. Furthermore, it has been stressed that Tibetan Buddhism is encumbered by distinctly androcentric, and even misogynist, gender stereotypes that continue to discriminate against women and shape popular conceptions of their roles and potential. It has therefore been argued that the Tibetan community can hardly be regarded as one of gender equality (Campbell 1996; Pike 2001). Regardless of the criticism levelled at gender relations in Tibetan society, the popularization of gender equality and women's emancipation rests on politically

convenient sociological misconceptions that have a high moral currency among Tibetans in exile and their worldwide supporters alike. Yet as Havnevik points out, the much publicized ‘high status’ of Tibetan women remains rhetorical because to describe a woman as simply having ‘high’ or ‘low status’ “obscures the fact that her status may be low in some spheres of behavior, while in others, she may achieve equality with, or even surpass the status of men” (1989, 127). In order to qualify, expand and correct the currently available and often simplistic, generalizing representations of Tibetan women, it is paramount to turn to Tibetan women’s self-representations and their descriptions of daily life within their homes and beyond.

2.4 Conclusion

This short overview of the popular images concerning ‘the feminine’ and ‘woman’ clarifies the need for some important shifts in contemporary representation of Tibetan women. Reflecting on Rey Chow’s commentary on Chinese women, Tibetan women “disappear” in popular and academic accounts of Tibetan history and politics and women only reappear in “case studies” or in the “culture garden” (Mohanty 1991, 32). There is at present a dearth of studies on Tibetan women, who are, like women everywhere, also under-represented in their own national history (Aziz 1987; Willis 1987; Gyalpo 1997; Yuthok 1995). Thus, there is a disconnect between the pervasive perceptions about Tibetan women in theory and the actual experiences of these women. To address the underrepresentation as well as the idealization of Tibetan women in history and literature, it is mandatory to turn *away* from ‘official history’ and *towards* women’s life writing. The following three textual analysis chapters therefore aim to present a historically and locally situated analysis of the particular prospects, limitations

and restrictions of five Tibetan women in pre-Communist Tibet. My decision to focus on so-called ‘peripheral’ sources takes seriously Urvashi Butalia’s call for a “democratization of what counts as an archive to enlarge the scope of what we *recognize* as such and to include memory in it: not as a second-class citizen, as it were, but as a usable source of history” (Butalia qtd in Burton 2003, 25).

CHAPTER THREE

Family Matters:

Women’s spaces and quiet truths in *House of the Turquoise Roof* and *Dalai Lama, my son*

Our means of knowing and speaking of ourselves and our world are written for us by men who occupy a special place in it... In learning to speak our experience and situation, we insist upon the right to begin where we are, to stand as subjects of our sentences, and to hear one another as the authoritative speakers of our experience. ~ D. Smith (1975)

On a usual day in 1913 in the village of Taktser in Amdo, Tsering Diki, age twelve, would get up early to brew tea, bake bread and make noodles for the entire family. She also helped her mother making trousers and blouses for herself, her brothers and sisters. On the same day in far-away Lhasa, Dorje Yudon Yuthok’s mother Tseten Chozom’s supervised a large aristocratic house and the family’s servants and was responsible for the maintenance of “accounts and records of transactions” from the Surkhang’s various estates. Central to the running of households across the Tibetan plateau but with varying degrees of physical workload and administrative responsibility, women’s contributions

were essential to the functioning of Tibetan society. Yet their experiences in and descriptions of home and house are notably absent in Tibetan historical sources.

Considered private rather than public, women's stories have been disregarded as being neither 'useful' nor 'helpful' in discovering "real" history the world over (Lal 2011, 95). In the Tibetan case, what is therefore remembered in historical sources dealing with the specific year of 1913 are political key incidents such as the ousting of Chinese troops from Lhasa and the Thirteenth Dalai Lama's proclamation of independence. While these events had significant impact on the homes and families of Tibet, the official archive only illuminates the chain of political incidents and is completely silent on the knowledge emanating from 'homely' histories. Yet what has been relegated to the domain of 'stories' rather than 'histories', presents us with a "rare catalog of materials" (Lal 2011, 109) that draws our attention to the peripheral, the domestic, and the everyday. In turn, knowledge from within the home provides us with the necessary framework to begin a more inclusive understanding of Tibetan society and culture at large. Offering us rare insights into family and gender dynamics of Tibetan peasant and aristocratic homes, Dorje Yudon Yuthok's *House with a Turquoise Roof* (1995) and Diki Tsering's *Dalai Lama, My Son* (2000) call into question the widely held assumption and consequent practice that memories of the home do not belong in the official archives of national history.

Like most official archives, Tibetan historiography sees history evolving as a succession of 'grand, heroic events'. Authoritative Tibetan histories furthermore present events through the lens of Buddhism and the ensuing power politics emanating largely from post-eleventh century Western Tibet and central Tibet. Buddhism in fact must be considered as the greatest influence on Tibetans' historical understanding; even today,

Tibetan history is still mostly understood in the light of the introduction and spread of Buddhism and its transformation of Tibetan society. Even though regionally diverse, pre-, and non-Buddhist histories have resisted their incorporation into the grand master narrative, their views of history have generally been marginalized in hegemonic Tibetan historiography. The result of this historical process has been the production of a linear, monolithic historical narrative that over-emphasizes events with Buddhist importance, elevates the experiences of Buddhist rulers and the male, monastic establishment and which fabricates lineages to improbably early periods. As a result, histories from the margins and the domestic realm, stories of non-aristocratic and non-monastic Tibetans, and stories of Tibetan women do generally not feature prominently in Tibetan historical sources. The fact that these stories are mostly neglected in Tibetan historical writing is indicative of the still underlying bias discernible within the institutionalized disciplines of history, which says that only ‘public’ experiences equal ‘greater’ truths.

I argue in this Chapter that *House with a Turquoise Roof* and *Dalai Lama, My Son* are equal in their value to conventional historical archives as they provide unique information of the overall social fabric and gender relations in central Tibet and Amdo at the beginning of the twentieth century. Both Yuthok and Tsering’s life narratives relate the daily minutiae of life within their homes. As such, their life writings contain what Ruby Lal (2011) terms “soft” or “marginal” sources, such as information about traditional food and dress, customs and manners. Apart from bringing alive city and rural life in central Tibet and Amdo, Yuthok and Tsering moreover focus on sensitive topics such as unequal gender relations and family hierarchies, which are too often glossed over in official Tibetan history. As they cover “areas of experience ignored by men” (Hooton 1992, 32), the two life narratives are exciting avenues for looking anew at what comprises the official Tibetan archive and re-examine what constitutes hegemonic

Tibetan exile history; moreover, they fuel the desire of “getting into the archival crevices” (Lal 2011, 104) to find and bring to light ‘other’ stories, that is, stories of women who were either hidden from view or appeared only in the form of a homogenized and ideal woman figure.

At the same time, the two life narratives also relate, though indirectly, the grand, public events enshrined in Tibetan history writing; their experiences in the family also question, quietly and indirectly, the narrative of a gender equal Tibetan society as put forward by the Central Tibetan Administration. In the popular rhetoric of Dharamsala, women are “a liberated group” and “opportunities for one’s advancement are there for the taking, no matter how some may choose to (mis)interpret terms referring to women” (Gorap 1994, n.pg). Dorje Yudon Yuthok (1995, 15-16) asserts in her introduction to *House with a Turquoise Roof* that the main emphasis of her life narrative is “the writing of a book about the women of Tibet”; yet by doing so, she asserts that her life narrative nevertheless tells, “though indirectly, something about our peaceful country, Tibet”. As Antoinette Burton points out, androcentric record keeping has relegated women’s writing to the domain of “‘Literature’ (the domain of memory, sentiment, and fiction) while men claimed the more ‘objective’ task of writing truth-telling ‘History’” (2003, 20). By reflecting on the place of women in traditional Tibetan society as well as the experiences of themselves and other female relatives, both Yuthok and Tsering move out of the ascribed realm of Literature to extend the official historical archive as well as our understanding of historically significant sources and material. They bring attention to the home as the prime locus to learn about and understand social relations that in turn shape common beliefs of gender(ed) roles. In so doing, these two life narratives quietly affirm that family and homely stories matter in the writing of national history.

The following chapter is closely aligned to Tsering and Yuthok's stories of domestic relationships, gender ideologies and inequalities as well as of quiet self-assertion. I approach these issues through a historically situated close-textual analysis of the two life narratives. The structure I follow in this Chapter will mirror the life cycles in both women's lives. Firstly, I will discuss childhood memories and the position of girls within the confines of the Tibetan paternal household. Secondly, I will examine the transition from the parental home into the husband's household and the challenges posed by marriage and childbearing that defined these two Tibetan women's livelihoods. The second section will furthermore analyze how changes to their marital status affected their position in the family and in the wider society. In both sections, I will closely examine the relations between women and men within the home as well as their links to the public sphere to critically interrogate the claims of a gender equal society circulated by the Central Tibetan Administration and its attendant institutions.

3.1 Daughters of the House: Relationality and female dependency

If you want to be a servant, make your son a monk. If you want a servant, make your daughter a nun ~ Tibetan proverb

Questions of gender inequality and discrimination are a delicate issue in the Tibetan exile community. In their continuous rhetorical exchange with the Chinese Communist Party over 'the truth' of pre-Communist Tibet, the situation of Tibetan women has become one of the propaganda battlegrounds for the Central Tibetan Administration. In *Tibet Transformed*, the pro-Chinese journalist Israel Epstein reports for example that in pre-1959 Tibet, women from the lower classes were said to have been "housed in [their] master's dog kennels", were forbidden to marry and leave the

landowner's estate or had witness their children die because of the cruelty of their masters (1983, 90-92). To counter arguments like these, the Central Tibetan Administration released a number of documents arguing the relatively high position of Tibetan women in comparison to China. The *Women's Empowerment Policy* from 2008 is a prime example of the CTA's defense of Tibetan women's status: "[s]ince the beginning of human civilization in Tibet, Tibetans in their entire history have not experienced problems such as gender inequality or gender oppression and exploitation" (CTA 2008, n.pg). Evidently, both Chinese communist and Tibetan nationalist publications actively participate in the creation of a discourse on Tibetan women as either fundamentally oppressed or exemplarily liberated (Makley 1997, 4).

While these representations speak for Tibetan women, women rarely represent themselves in these publications and their voices are for the most part absent. Turning to women's life writing allows us bridge this knowledge gap and to gauge the extent of both opinions. In their frank descriptions of their childhood and adolescence, both Yuthok and Tsering show that reality for women was far more complicated than either side depicts. In the first section of this sub-chapter, I will explore both depictions of their childhood and the differing expectations leveled at female children in aristocratic and peasant families at the beginning of the twentieth century. The second sub-section will examine formal and informal education for girls followed by their relationships with other people in the home and outside the household, investigating the boundaries in which girls and young women had to perform their gender.

3.1.1 *'What a girl does'—early gendering in Tibetan society*

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Tibetan views on children and what part they played in the family home were neither ubiquitous nor unanimous across social and geographical planes and no special articulation of childhood is evident in Tibetan social commentaries or autobiographies of the time. Yet while Dorje Yudon Yuthok's and Diki Tsering's memories of childhood differ significantly in the expectations placed on them by other family members, their sentiments regarding their social roles as girls are surprisingly similar.

Yuthok's aristocratic background ensured that she experienced a privileged and carefree childhood and was well looked after in material and emotional terms. In contrast, Diki Tsering had to assume a number of responsibilities and carry out household tasks from the early age of five years. While children from noble backgrounds engaged in play and were generally exempt from physical labor, peasant children were socialized early into the world of work and the many household and farming duties. Tsering remembers that after their family had moved to a property the grandfather had purchased, "my carefree childhood came to an end, and my life entered a new phase":

There was now no time for play. I became the charge of my mother, who began to teach me about the world of women and train me in household duties in preparation for marriage. In Amdo at that time many of the household responsibilities fell on the shoulders of daughters, even when they were quite young by Western standards, six or seven years old. I had to learn to make noodles, brew tea, and bake bread for the entire family. At age seven I could scarcely reach the top of the cooking table, so I had to stand on one chair to prepare the dough. (2000, 28)

This powerful memory sheds light on the intense involvement of girls in peasant communities from a very early age as a focus on preparing them for their later household roles. As Tsering's account illustrates, the Amdo society she grew up in, operated under

very different ideas of childhood—one in which children were being given the responsibilities of adults. In fact, the portrayal shows that during the early decades of the twentieth century, parts of Tibetan society had not yet ‘discovered’ childhood as a period of unburdened playfulness and innocence.

While children were still expected to take on adult responsibilities and contribute to their family’s income in the early years of exile (Seele-Nyima 2000, 218-220), contemporary ideas of childhood in the Tibetan exile community are more closely aligned to Sharon Stephens’ observation that “modern children are supposed to be segregated from the harsh realities of the adult world and to inhabit a safe, protected world of play, fantasy and innocence” (1995, 14). This demonstrates that childhood is a concept that is culturally contingent and ever-changing (see Ulanowicz 2005, n.pg.). At the same time, pre-1950 Tibetan attitudes were not unanimous either and were contingent on whether households needed family labor for their subsistence. Claudia Seele-Nyima (2000, 213) remarks in this context that in non-aristocratic families, girls were introduced to small household tasks around the age of five or six while boys became involved in the family’s work load only around the age of eight (see also Rabgey 2006, 111). As is further evident from the types of work assigned to girls within the home, such as the preparation and cooking of family meals, washing and sewing of clothes, this early division of labor was used to prepare them for their later roles in the household economy.

As pointed out above, Yuthok’s childhood revolved around play and was characterized by a high degree of comfort and blitheness. She recounts playing different games such as *teybey*, rope jumping and dress-up. In summer, many days were spent on picnics and on sunny winter days, she often went ice-skating. In stark contrast to

Tsering's early involvement in the family economics, Yuthok remembers that until she was eighteen, "I did not have much to do. When my mother has visitors but was busy, sometimes I relieved her by entertaining the visitors. Also I would sometimes take charge of the keys of the storerooms. Other days I would go in my mother's place to buy odds and ends or to pay an informal visit for her. I also did some knitting and embroidering" (1995, 59). The leisurely existence of the aristocracy had been commented on by early travelers and missionaries to Tibet and in the eyes of Tibetan Historian K. Dhondup: "The aristocrats who impressed the outsiders with their exquisite taste and manners lived a totally different and luxurious life. It was as if the aristocracy and the commoners belonged to different races" (1986, 115). And while the avenues open to girls were still fairly prescribed across all social strata, the forms of education open and available to girls at that time were distinctly better for daughters of noble households.

3.1.2 A Girl's Education in Early Twentieth Century Tibet

While education was, strictly speaking, not divided along gender lines, class divisions were mainly responsible for whether children went to school or not. Monasteries and some nunneries provided most of the education but were usually restricted to the admission of children as novices, which was a role rarely retained for very long after admission. Apart from scholastic education, there were also a number of private schools and tutors who generally accepted students from all social classes who could afford the tuition. Nevertheless, most Tibetans were illiterate at the turn of the twentieth century and children in rural areas or from non-aristocratic families were less likely to attend school. As farming households often needed the help of their offspring and pastoral communities did not remain sedentary long enough for their children to

attend a school term, significant divisions existed in the educational level between urban and rural communities until well into the twentieth century. Furthermore, if a family was moderately wealthy and could afford to pay for schooling, it was usually the sons who received formal education while the daughters received their training in domestic work. Diki Tsering recounts her own education in this way:

When I was not cooking or cleaning, my mother taught me to cut out clothes and do embroidery ... This was the education for girls in 1907. At the time it was unheard of for girls to go to school, to learn to read and write. Boys had to till the land and work on the farm from a young age. If the family was well off, and there were many sons, the sons would be sent to school. ... Our only other training was in prayer. In the evenings, when we lived with my grandparents, my grandfather would summon us for daily prayer sessions. (2000, 29)

Gender clearly mattered when peasant parents had the ability to send their children to school; a girl's physical strength and her familiarity with household duties was considered more useful in the economy of peasant communities than the ability to read or write. Girls who aspired to access education despite this bias were often regarded with suspicion or were made the subject of ridicule for transgressing gendered boundaries (see Sakya 1990).

Largely due to their social and financial influence, noble families were able to offer better access to education and formal religious instruction to their children than parents in farming or pastoralist communities. Yuthok confirms that the acquisition of scholarly knowledge was tied to privilege in pre-1950 Tibet: "Only the children of the higher families and sometimes their servants went to school. The few government schools were intended just for the education and training of boys who would become government officials. ... For the rest of us there were twenty-five or thirty private schools in Lhasa for boys and girls together" (1995, 51). Yuthok further points out that those allowed to go to school only received minimal education with the focus mainly on

learning basic arithmetic, writing, and reading of Tibetan Buddhist texts (see also Seele-Nyima 2000). Although children of both sexes were able to enroll in school for some years, even among the noble classes, not as many girls as boys ultimately received instruction for the same amount of time.

Yuthok explains that the reason behind this was simply that “[i]n my day girls were not so keen to study, so that only about one-fourth of my schoolmates were girls” (1995, 57). While she interprets the lack of female children who pursued further studies by resorting to essentialist ‘feminine’ characteristics of never straying from or returning early to the familiar world at home, Tsering’s observation above seems more enlightening. While sending one’s children to school was not at all standard or affordable for many Tibetan families, education was deemed even less necessary for girls. Rather, girls were encouraged to excel in performing household duties and tasks such as embroidery and weaving, reinforcing and widening the already existing gendered division of labor and knowledge. Furthermore, girls and women were hampered by the popular belief that they were intellectually inferior to men (Rabgey 2006, 100). This perception was also indicative of girls’ general position in the household and the wider fabric of Tibetan society at the beginning of the twentieth century.

3.1.3 Learning the architecture of the household—a girl’s position in the family

Born in 1901 into a family of “humble but prosperous peasants” in eastern Tibet, Diki Tsering remembers her childhood fondly: “From the moment of my birth I was loved by my grandparents ... They lavished such tenderness and affection upon me that I felt cherished. The enjoyment of life that resulted has never left me” (2000, 19; 21). The

closeness Diki Tsering describes between herself and her grandparents was not only loving but also special since relations between children and parents were “restrained, distant, and very formal” (2000, 22) in the Amdo peasant community. Dorje Yudon Yuthok likewise remembers the bond with her mother fondly; however, in recounting her childhood, it becomes evident that aristocratic family relations, too, were regulated by protocol. Thus, from birth until the age of six or seven, Yuthok describes herself as having been “in the custody” of a nanny while her mother’s role was “to supervise my care and to give me love” (1995, 48). She is, however, quick to reiterate that her mother “did not in any way neglect us”; yet like other aristocratic women, she was nevertheless freed from the daily care taking responsibilities of her children and only saw her children “to teach” them or enjoy their company (Yuthok 1995, 49).

Early childhood memories are often regarded more fondly with passing time and thus, social or domestic inequalities may sometimes not be remembered or mentioned in later accounts. Although Taring and Yuthok both paint a relatively harmonious picture of their early childhood, neither woman is completely silent on gender differentiation in their respective social class. While Yuthok does not comment on her family’s reaction to her birth, she allows the reader a brief insight into a cultural preference of boys in pre-1950 Tibet: “There was a strange custom in Tibet that we used to observe after birth. Childbirth itself is treated as being very impure, so after a child is born a religious purifying ceremony is performed. In the case of a boy the ceremony is performed after two days and in the case of a girl it is after three days. The difference in time is because boys are regarded as being more pure than girls” (1995, 174). The notions of ‘pollution’, male ‘purity’ and relative female ‘impurity’ are widespread in Tibetan cultural areas and in the case of childbirth, operate on what Sarah Pinto calls “the levels of the ultimate and the mundane” (2000, 160). While childbirth is generally seen as a

“messy” or “dirty” business, the blood, placenta, “and by association the womb, are considered to be highly offensive to extremely pure and powerful entities, human and non-human” (Pinto 2000, 161). While the perception that childbirth is polluting does not strictly apply to the pregnant woman, women’s bodies are nevertheless frequently equated with impurity and thus constitute “the negative pole in the dualistic system of bondage and enlightenment” (Schaeffer 2004, 8).

As highlighted in Chapter Two, a common Tibetan word for women translates to ‘low/ inferior birth’ (Tib. *skye dman*) underlining the Tibetan view that full liberation is only possible through the attainment of a male body. The belief that Tibetan women are somehow less pure, emotionally weaker and intellectually inferior to men would certainly have been mitigated within individual families, yet it nevertheless enjoyed wide currency and was instrumental in shaping Tibetan women’s identity (Rabgey 2006, 100). Certainly, Diki Tsering was fully aware of the gender differences operating in her Amdo community and highlights how this realization shaped her self-understanding from an early age: “Even when I was still quite little, the fact that I was a girl weighed heavily on my heart. From very early in life we were aware of the different roles and aspirations of males and females and the preference families had for sons. The birth of a girl was sometimes looked upon as a curse. I heard a story about a poor family who drowned a female child immediately after her birth” (2000, 23).

Tsering’s assertion of gender discrimination and some of the devastating outcomes are so far not acknowledged in exile Tibetan social histories and receive only scant mention in anthropological studies. In her article “Den halben Himmel stützen” (1993), Jetsün Pema Gyalpo states that Tibetan society did not practice female infanticide, a view also upheld by the Central Tibetan Administration. Despite these

avowals, it is paramount to acknowledge that while the practice of female infanticide might not have been widespread, the possibility also exists that family issues such as those might not have been spoken about, were not or less often reported or recorded in local and official histories. It is also important to note here that in general, girls were not considered a burden in the same way as they were in China and India at that time; it is to be suggested that the terrible fate the girl suffered was very likely due to economic reasons than simply a case of her being female. Despite the sense that girls were less valued than boys in Tibetan families, they were nevertheless of use in and around the house and as potential marriage partners to wealthier families whose influence might assist the parents. Barbara Nimri Aziz (1985) similarly states that to her knowledge no cases of female infanticide were identified in pre-1950 Tibet; yet she shows how gender differentiation and discrimination were nevertheless present from the beginning of a child's life: for example, a white stone placed outside the house heralded the birth of a boy as a joyous event, yet a black stone—the sign for inauspiciousness—indicated that a girl had been born (Aziz 1985, 28).

There can be no doubt that practices such as these impart important cultural messages and are instrumental in forming and maintaining gender difference. At the same time, we have to be cautious not to generalize Tibetan attitudes towards gender across time and space. What emerges from Yuthok's and Tsering's narratives is, however, a focus on preparing girls for their roles as women in their respective social classes. Both life narratives share an emphasis on humility as a desirable characteristic of Tibetan girls and women, as well as with social expectations of their compliance with certain roles in the home and wider society. In the case of Diki Tsering this compliance included the strict regulation of her interaction with strangers and a practice somewhat similar to the Indian custom of *purdah* for girls and young women. The following

excerpt illustrates these practices while exemplifying at the same time, the acquiescence of Tibetan girls and women with family expectations regarding the roles and boundaries of ‘proper’ feminine behavior:

As girls we were taught that our only future and hope were marriage and a life of hard work. We led a rigorous life, which was bare in the extreme, with no entertainment or amusements. On some occasions there were folk dramas, but even here we had to be chaperoned by our parents. We were never permitted out alone. [...] Once we passed the age of puberty, if there were guests in the house, we had to stay in our rooms, doing our work. We were never permitted to mingle with the guests, even out of curiosity. It was considered bad manners to look at visitors. (Tsering 2000, 55-56)

The customary shielding of Tsering and her sisters from the unsolicited male (and perhaps female?) gaze suggests a heightened sense of cultural (and community) anxiety surrounding the guarding of female respectability. Clearly, in Tsering’s case, the adolescent female body was out of bounds to be viewed or touched by those outside the familiar and familial circle. While the protection of female ‘purity’ is rigorously practiced in many South and East Asian societies, Tsering’s memories stand out from the popular narrative of Tibetan women’s sexual freedoms repeatedly mentioned by foreign observers (see, for example, Bell 1928; Harrer 1997), Western academics (Samuel 1993; Kapstein 2006), other Tibetan life narratives (D. Norbu 1974; Gyalpo 1997) and statements from attendant institutions of the Central Tibetan Administration such as the DIIR and the TWA.

Mostly, these publications comment on the relative ease with which Tibetan women interacted with the opposite sex (Bell 1928; Lowell 1950; Kawaguchi 1909 Rockhill 1891; among others) and what Karma Lekshe Tsomo calls “a remarkable degree of sexual freedom” (1999, 173). As the British Political Officer in Sikkim, Charles Bell had regular contact with Tibetans from all walks of life but especially from

the ruling classes. His evaluation of the position of Tibetan women in *The People of Tibet* is thus: “When a traveler enters Tibet from the neighbouring nations in China or India, few things impress him more vigorously or more deeply than the position of the Tibetan women. Accustomed to mix with the other sex throughout their lives, they are at ease with men and can hold their own as well as any women in the world” (1928, 147).

In a more recent evaluation of gender relations in Tibetan society, John Avedon’s *In Exile from the Land of Snows* concludes that prior to the Chinese annexation, the “status of women was equal to that of men in both business and the household and, without doubt, the highest in Asia” (1997, 16). In her dissertation on higher educational possibilities for Tibetan women, Yeshe Chodon similarly stresses that “[a]lthough patriarchal in societal structure, Tibetans practice neither veiling/purdah system ... as in many Islamic countries nor foot binding as in Chinese society” (2007, 12). Her assessment of pre-1959 Tibetan society is widely shared among exile Tibetans (Gorap 1994; Gyalpo 1997; Thonsur 2004; among others).

In reading about the freedoms of Tibetan women or lack thereof, it is paramount to understand that, for one, the Tibetan plateau was too vast and diverse an area to have had standardized social practices or to allow for an easy categorization (Kapstein 2006, 204). Likewise, to speak of a generic Tibetan attitude towards women’s bodies and gender boundaries is inherently simplistic because yet again, it constitutes an attempt to reduce Tibetan diversity to a set of recognizable and universally applicable social and cultural practices. As Carole McGranahan (1996) and Charlene Makley (1997) have persuasively argued, Tibetan women have been hijacked by various discourses—Chinese Communist rhetoric, Tibetan nationalism, Western feminist Buddhist practice, and Western human rights agendas—with the result that only “hyperbolic and starkly

polarized accounts of [Tibetan women's] oppressions and liberations" (Makley 1997, 4) exist today.

Precisely because Diki Tsering's experience is not replicated in other women's life narratives or supported by social scientists and historians, it offers us a unique insight into the varying and complex nature of Tibetan practices in the home and the wider community. By complicating our preconceived notions of Tibetan women's freedoms, Tsering's account cautions the reader to envisage Tibetan childhood years, particularly for girls, in overly romantic or idealized terms. What we can infer from her reactions to the experience is pliancy with an expected feminine comportment that also comes to the fore in many other accounts of and by Tibetan women (Gyalpo 1997; Sakya 1990; Thonsur 2004; Yuthok 1995). Despite repeated affirmation that the status of Tibetan women in pre-1950 Tibet was generally 'high', women are nevertheless constantly referred to as being 'naturally' more nurturing, passive, and gentle (Rabgey 2006, 100). As Karma Lekshe Tsomo succinctly summarizes, despite changing circumstances, the ideal nevertheless remains so that to this day, "[i]n Himalayan Buddhist cultures a woman should be serene and subdued, humble and not arrogant, calm rather than harried, patient rather than angry, kind rather than uncaring, other-centered rather than self-centered, content rather than greedy, subdued rather than unruly" (1999, 174).

By critically examining the enduring trope of a 'feminine predisposition' for 'caring and coping', we can see that these seemingly benign characterizations of Tibetan women conveniently mask social inequalities and reinforce separate spheres of influence between the sexes. Understanding that the existing patriarchal system aided the perpetuation of gender imagery and associated roles, both Tibetan girls and young

women modeled their behavior after other, respected women in the immediate household and larger community. Merry Wiesner-Hanks outlines how “structures and meanings” are shaped from the very beginning by our exposure to role models in the family and that these experiences shape other aspects of our lives: “It is also clear that experiences within the family group differed for boys and girls, men and women. Children learned (and continue to learn) what it means to be male or female first from the older people in their families, and their first experiences with gender differences were usually within the family” (2006, 52).

The immediate influence for Tsering and Yuthok’s acceptance of gendered roles can thus be regarded as ‘learned behavior’ as seen from their mothers’ and other female relatives in their immediate surroundings. Their acceptance of the status quo in the household first as daughters and later, as daughters-in-law and wives must furthermore be seen in the context of lived examples that imparted, like in many Asian societies, “a particular image of woman as chaste, dutiful, daughterly or maternal” (Ray 2000, 3). The next section will examine how certain learned behaviors shaped Yuthok’s and Tsering’s adult lives as daughters-in-law, wives and mothers.

3.2 The curse of scripted femininity: women’s duties and men’s freedoms

The following section will firstly discuss the challenges associated with entering a patrilineal and patrilocal household as a daughter-in-law. This will also incorporate an examination of the observance of social roles in Tibetan society more generally. Secondly, I will investigate the challenges posed to women by marriage breakdowns and widowhood and examine their strategies to re-negotiate their social being.

3.2.1 Stepping over the Threshold

Arranged marriage was the most common form of finding a suitable match for one's daughter in pre-1950 Tibet and this practice was generally adhered to across social classes. Diki Tsering remembers that she was only thirteen years old when her family agreed to a proposal that eventually led to her marriage to Taktser Rinpoche's nephew. While her husband's family initially sought the marriage to be formalized when she was only fourteen years, Tsering's parents postponed the wedding until she had reached age sixteen. While Yuthok agrees with this description of arranged matrimony, she emphasizes that hers "was a love marriage" (1995, 139). Yuthok further explains that contrary to custom, her wedding was a relatively small and private affair; this was mainly because she had been living together with her future husband before the marriage was formalized and also due to the death of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama at the time of their engagement. Tsering on the other hand did not meet her future husband until the day of her wedding, which is described as a relatively lavish affair that involved both natal villages of bride and groom. Overall, however, the descriptions of the preparations for the wedding and the actual ceremony are very similar in both women's narratives, allowing us to construct—albeit cautiously—a pan-Tibetan view of wedding customs and sentiments at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Firstly, Yuthok explains to the non-Tibetan reader the intricacies of astrological calculation for an auspicious marriage partner and the wedding date, the gift exchanges between the involved families along with the bridal jewelry and the actual ceremony. The narrative then shifts the attention to herself as bride in a vulnerable and liminal moment as she moves from the parental home to the household of her husband. Yuthok remembers a hesitation, unease even, as she gets ready to step across the threshold into a

new household and therefore, a new life, position, and identity. Dorje Yudon Yuthok voices disquiet at wearing the ornaments from her future husband's family, which she describes as "extraordinary and costly" (1995, 143). She seems acutely aware that the magnificent jewels, which "signified the wealth of the family", also represented the responsibility to "preserve them and pass them on to the next generation" (1995, 143), which was, quite literally, wearing her down. While the realization to be just one small part in the greater history of her husband's lineage reminded Yuthok of the "impermanence of life" (1995, 143), this episode also hints at the larger process of remembering and forgetting in Tibetan genealogy and history.

In Tibetan culture, the so-called "bone repository" *rus mdzod*, which documents genealogies and histories of clans and family, is exclusively associated with the male line. As Nancy Levine summarizes in *The Dynamics of Polyandry*, *rus*

passes in pure form from father to child through the medium of sperm. ... Seen as the template of the body, *ru* influences all physical and mental attributes – which makes men the primary source of their children's character, skills, and physical appearance. Women have the same bone as their fathers and brothers but can only pass it indirectly to their children through the medium of blood, which has lesser effects. (1988, 38)

The blood women transmit to their children is considered "the bone that came from her father, transmuted to blood" (Levine 1988, 53). Tibetan women are thus part of the genealogies comprised in the bone repository yet they cannot directly lay claim to their lineages other than through recourse to their male ancestors. A matrilineage thus does not exist.

Not only does this illustrate Tibetan women's more marginal position within patriarchal society; it also illuminates how women have been rendered mostly invisible in family history. Levine's observations of ethnic Tibetans in Nepal are therefore salient

also in this context: “[t]hat kinship through women is de-emphasized [which] accords with the stated view that women are less important members of the society, and relates in turn to the systems of descent, patrifilial succession and inheritance, virilocal residence, and a household system centred around men” (Levine 1988, 54). Yuthok’s reservations about the deeper meaning of the heirlooms may point to an understanding, however subtle, that women’s contributions to the continuity of the family lineage are to a large extent neither remembered nor enshrined in family history. This is somewhat foreshadowed in Yuthok’s musings on the conflicting emotions regarding her wedding day as she remarks, “I do not know why these things should have come to me on a day that should have been only a happy one. Of course, just wearing the ornaments was most uncomfortable. They were so heavy that I could not lift my head at all. I felt somewhat like a doll with whom everyone seemed to do whatever they pleased” (1995, 143). The last observation is particularly revealing as it describes both a physical and emotional reaction to the wedding ceremonies.

The heavy headset necessitated that the bride needed to be escorted to the various ceremonial settings and yet, Yuthok’s description also hints at a loss of agency that goes beyond the meticulously orchestrated traditional affair. Although decisions about engagements and weddings were mainly the domain of parents, Yuthok concedes that “[g]irls usually had no say in the matter [while] boys could occasionally choose their brides” (1995, 135). It is this resurfacing gender difference which runs through Tibetan women’s life narratives and which allows us an insight into the everyday structures in which both women and men fulfilled their roles and responsibilities. In this case, it also illuminates that brides were aware that they (mostly) lacked the power to intervene in a decision that was to shape their adult lives. The active removal of the bride’s agency through rendering her unable to act of her own accord, including lifting her own head, is

a fine metaphor for many mother-and-daughter-in-law relationships. As was Diki Tsering's experience, many mothers-in-law desired precisely the bride's inability to act independently or to argue, synonymous here with the lifting of the head. As mentioned in the previous section, Tibetan women had very few traditional avenues or role models from which they could glean ways to influence or negotiate decision-making processes that affected their physical and psychological being. Instead, it was expected of women (and men) to operate within traditional, regional norms of appropriate gendered behavior that taught them, above all, to mostly accept their lot without lament.

3.2.2 Playing by the rules, learning wifely duties

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Tibetan women were guided by a deeply ingrained sense of duty towards fulfilling normative behavior where suffering was seen as an inalienable part of life, and therefore of the role one had to fulfill. This is evident in Tsering's depiction of her experiences during the first years of her marriage:

During childhood, despite the fact that I had a lot of chores and work, I was extremely happy. But after I got married, at the age of sixteen, I had a most difficult time. Still, I am a Buddhist by upbringing, and it is our belief that in order to live a full and self-contained life, it is imperative to suffer. ...It was this basic creed that saved us women, especially, from despair and hopelessness. This faith saved me from the death of my spirit during the first few hard years of my marriage. Without this strength I would have succumbed to a bereft existence. (2000, 55)

Extremely frank in her assessment of the emotional and physical hardships she encountered in her husband's home, Tsering offers her Buddhist faith as an explanation for how she endured the challenges during her first years of marriage. Alluding to one of the most fundamental teachings underpinning Buddhism, the Four Noble Truths, Tsering explains to the non-Buddhist reader how deeply these teachings affected people's

outlook in life and their capacity to accept their fate in the understanding that they were part of a greater philosophical structure.

Karma Lekshe Tsomo's (1999) study of women's religious identity in the Buddhist Himalaya demonstrates the range of identities women had at their disposal as practitioners. Her observations add considerably to our understanding of Diki Tsering's, and other Tibetan women's identity construction in light of Buddhist cultural values. According to Tsomo, the concept of *karma* must be seen as a key determinant for accepting social and cultural norms regarding one's roles and responsibilities. While people's attempts to lead a virtuous life in accordance with basic Buddhist ethical values can certainly reinforce "an ethic of individual responsibility", Tsomo cautions that "a deterministic interpretation may still be subtly at play in some minds. This is reflected in an attitude of resignation to life circumstances, which may stifle initiatives to ameliorate problems and difficult situations" (1999, 172). Tsomo's statement helps to explain Tsering's capacity to endure the difficult circumstances in which she found herself aged only sixteen, and indirectly sheds light on the religiously inflected cultural values that manifested themselves in the demure attitude of women such as herself in their dealings with figures of authority, including in the household and family. Yet *Dalai Lama, My Son* also offers examples that while agency was something that was not necessarily available to young women, it could be discovered later in life when a woman's position had been consolidated in the family. Tsering candidly recounts the kinds of power a matriarch of the household held against younger women:

My mother-in-law never did a stroke of work. She was bossy and domineering and not afraid of anyone. She was led by her emotions and fancies, and she liked to eat, dress, and live well. ... She was also hot-tempered and was sometimes physically violent. I, being the daughter-in-law, had to take it all. Her sharp tongue made me the brunt of many miseries. If she was having her meal on the kang, I could not remain in the same room but had to eat in the kitchen. Even then I always had to eat standing up. (2000, 73)

The subordination of herself to the wishes and whims of her mother-in-law reinforces the supposition that younger women commanded very few rights in the household and were expected to act respectfully towards their elders, as well as their husbands. While the hierarchical stratification was equally applicable to younger men when dealing with their elders (Tsering 2000, 21-22), daughters-in-law inherited a particularly difficult position since they were subordinated not only to both junior and senior men but also the senior women (Kandiyoti 1988, 278). As newcomers to the family, Tsering elucidates that they

almost always had a very difficult life and were treated like servants or chattels. Some mothers-in-law drove their daughters-in-law like slaves, neither feeding nor clothing them properly, as a result of which many women, driven by desperation, committed suicide. ... But no matter how ill treated the daughter-in-law was, she could not utter a word of complaint, nor could she leave. It was her fate. (Tsering 2000, 68-69).

It seems counter-intuitive and cruel that senior women would exert their power to denigrate a daughter-in-law and even subject her to the same callous treatment they may have suffered themselves at the beginning of their marriage; however, Deniz Kandiyoti's (1988) comparative work of women's subordination to classic patriarchy elaborates how senior women in the household perpetuate gender inequalities and sustain a system in which women participate in upholding patriarchal structures:

The patrilineage totally appropriates both women's labor and progeny and renders their work and contribution to production invisible. Woman's life cycle in the patriarchally extended family is such that the deprivation and hardship she experiences as a young bride is eventually superseded by the control and authority she will have over her own subservient daughters-in-law. The cyclical nature of women's power in the household and their anticipation of inheriting the authority of senior women encourages a thorough internalization of this form of patriarchy by the women themselves. (Kandiyoti 1988, 279)

Reading Kandiyoti's exploration of women's corroboration with patriarchy alongside Tsomo's careful investigation into some of the underlying cultural attitudes towards

power and self-determination among Himalayan Buddhist women allows us a better understanding of the lack of rebellion we witness in Tsering's life narrative. Tsomo's observations of women's socialization in the Buddhist Himalaya help to explain that their ostensible surrender to 'fate' was grounded in the expectations of what married life might entail for women, regardless of their class:

Marriage is understood as entailing many sufferings for women, including childbirth, hard work, and possible oppression by husband and in-laws. Although women may interpret the hardships of their lives as a blessing—they also realize that their power is limited, abdicated in fact, in marriage. Societal norms have taught them that power is vested in males, both in the secular and religious spheres. Women's power of decision-making is curtailed by both custom and circumstance. (Tsomo 1999, 178)

Although it remains important to question the underlying power structures that governed family life in order to gain a more nuanced understanding of pre-1950 Tibetan social realities, it is equally vital not to assume and construct the idea of 'total patriarchal control' wielded by men and senior women in the household. Tsomo's caution is indicative of third wave feminism's urgent appeal to acknowledge that women worldwide do not form a unitary category but that their experiences of patriarchy are varied and influenced by distinct cultural and religious values (Mohanty 1988; Spivak 1985 and 1988; among others).

It is therefore impossible to assume a universally applicable truth about women's condition or to suppose that "women unite as a biologically oppressed caste" (Spivak 1987, 144) against a similarly monolithic category of men. Instead, we must critically examine ostensibly 'objective' concepts such as 'patriarchy' or 'oppression' by taking into account the differences of class, race, religion, and culture that produce heterogeneous experiences and concerns for women. Gayatri Spivak exposes the slippage by which the tenets of Western feminism become constructed to be universal;

in order to avoid turning feminism into (another) totalizing master narrative, Spivak cautions that “[t]he academic feminist must learn to learn from them, to speak to them, to suspect that their access to the political and sexual scene is not merely to be corrected by our superior theory and enlightened compassion” (Spivak 1987, 186).

Spivak’s tireless self-inquiry should provide the benchmark also for analyzing Tibetan women’s life narratives in their specific historical and cultural context without assuming to be able to speak for them. Similarly, Chandra Mohanty (1988) asserts that without attempting to unlearn our predisposed ideas and knowledge of the Third World woman, we will remain blind to the heterogeneity of women’s experiences and continue to universalize a Western feminism (Mohanty 1988, 66). In order to put these observations into academic practice, I agree with Charlene Makley and Aihwa Ong that it is necessary for those working with “cultural others”, in this case Tibetan women, to maintain “a ‘humble distinction’ or a ‘respectful distance’ between our subject worlds and those of others” (Ong qtd in Makley 1997, 21-22).

Using the insights of postcolonial feminist theorists, we can strive to avoid creating a monolithic category of ‘Tibetan women’ by carefully examining gender norms and gendered roles in their specific context alongside differences in class, education, age, and region. Gender inequality is undoubtedly crucial in appreciating some of the constraints that Tibetan women faced in ‘old’ Tibet and to some extent in exile; however, it is not sufficient in understanding and framing the totality of Tibetan women’s experiences. Thus, to describe Tibetan women’s strategies of acceptance and methods of coping in the family or household as “resignation”, “quiescence or apathy” is a value-laden statement that is likely to reveal more about our concerns than their realities; instead, as Tsomo lucidly remarks, we must allow for the distinct possibility

that they act from the conviction that to show “equanimity” is a desirable cultural virtue (1999, 174). Tsomo’s work on women’s consciousness in the Buddhist Himalaya is important here as it is careful to read between the lines with great cultural sensitivity that does not assume a monolithic category of the ‘oppressed Eastern Woman’. This is particularly important when we examine the differences in women’s treatment according to class.

While Diki Tsering’s life narrative suggests a degree of harshness that underlies the power exerted against younger women or subordinate persons in the household, the experiences of Yuthok’s mother attest to a different kind of control exerted by her mother-in-law. Yuthok’s mother Tseten Chozom is a prime example of the tame(d) behavior associated with Tibetan women (Samuel 1993): a daughter of the illustrious Lhagyari family, said to be directly descended from the “original royal family of Tibet,” Tseten Chozom had been ‘given’ to the Surkhang family in 1908 to marry two brothers (Yuthok 1995, 35). As the product of a traditional Tibetan upbringing, Tseten Chozom was familiar with the expected observance of family hierarchies and abided by tradition in the domestic sphere. Tseten Chozom therefore accepted that her mother-in-law “was in complete charge of the household affairs, so did not allow [her] and Tsering Yangchen [her sister-in-law] any special responsibilities, thus freeing them from doing any family work.” (Yuthok 1995, 37). The apparently unquestioned compliance with which Yuthok’s mother accepted her status quo in the household reminds us again of the culturally scripted norms of femininity that expected women to remain within the domestic sphere and to fulfill their duties as daughters, wives and mothers.

Although the above quote seems to indicate a benign form of power relation between mother- and daughter-in-law, Tseten Chozom’s faineance was nevertheless a

prescribed one. Many Western observers who travelled to Tibet before the Communist take-over commented on the privileged and unencumbered lifestyle of the aristocracy (Bell 1928; Harrer 1997; Lowell 1950; among others). Since many observers mainly mixed with the upper stratum of Tibetan society, their views of women were necessarily shaped by these encounters. Heinrich Harrer painted a particularly idle existence of Tibetan noble women:

Women [of the nobility in Lhasa] know nothing about equal rights and are quite happy as they are. They spend hours making up their faces, restringing their pearl necklaces, choosing new material for dresses and thinking how to take the shine out of Mrs. So-and-so at the next party. They do not have to bother about housekeeping, which is all done by the servants. But to show that she is mistress the lady of the house always carries a large bunch of keys around with her. (1997, 137-38)

While these descriptions suggest that noble women happily indulged in dress up and gossip, these historical sources do not include the voices of women themselves. The objectifying representation of Tibetan noble women and their comparison with European and American women of similar social standing indicates much about the travelers' own preconceptions about women in general—be they Tibetan or Western—and the recognition of known domestic and public spheres of interaction in their own societies, which these travelers found prevalent also in Tibetan society.

While observers such as Harrer, Bell, and Lowell, had been networking with Tibetans from privileged backgrounds, their exchange was mostly with the male part of society. Though invited into the privacy of family homes, the separation between public and private seems to have been re-enacted at home; men and women still had separate spheres and the surface descriptions of Tibetan aristocratic women reiterate this social reality. Their jewel-encrusted appearance is unfortunately what these visitors have come to perceive and to preserve in their writings while the domestic issues and challenges

faced particularly by Tibetan women of the nobility or their actual roles within the wider society remain opaque in these descriptions.

A different reading of the existing preoccupation with dress and jewelry among Tibetan noble women would question if women may have sought these more superficial avenues due to their restrictions in pursuing more meaningful creative and social outlets in the ‘public sphere’ such as in government, education, religion, or the arts. Mrs. Namseling, wife of a former Tibetan Cabinet minister, emphasizes that though rich in material possessions, “I wasted my time. Before in Lhasa, I couldn’t say what I really felt like saying; I had to comport myself a certain way, being a high official’s wife” (Namseling qtd in Sam 2009, 208). With their influence in the public sphere curtailed, many women turned to domestic concerns and personal issues (Sam 2009, 210). Although portrayed as one of opulence and insouciance, Namseling’s remark cautions us about celebrating the aristocratic lifestyle unquestioningly. The noble woman who looked like a “glittering, movable statue encrusted with precious stones” (Taklha 2001, 16) may, at times, have experienced the lavish lifestyle and sweet idleness not nearly as fulfilling as Heinrich Harrer suggested.

As a peasant woman from rural Amdo, Diki Tsering acutely felt the restrictions of the aristocratic lifestyle when her family was moved to Lhasa after her youngest son, Lhamo Dhondup, had been discovered as the reincarnation of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama. Used to a constant flow of physical work and duties, Tsering was hardly impressed with the leisurely routine in Lhasa and gives a rather somber interpretation of what it meant to be forced to do ‘nothing’:

After a while [in Lhasa] I began to find it frustrating to be waited on and not do any work. Though great honor had now become my fate, I wept inside for my home. There I had had to work hard to support my family, but I had been at peace and extremely

happy. I had had freedom and privacy. Now I was treated like a queen, but I was not as happy as I had been in Tsongkha. I had found it satisfying to work hard and to witness the fruits of my labor. To succeed with my crops and with my home and family was to me the epitome of a good life. (Tsering 2000, 109)

It is illuminating that Tsering equates the luxury of her new life in Lhasa with loss, and in particular the loss of privacy and freedom. Interestingly, she also experiences the expectation to delegate work to servants rather than performing the household and farming duties herself, as a diminishment of her power. Yet just like she had bowed to tradition in her earlier life, she accepted the new role as Gyalyum Chenmo, the Great Mother, gracefully and bore the responsibility of her position with utmost care. Both Tsering and Yuthok, and the other women that we can trace through their writings, learnt and internalized the traditional roles and rules that governed the patriarchal system in which they lived. Despite their veritable surrender, the system did not necessarily reward their compliance or protect them from harm. The next section will examine the vulnerability of women within this structure and their attempts to create alternative spaces of security for themselves and their children.

3.2.3 Like a Table with Broken Legs

Marriage is a complex and ambiguous issue in Tibetan exile discourse. Foreign observers have continuously commented on different marriage forms in pre-Communist Tibet, such as polyandry, polygyny and monogamy. In the discourse of the Central Tibetan Administration, these variations are portrayed as bygone with the focus on monogamy as the current norm among Tibetans. Both life narratives focus in depth on their marriage experiences, highlighting thus the importance attached to marriage for the joining of families and the safeguarding of land and wealth in Tibetan society. As outlined above, in pre-1950 Tibet marriages served economic and sometimes political

alliances and were seldom thought of as romantic. As Lobsang Rabgey summarizes, parents usually chose the future partners of their children “on the basis of region, economic class, rigs (social caste), astrological compatibility, personality, and physical attractiveness” (2006, 113). As pointed out above, love marriages, such as in Dorje Yudon Yuthok’s case seldom occurred; children usually bowed to the wishes of their elders including in the selection of their future spouse.

This obeisance to figures of authority within the households and the wider society has been observed as a prominent feature in pre-Communist Tibetan society; Claudia Seele-Nyima argues that much like in pre-industrial Europe, family cohesion in pre-Communist Tibet was generated by economic necessity and relied on the subordination of the individual will to ensure the welfare of the group (2000, 140). Pronounced individuality or the questioning of authority could, in extreme cases, cause the disintegration of the family unit and was therefore neither promoted nor tolerated to a great extent. Though family cohesion was economically more crucial for peasant and nomadic populations than for the Tibetan nobility, Dorje Yudon Yuthok speaks of the same kind of behavioral code in aristocratic circles: “The inner relationships and responsibilities in Tibetan families were extensive and involved. However strange these customs may appear to non-Tibetans, they served to provide for the safety and care of the various family members. They also served as the foundation and basis for providing a continuity to the social, economic and political aspects of Tibetan life” (1995, 34-35).

While Yuthok, too, foregrounds the individual’s submission to safeguard the welfare of the greater household, she also introduces the idea of that Tibetans’ obeisance to family authority and structural hierarchies were based on cultural norms. In what

Ugen Gombo calls “cultural expressions of social stratification”, the strict seating orders that Tibetans observed within the home was mirrored at social gatherings and a person was placed at the table according to their “age, sex, ‘pecking order’” and the individual’s position in the socio-economic stratum (Gombo 1983, 50-51). These ‘socio-cultural norms of stratification’ permeated all forms of exchange, dictated social protocol as well as the use of honorific language (Gombo 1983, 53-59; see also Fjeld 2005). While daily expressions of socio-cultural stratification were not primarily influenced by religious ideology, Tibetan Buddhism nevertheless played a role in supporting the already existing social framework. Both Tsering and Yuthok acknowledge that to the ‘outsider’, the organization of Tibetan social structure might seem inflexible. At the same time, both women reiterate that the observance of hierarchies was invaluable for the continuity of the household and the wider community. In other words, to violate the operating social norms was akin to questioning the hegemonic order which was regarded as so severe that it could result in a person’s ostracism, or ‘social death’ (see also McGranahan 2015).

For men and women, this included also a surrender of their own wishes to the greater good of the family was based on the premise that to act within the structures of the family every member of the household was expected “to try one’s utmost to preserve family harmony and prosperity by avoiding feuds and open disputes” (Yuthok 1995, 36). Aziz underlines this principle by stating that in pre-Communist Tibetan society “the extent of an individual’s personal choice would have to be considered extremely limited by today’s standards, for traditional lifeways demand that the group’s key values be collectively shared and integrated throughout the entire society” (1978, 219). Transgressions or challenges to the responsibilities and social relations were seen as questioning the obligations for women and men and could, according to Kim Gutschow,

“spell disaster” (2004, 69). To abide by this principle was critical for women who would enter their husband’s family because the success of marriages was regarded not simply as the affair of husband and wife but as the union of the two families. Failed marriages were thus to be avoided and though divorce existed, it was not very common and generally regarded as an embarrassment for the families involved (Rabgey 2006; Yuthok 1995).

The ensuing commitment to keep marriages intact is vividly described in *House with a Turquoise Roof*. Yet rather than a celebration of successful marriages, Dorje Yudon Yuthok prefaces her own disastrous marital experiences with the divorce of her parents. She recounts that her mother, Tseten Chozom came to know that her husband Samdup Tseten had an affair with “a young woman named Dawa, who was a neighbor” (Yuthok 1995, 43). Despite the scandal his behavior was causing in Lhasa, Yuthok remembers her mother as “always optimistic that her husband would change for the better” (1995, 44). However, neither her offer of reconciliation nor the attempts of their mutual friends to reason with her husband could change Samdup Tseten’s unwillingness to end the affair. The eventual failure of her marriage and the shame of an enforced divorce by the Thirteenth Dalai Lama were compounded by the obstinacy of her husband which was responsible for the unconventional outcome of the separation: “To her it seemed that the impossible had happened because there was no custom in Tibet for the father to leave his own house” (Yuthok 1995, 45). Despite the grief the whole affair caused, Yuthok is of the view that while her “mother suffered very much at first when my father left, ... she gradually adjusted to her fate” (1995, 47). In light of women’s socialization in the early decades of the twentieth century and before, Tseten Chozom’s acquiescence to the new status quo does not seem particularly strange. Although she

tried to save her marriage by traditional means, Tseten Chozom eventually submitted herself to the order given by the Tibetan government to end the marriage.

As is evident in Tseten Chozom's response to the failing of her marriage, her socialization taught her to practice moderation in regards to her husband's extra-marital affair. While the 'impossible' had happened and her husband had left the paternal estate, Tseten Chozom continued to comport herself in a way that is remarkably close to the feminine ideal described by Tsering Norzom Thonsur, former Vice President of the Tibetan Women's Association: "Women from a young age were taught to be polite and faithful to their men. Culture and moral values had a great impact on the daily lives of women in Tibet, they voluntarily took a back seat in society, and this had nothing to do with gender discrimination per se. Women always treated the husband as the head of the family and gave him due respect" (2004, 235).

While women were called upon to put the needs of the husband before their own and live up to the expectations of the calm, kind, and faithful wife, a completely different set of norms applied to Tibetan men. The following quote by Barbara Nimri Aziz (1978) exemplifies the unequal standards by which Dingri Tibetans were judged:

It is interesting that in general social situations much more is expected of a woman than of a man. Complementing this, women, when they are badly behaved, are subject to severe criticism—far more than a man. The male in this society may be thought to be more like an animal, easily pardoned for carelessness, for ignorance and for harsh ways. While man may lose control and be forgiven, women are not given this license. (1978, 180)

The apparent 'double standard' that was applied to men and women in Dingri can be traced in Yuthok and Tsering's narratives. To operate under a fundamentally different set of criteria, must certainly have had serious implications for women's identity, self-esteem and the ways in which they saw themselves. Despite her high social standing,

Dorje Yudon Yuthok saw herself nevertheless limited to challenge or change decisions made by male relatives that greatly impinged on their freedom and wellbeing. Having witnessed how her mother coped with the shame of being left for another woman, Yuthok herself seems to have well internalized this double standard of women's compliance with men's freedoms as she keeps up the appearance of a fully-functioning marriage when her husband, too, began to openly have an affair with another woman during his time as the Governor of Kham.

Although her husband had been unfaithful on a regular basis when they were living in Lhasa, Yuthok tries to come to terms with these infidelities by justifying that "he used to be exceptionally kind to [her] after he had gone to another woman" and generally tried to keep these extra-marital affairs a secret from her (1995, 228). While this seems an act of moral self-policing to rationalize her husband's behavior, Yuthok's acceptance of her husband's frequent infidelity can also be read in the context of her general meditation on the expectations of marital coexistence along gendered lines: "It was our custom in Tibet among high as well as low families that the husband should be the head of the household. The man always preceded the woman when walking or speaking. When a woman showed respect to her husband people would say that she was well-behaved" (1995, 163). It is evident that social constructions of femininity and masculinity, and by extension female and male sexuality, were heavily scripted and social recognition hinged on the execution of the above-mentioned etiquette.

These expectations can indeed be found even today in the discourse of the Central Tibetan Administration. Pema Dechen Gorap, Member of the Assembly of Tibetan People's Deputies, announced in the cover story of the 1994 May-June edition of the Tibetan Bulletin, that Tibetan women should be "women-like: decent, self-

confident, self-reliant, loving, caring, concerned and conscious of her duty to her family, society and the world” (1994, n.pg). Gorap’s ideal of a Tibetan woman in exile today is strikingly similar to the expectations voiced by Yuthok and Tsering; and while the potential radius of a woman’s involvement has widened to include “society and the world”, her responsibility rests first and foremost with the family where she is to exercise decidedly ‘feminine’ qualities of nurture and care.

Yuthok is deeply hurt by the infidelity of her husband yet she seems to bear no grudge against her husband’s mistress; her review of the situation is telling not only of the inequality between the sexes but also of the internalization of the moral and sexual standard applied to women in contrast to men:

Husbands are expected to love their wives and try not to hurt them, which of course includes being faithful. It was my husband’s own duty to fulfill these moral obligations to me. Nevertheless, it was his weakness to seduce other women and to have affairs with them. Since [his mistress] had not tried to attract him, there seemed to me no ground to blame her falling under his spell” (1995, 227)

In Yuthok’s portrayal, women have the ability to recognize their feelings and desires but seem to have little power to act upon them; recognizing a connection between women in this loss of agency to challenge the demands made on them by men, her anger towards the mistress of her husband subsides. In Yuthok’s experience, women lack the power to bluntly reject male desires and wishes, an understanding that is shared by Diki Tsering. In her evaluation, the relationship between wife and husband was “not one of equality” but “[t]he woman was always subservient to the man” (2000, 74). This gender asymmetry is further accentuated when Tsering recounts her long hours of work while admitting that her husband was meanwhile “gambling and having a good time” (2000, 74).

The seeming lack of empowerment, cultural or social, to question the hierarchy of desires has dire consequences for Yuthok's marriage. In the same manner her mother had sought reconciliation with her estranged husband, Dorje Yudon Yuthok "warned him [that] ... there was the danger of losing our respect for each other, which was sure to happen if he still kept on [having affairs]" (1995, 228). Admitting that these fights were fueled by "desperation", Yuthok concludes that despite her appeals to the respect he owed her and her family, she was in no position "to bring any change in his habits" (1995, 229). Almost exactly a reenactment of her parents' marriage breakdown, Yuthok painfully learns that her influence in determining the outcome of her marriage, too, is severely limited. Not being in the powerful position to call an ultimatum, Yuthok, like Tseten Chozom, attempts to reason with her husband and is devastated to find out that he quickly calls for a divorce:

I was shocked when I realized that he had already worked out every detail in his mind, but again I asked him if he really meant it. His reply was very firm. He had decided that each should lead our own lives in whatever way pleased us. I would be free to decide whether I wanted a religious or mundane life, and he also would be free. On hearing this last remark I became very angry. [...] Up until this time I had always tried to cultivate some understanding between us but now I realized all had been in vain. I was very disheartened to hear his firm decision but I tried to console myself that in the end my life would be happier if we were separate; to continue a life like this was nothing but misery. (1995, 229-230)

What stands out in this passage is, once again, the husband's supreme position in the relationship; the fact that 'he had already worked out every detail' before discussing the possibility of divorce with Yuthok, signals his status as the head of household and his authority to assert and enforce this decision regardless of his wife's opinion on the matter. Tsering adds emphasis to this power inequality between husband and wife by recounting that "[i]f the husband was dissatisfied with the marriage, he could end it at will" and that in the case of divorce, "the husband was the main signatory" (2000, 69) of

the separation document. Although members of the aristocracy needed to seek permission from the government, the divorce could in any case not be legalized without the husband's consent, while women on the other hand, seemed to have few options, if any, to achieve a different outcome if her partner wished for a legal separation.

Although Yuthok is repeatedly disappointed by her husband's selfish decisions and Tsering's capacity for endured hardship is often tested during her marriage, particularly during the early years, both seem to find quiet empowerment and solace in their care for their children and grandchildren after in the later part of their lives. At the beginning of facing life alone, Yuthok is distressed by the thought of spending her days without the stability of the institution of marriage and Tsering faces severe challenges after the death of her husband. Indicating that intrigues in Lhasa were responsible for the death of her husband and caused great difficulty to the Fourteenth Dalai Lama and the rest of her family, Diki Tsering likens the death of her husband to a "crucial test" to which she "stood up to it with courage and determination, never letting anyone undermine [her] spirits, though many in power tried to take advantage of [her] naiveté and lack of education" (2000, 129).

Similarly, Yuthok recounts that on returning from Kham without her husband, "I finally forced to myself to be realistic and soon set about making positive plans to organize a new life for myself and my children. Now that the Chamdo part of my life was over and my marriage was finished, I had to face the future alone with my children" (1995, 238). It is not only the swift adjustment to their new situation that is remarkable; both women display an extraordinary amount of resolve not to be beaten by adversities but to engage with and ultimately overcome the vicissitudes of life. In this sense, I read Yuthok and Tsering's resolution to dedicate their lives to the wellbeing of others as an

empowering redefinition of the feminine ideals they had been raised to be understood as “Buddhist ideals of selflessness and renunciation [that] are institutionalized in ordinary aspects of life: caring for others, putting others’ before one’s own, patiently enduring pain, cheerfully ignoring deprivation” (Tsomo 1999, 181).

3.3 Conclusion

This Chapter has followed Diki Tsering and Dorje Yudon Yuthok’s intimate portrayals of childhood and marriage. In their focus on the ‘soft and marginal’ sources such as childhood, adolescence and marriage that constitute, both women writers offer a significant extension of Tibetan history of the early decades of the twentieth century. While the contemporary nationalist discourse in exile espouses the view of a gender enlightened Tibetan society, *House with a Turquoise Roof* and *Dalai Lama, my son* complicate the favorable representation of women’s equality in the home and *vis-à-vis* their family and husbands. Depicting how social expectations of normative femininity elevated expressions of calmness and kindness, even in the face of great adversity, both life narratives open a space for an understanding of the social demands that accompanies this image of femininity. It must be seen as restrictive, not only because it attempts to fix women into an unchanging ideal, but because non-compliance with this feminine ideal was consequently judged as deviant, unfeminine behavior.

Although Yuthok and Tsering came from very different backgrounds, their life narratives allow us to understand that regardless of class and region, both women saw themselves and the women around them to be guided by a hegemonic Tibetan female morality that was grounded in patriarchal views of the nature of the feminine (Cabezón 1992). Neither rebellious nor overtly feminist, these two life narratives quietly tell

histories of the home and the family that help to diversify our knowledge and enrich our understanding of the lives of Tibetan women at the beginning of the twentieth century. While Tsering and Yuthok narrated their lives from within the fabric of the family, the next chapter will examine the life narrative by Rinchen Dölma Taring who moved from the house into the public sphere to carve out a space for women who ventured beyond the walls of their homely lives.

CHAPTER FOUR

Re-imagining the Past:

Tradition, change and ‘indigenous modernity’ in *Daughter of Tibet*

In 1922, Rinchen Dölma Taring became the first Tibetan female student at the Queen’s Hill for Girls in Darjeeling. After completing her middle school years in India, Taring returned to Lhasa in 1926 to accept the role of secretary to Dasang Damdul Tsarong in his growing international import and export business. In this position, Taring acted as the metaphorical bridge between her brother-in-law Tsarong and the various commercial partners. She oversaw accounts, the import and export of goods and corresponded in Tibetan and English with a large number of merchants and banks across the Tibetan Plateau, in China, Mongolia, Japan, and British India and as far as

France. These activities were by no means unique to the Tsarong family: following the Younghusband mission of 1904, Tibet slowly moved into the British financial and cultural orbit, which facilitated a greater exposure to foreign, particularly Western, commodities and knowledge.

An increasing number of Tibetans, including several women, realized the opportunity for the opening of Tibetan society to modern technologies and knowledge, and the progressive faction within the government actively fostered this exchange with other countries, particularly with British India. These modernization efforts were met with fierce resistance by the conservative factions in the government and monasteries thus resulting in their gradual abandonment and the government's turning away from modernization. Although this anti-modernization movement had dire consequences for individuals in Tibetan society and significantly shaped the trajectory of Tibet as a nation, its reasons have neither been fully explored in exile histories nor are critical discussions about the role of conservative monastics and aristocrats encouraged within the exile community.²⁶

Chinese propaganda has continuously used this return to a more isolationist attitude of the Tibetan state as justification for its 'liberation' of Tibetan society from its state of 'medieval stagnation'. Tibetan exile rhetoric, on the other hand, has not fully capitalized on this earlier modernization project to refute Chinese claims of Tibet as a feudal, isolated and backward society. In order to gain international support and recognition, exile publications circulate the image of a 'positively traditional' society in which Buddhist traditions helped to foster peaceful and harmonious relations between

²⁶ My view of the lack of criticism in the Tibetan exile community refers to written and printed comments; particularly the Tibetan Youth Congress (TYC) has been vocal in their critique of traditional power structures and the role of the monastic and governmental conservatism in aborting many modern reforms in Tibet in the decades leading up to the Chinese invasion.

the government and its people throughout the different regions. Though favored also by a segment of Western supporters, these romanticized depictions neither allow for serious discussions of social tensions nor of political shortcomings. To a large extent, they also circumscribe the possibility for open critique regarding the power machinations between different political and ideological factions in pre-Communist Tibet. Until the 1980s, critical representations of the interregnum period with its internal power struggles, and the reasons for Tibet's abandonment of its modernization efforts were missing from historical accounts and the life narratives of influential Tibetan officials (T. Gyatso 1962; Shakapba 1967, 2010; Norbu and Turnbull 1969; among others).

In contrast, however, a small number of life writings published in English by non-governmental officials has begun to fill this gap by offering political details in their personal histories.²⁷ These authors critically view the strategy of receiving support via an idealistic representation of Tibet and thus attempt to present a more balanced and complex view of Tibet during the first half of the twentieth century:

Writers, both Tibetan and Western, have in the past projected an image of Tibet that is not only deceptive but also harmful to the Tibetan cause—the romantic and mystical image of Shangri-la, where lamas fly like birds, where everyone is religious and everyone is happy. While there is some truth in such a view, it does exaggerate one aspect of Tibet at the exclusion of other, disturbing elements. (D. Norbu 1997, ix)

Rinchen Dölma Taring's *Daughter of Tibet* ([1970] 1986) was the first exile life narrative to focus on the history of Tibetan modernization while critically examining the subsequent thwarting of these efforts through political intrigue and corruption in government circles. *Daughter of Tibet* therefore marks not only the genesis of exile

²⁷ See for example, Tsewang Pemba's life narrative *Young Days in Tibet* (1957) and his novel *Idols on the Path* (1966); Dawa Norbu's account of his youth in Shakyia, *Red Star over Tibet* (1974).

Tibetan women's life writing but as the first woman to pen her life story in exile, Taring also created a vivid and insightful account of twentieth century Tibetan politics from the Thirteenth Dalai Lama's exile to India and the following tumultuous times under the Reting/Taktra regency, to the aristocracy's collaboration with the Chinese until the flight of the Fourteenth Dalai Lama in March 1959.

Although criticism of the traditional Tibetan government was considered a particular threat to the Tibetan cause in the first decades of exile, Taring insists on publicizing a powerfully revisionist history of the period between 1911 and 1959 in which she details political failure, corruption, ignorance, and decadence among the Lhasa clergy and aristocracy. Setting out to be a corrective on several accounts, *Daughter of Tibet* not only undermines Dharamsala's idealized portrayal of pre-Communist Tibet; it also counteracts Chinese allegations of Tibet as a decidedly non-modern and backward country by tracing moments of internationalization throughout its cultural and social history from the eighth until the twentieth century. Thus, by detailing both resistance to any form of (modern) changes and successful efforts to modernize, Taring's life narrative strikes a delicate balance between defending and critiquing Tibetan society and government. As the reasons for the failure of this modernization project are complex and had not been dealt with adequately prior to 1970, her investigation into the sustained efforts to open up Tibet on the one hand and their obstruction by conservative factions on the other provides important insights into the various histories of twentieth century Tibet.

With historiography still firmly in the hands of male historians at the time of publication of *Daughter in Tibet*, the narrative furthermore interrupts both generic and genderic boundaries that have marginalized women and their life narratives and

excluded them from the archives of ‘official history’. In contrast to the life histories by eminent male authors, women writers were viewed as “culturally insignificant” and hence their narratives were “themselves culturally insignificant” (S. Smith 1987, 14). This omission not only impoverishes the histories composed in the exile community; it also reinforces the professional bias that historiography is a domain that values an overwhelmingly male point of view. Women’s writing of history is clearly not enough; the discursive exclusion imposed on their histories still operates to silence their voices (Spivak 1988).

Resisting the categorization of the historian as male, Rinchen Dölma Taring utilizes the genre of life writing to voice divergent (and dissident) versions of history and illustrates thereby, the gendered politics of historiography. Deviating from the assumed focus of women’s life writing with inner worlds and relationships, Taring’s account freely blends the personal, family and political history. In so doing, her life narrative can be read as an example of a “literary rebellion against the exclusion of women from historical discourse” (Neumeier qtd in Gruss 2009, 245). This Chapter therefore contains in its title the reference to *Daughter of Tibet* quite deliberately posing it as a creative intervention into the practice of historiography: by challenging genre boundaries and their arbitrary nature including the facile demarcation between life writing and historiography; it also highlights the constructed nature of historiography and the narrative nature of all histories, official and personal. While reviewers of the life narrative have reinforced the genre/gender divide by highlighting the portrayal of family history, this chapter seeks to create a space for *Daughter of Tibet* as an important historical account and key text for Tibetan exile historiography.

By following the narrative's layered technique, I have chosen to divide this Chapter into three story circles: the personal, the political, and the personal-is-political. Firstly, I will discuss Taring's self-authorization in the literary genre as a historian of twentieth century Tibet. I will then move on to discuss Taring's tracing of Tibetan internationalization and modernization, exploring her interpretations of the failure to implement an indigenous modernity. Lastly, I analyse how Taring's multiple (hi)stories come together in an effort to position her family and herself as the embodiment of a truly Tibetan spirit, establishing her authority for educating the next generations of exile Tibetans in the spirit of an indigenous Tibetan modernity (Tib. *deng rabs kyi bsam blo*).²⁸

4.1 Self-authorization in life writing

From the beginning of exile, the Central Tibetan Administration has welcomed the writing of life narratives that detail the social and political situation in pre-Communist Tibet. Considered important testimonies against the unlawful colonization by China, the CTA values these publications as 'soft weapons' (Whitlock 2207) in their battle to influence international opinion. The politically fragile situation of exile has helped to democratize the genre of traditional Tibetan hagiography, allowing men and women from non-monastic and non-aristocratic backgrounds to circulate their life stories and thus aid the Tibetan cause internationally. The boundaries of traditional Tibetan autobiography have thus been widened to include various forms of life writing, containing life stories by women whose narratives had previously been considered

²⁸ While 'modernity' is not in fact an indigenous Tibetan word, a reasonable translation of the concept might be 'modern way of thinking' (Tib. *deng rabs kyi bsam blo*). I would like to thank David Templeman for discussing the nuances of the Tibetan terminology with me.

culturally and historically ‘insignificant’ (S. Smith 1987, 14). Although they raise certain uncomfortable questions regarding gender relations and hierarchies in pre-1950 Tibet, women’s life stories are now nevertheless deemed worthy of circulation because they also firmly reinforce the CTA’s position on the colonial nature of the Chinese presence in Tibet. As the selected narratives in Chapter Three show, some Tibetan women’s writing is firmly anchored in the realm of the domestic, offering important and thus far neglected insights into the private sphere of pre-1950 Tibet. Mirroring the heterogeneity of women’s life experiences, other life narratives, such as *Daughter of Tibet*, transcend the private to focus on the larger national story.²⁹

Disregarding these different foci, historians and critics of life writing the world over have for a long time recognized only so-called feminine qualities within women’s life writings, namely interiority and relationality (Smith and Watson 1998, 7-8; Jelinek 1980). In both Western and Tibetan traditions, women’s writings were therefore seldom taken seriously as historical documents in themselves or considered as evidence for history in the making. Therefore, and in spite of Rinchen Dölma Taring’s explicit focus on the political history of twentieth century Tibet, her life story is still simply regarded as representative of ‘the Tibetan female experience’. Reviews of *Daughter of Tibet* generally sideline her insights into the complex political history and instead, applaud the life narrative for throwing “an intimate light on Tibetan family life and customs and on aspects of Tibetan domestic history in the past fifty years” (Richardson in Taring 1970, 10). While details about the domestic loom large in Tibetan women’s writing and are equally important ways to understand history and culture, we need to be careful to pay

²⁹ This phenomenon is not limited to creative processes in the Tibetan exile; the mixing of geography, history and testimony have also been used inside the Tibet Autonomous Region. One example of this is the multi-volume series *Bod kyi lo rgyus rig gnas dpyad gzhi’i rgya cha bdams bsgrigs*. I would like to thank David Templeman for alerting me to this significant literary output.

the same attention to stories that transcend the home and the house. To read women's life writings narrowly in fact reinforces the propagation of gendered domains of influence and effectively denies the possibility of women as public, and specifically, as political historians.

The blending of personal and national history, and indeed the enmeshment of both, is a frequent *topos* in traditional male Tibetan auto/biographies and a small but significant stream of eminent Tibetan male personae have been used as sources in Tibetan histories. Women's life writing, on the other hand, has not been considered as a valuable source of historical knowledge. Positioned outside the genres of traditional autobiography and history, women's writing has generally not been accorded the same degree of representativeness for the ideas, values and indeed the *Zeitgeist* of their period (Marcus 1994, 230). While life histories of women have therefore been at the margins of this literary genre, they have been treated with even more skepticism in their portrayal of historical events and have very rarely been read as historical material or as histories in themselves. The following section examines Rinchen Dölma Taring's literary strategies to authorize herself to present a legitimate interpretation of Tibetan history.

4.1.1 *Legitimizing the Self*

From the beginning of *Daughter of Tibet*, Rinchen Dölma Taring questions predominant assumptions about the production of a legitimate subject-position in life writing. Neither linear nor simply the story of an individual, this life narrative queries the seemingly uncomplicated convergence of author and subject. Philippe Lejeune was the first critic to articulate a theory of "the autobiographical pact" between writer and

reader in which the “deep signature” promises that author, narrator and protagonist are identical (1982, 4-5, 12). This “social contract” also quasi-legally binds the autobiographer to tell the truth. This “pact” assures the reader that the *proper name* literally mirrors author and protagonist so that we can trust that the name on the cover actually refers to a verifiable “real person” (Lejeune 1982, 11). Julia Watson argues that for the so-called “father texts” of autobiography, namely those written by the “great men of history,” the name confers authenticity and acts as “a guarantor of identity, a claim to visible public status and unique individuality” (1994, 96).

Watson’s telling characterization of ‘father texts’ indicates that questions of gender lie at the heart of the deep signature. Leigh Gilmore astutely observes in this context that “[f]or men, the mythology of the signature involves either the empowerment or the anxiety of influence: tradition, genealogy, and the legacy of naming constitute a mutual heritage” (1994, 81). A name thus signifies not simply a verifiable person but indeed a person, on whom patriarchy has bestowed the privilege to assert their authority in the present through their rightful place in, we can safely say, a *patrilineage*. Gender therefore plays a significant role in authorizing a writing subject to ascertain genealogical affiliation. In contrast to male life writers, Gilmore stresses that for women “the fiction that our names signify our true identities obscures the extent to which our names are thought of not as our own but as the legal signifier of a man’s property” (1994, 81). Writing and speaking has been the prerogative of (privileged) male subjects and so, women writing self and history are transgressing not only generic boundaries but also gender boundaries. The fact that women’s stories have been historically marginalized or even made invisible, hinges in part on the authority of the signature and furthermore their authority to claim their legitimate position within the lineage. Women, Carolyn Heilbrun suggests, “have been deprived of narratives, or of

texts, plots or examples, by which they might assume power over—take control of—their own lives” (1988, 17) and by extension of their own life narratives.

This is salient also in the Tibetan context where the “bone repository” *rus mdzod*, which documents genealogies and histories of clans and family, is associated with the male line. As explained in Chapter Three, *rus* has a special male referent and alludes to the inextricable linking of lineage and masculine strength. While women are part of the genealogies comprised in the bone repository, they cannot directly lay claim to their lineages other than through recourse to their male ancestors, an important aspect when considering the relation between the proper name and the author’s authoritative subject position in traditional Tibetan autobiography. As Janet Gyatso points out, autobiography is the literary expression of a more general Tibetan inclination for “relating narratives of origin” (1998, 117). Used to record a wide variety of customs and histories and used in resolving legal disputes, the production of genealogies is perhaps best known in the context of establishing kinship networks and claims to membership of a particular ancestral lineage. Establishing a past is paramount for the grounding of a stable identity and a unified self, or put differently, to know one’s past is to affirm legitimacy in the present. The next section will explore Rinchen Dölma Taring’s claim to her origin narrative through an elaborate historical sweep of the most outstanding male ancestors.

4.1.2 An Illustrious Family Lineage

In order to establish legitimacy, Tibetan male and female authors have traditionally taken recourse either to secular or religious origin narratives. Closely following in this tradition, Taring opens her life narrative by invoking her patrilineage:

“My father, Tsarong Shap-pé Wangchuk Gyalpo, was descended from the earliest and most celebrated Tibetan physician, Yuthok Yönten Gonpo, who wrote several classical medical works and lived during the reign of King Trisong Detsen (A.D. 755—797)” (1986, 1). The biographer Darmo Lobsang Chödrak (1638—1710) credits Yuthok the Elder with having been the personal doctor to King Trisong Detsen as well as being renowned as an internationally physician who had studied the medical traditions of India and China (Kunzang 1976, 202-209). Regarded as a manifestation of the Medicine Buddha (Tib. *sangs rgyas sman lha*), Yuthok Yönten Gonpo was also credited with having composed the commentary to the *Four Medical Tantras* (Tib. *rgyud-bzhi*), the founding text of the Tibetan medical tradition. Around 790 CE, Yuthok founded and funded the first Tibetan medical school (Wernsdörfer 2008, 77). At the first international medical conference held in Tibet, which took place sometime before the famous Debate of Samye (792–794 CE), Yuthok represented the Tibetan medical system and engaged in debate with other physicians from Persia, India, China, Kashmir and Nepal (Wernsdörfer 2008, 75). With Yuthok Yönten Gonpo as her family’s progenitor, Taring traces the beginnings of her lineage back to the so-called Dharma Kings and the Imperial Era (7th—9th century CE) thus affirming her family’s ancient origins. Many noble families claim to trace their lineages back to the Imperial period because the established link would thus anchor them to a time of purity, similar to what Eliade refers to as *illud tempus*. The Imperial period is thus axiomatic for Tibetan history because it marks the beginnings of Tibetan Buddhist civilization and indeed, Tibetan historiography itself when a unified Tibetan kingdom extended its political and cultural reach throughout Central Asia (Schaeffer, Kapstein, and Tuttle 2013, ix).

Apart from the progenitor of her lineage, Taring names several other outstanding individuals who had contributed to the social and political status and esteem the

Tsarong family enjoyed. During the eighteenth century, one of her male ancestor was appointed Lord Chamberlain in the Tibetan government. As *Chi-Kyap Khempo* (Tib. *spyi khyab mkhan po*), Kelsang Chodak held the highest religious position after the Dalai Lama with full responsibility for “His Holiness’s personal household and ... both his personal treasury and the official treasury of the Potala” (Taring 1986, 29). Despite these important ancestors, it was not until the nineteenth century that the Tsarong family was elevated to the rank of Midrag (Tib. *mi drag*).³⁰ Taring’s paternal grandfather *Tsi-pon* (Tib. *rtsi dpon*) Tsarong was “one of the strongest characters among the Tibetan nobility of the day” (Taring 1986, 19), who played a significant role in the Sikkim-Tibet border dispute between the British in India and the Tibetan government. Wary of an increased British presence and dominance in Tibetan border areas since the 1860s, the Tibetan government had viewed the incorporation of Sikkim as a ‘princely state’ into British India as encroachment into their traditional relationship with this Himalayan kingdom. Suspicions regarding British designs in the Tibetan borderlands increased when the Tibetan government became aware of British preparations to enter into Tibetan territory in 1885/6.

After repeated attempts at establishing diplomatic ties with the Dalai Lama and his government had been unsuccessful, the British Government of India made use of the 1876 amended (Anglo-Chinese) Chefoo Convention to obtain access to Tibet in order to establish an alternative trade route to China as well as to open markets in Tibet. Having learnt of the British design to send an exploratory mission under Colman Macaulay on

³⁰ Petech (1972) and Yuthok (1990) list four subcategories of the nobility based on family lineage and politico-economic influence: yabshi (Tib. *yab gzhis*), depön (Tib. *mda’ dpon*), midrag (Tib. *mi drag*) and gerpa (Tib. *sger pa*). Of these four, the six yabshi families, a rank bestowed on the families of the successive Dalai Lamas, held the highest rank. Depön families descended from the early rulers of Tibetan history and held powerful positions in local and national government. Including aristocrats from the subcategory midrag, these three divisions possessed the greatest concentration of political and financial privileges in Tibet. According to Yuthok, the majority of noble families belonged to the fourth subdivision called gerpa who administered estates but rarely held government positions.

Chinese-issued passports for Tibet, the Tibetan government defied the Chinese government by sending *Tsi-pon* Tsarong with a group of armed men across the border into Sikkim, in order to “take up position in an old fort at Lingtu overlooking the route which the British party would probably follow” (Lamb 1989, 5). ³¹A stalemate ensued which was only resolved in 1888 after a British regiment drove the Tibetans back over the border into Tibet. Although defeated, the Tibetans did not seem to relent in their efforts to establish their authority over Sikkim, which they regarded as a traditional Tibetan sphere of influence, and thus both sides across the border remained apprehensive. Taring’s assessment of the British attitude towards the Tibetan demarcation of its national borders with Sikkim as “a little troublesome” (1986, 19) downplays the greater political implications of the Chefoo Convention as well as Britain’s deliberate shying away from clarifying Tibet’s international status *vis-à-vis* China. Her account further fails to convey the dismay caused by the Convention among Tibetan officials. This lenient attitude towards Britain, which is also evident in some other Tibetan exile histories, may be explained by Taring’s early acculturation in the British system and her family’s overall pro-British position; her choice to be published by a well-known British publishing house and the understanding that her life narrative was therefore to be circulated in Britain and other English-speaking countries would have contributed to the positive portrayal of Britain’s relations with Tibet.

Nonetheless, her reference to the border incident offers an important glimpse into the beginnings of Anglo-Tibetan relations and valuable insights into Tibetan

³¹ The Chinese Amban Sheng Tai stationed in Lhasa attempted to assuage the situation and signed the Sikkim-Tibet Convention with the British Viceroy Lord Lansdowne in 1890, acknowledging thus that Sikkim was a British protectorate as well as conceding measures for trade and official communication between British India and Tibet. Since the Convention was drawn up and signed without Tibetan involvement, the Tibetans actively undermined concessions the Chinese had made on their behalf. It therefore became clear to the British in India that Chinese sovereignty over Tibet was effectively a myth (Lamb 1989, 5; see also Kellam 2003).

understanding of its sovereignty and the assertion and exercise of those powers, including the rejection of Chinese claims over influence in Tibetan state affairs. Indicative of a Tibetan awareness of international treaties and the ensuing need to protect its borders also effectively neutralizes claims of the country's complete isolation from international relations. Rather, this border dispute illustrates, in Jamyang Norbu's evaluation, the emergence of "an assertive, even aggressive "nationalistic" spirit [which] manifested itself in the Tibetan response to British colonial advances and Imperial Chinese machinations in Tibet" (J. Norbu 2013, n.pg) By framing the 1886 incident as Tibet's assertion of national territorial integrity, Taring reinforces the exile government's position of Tibetan independence prior to 1951.

Continuing his father's work in negotiating with the British, Tsarong Wangchuk Gyalpo met for talks with Colonel Francis Younghusband at Khampa Dzong in 1903 regarding renewed British interest in sending a mission to Tibet.³² In the course of acting as one of the negotiators at the Sikkim-Tibet border, Tsarong Wangchuk Gyalpo was promoted to the rank of Cabinet Minister or *Shap-pé* (Tib. *zhabs pad*) by direct appointment from the Thirteenth Dalai Lama (Taring 1986, 31).³³ After failed negotiations at the border, Colonel Younghusband pressed on to Lhasa, killing and wounding large numbers of Tibetans on the way and forcing the representatives of the Tibetan government to accept a treaty which conceded trade rights and political access

³² Coined by Rudyard Kipling in his novel *Kim* (1901), the term „Great Game" refers to the power race between Britain and Russia for hegemony in Central Asia. As Tibet was considered a natural buffer in Central Asia, the establishment of relations was of major interest to both powers. At the height of the Great Game with fear of Russian designs to establish a presence in Tibet, the incumbent Viceroy Lord Curzon saw his repeated attempts to enter into diplomatic relations with the Tibetan government constantly rebuffed. Frustrated at this impasse and convinced of Russian advances in the region, Curzon "devised a scheme by which the situation on the Sikkim-Tibet border would be exploited to provide justification of sorts for the dispatch of a formidable British Mission ... to Lhasa to force the Dalai Lama to enter into some kind of dialogue with the Indian Empire" (Lamb 1989, 8).

³³ The chief executive organ of the Tibetan government, the Kashag, consisted of three lay members from the aristocracy and one high-ranking monastic member. According to Richardson, the Kashag was not „a cabinet in which each member had a special portfolio but all the Councillors, known as Shap-pé (Lotus-foot) or Kalon (Minister of Council), had corporate responsibility" (1962, 21).

to Tibet (Lamb 1989; McKay 2003b; Powers 2004).³⁴ In the absence of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama, who had sought refuge in Mongolia, Tsarong *Shap-pé* was one of the four Cabinet Ministers to sign the treaty. Although stipulating a number of trade-related conditions in favor of the British, the treaty is now considered as an important bi-lateral agreement because it does not mention Qing authority in Tibet (Schwieger 2015, 334). Understanding this to be important historical evidence for Tibet's *de facto* independence, Tibetan exile historians therefore downplay the conditions under which the Lhasa Convention was signed and instead, emphasize the fact that Tibet signed bi-lateral agreements directly with foreign powers.

Particular emphasis is given to Article IX of the Lhasa Convention to support the exile Tibetan claim that China was indeed a foreign power with no sovereign or suzerain rights over the Tibetan polity (Shakapba 1967, 217-218).³⁵ In her description of the historic event at which her father was present, Taring writes with confidence: “This Convention—which forbade us to have any relations with any foreign power other than Britain—made it quite clear that Britain was dealing with us as an independent country, over which China had no control of any kind” (1986, 32). Although the Anglo-Chinese Convention of 1906 reinstated the suzerain rights of China *vis-à-vis* Tibet and effectively nullified the concessions Britain had received in the 1904 treaty, Tibetan exile histories focus specifically on the Lhasa Convention and the later Tibet Trade Regulations of 1908, which were drawn up as an amendment to the latter

³⁴ For detailed discussions of the Younghusband expedition refer, for instance, to Addy 1984 and Allen 2004.

³⁵ In Article IX, the British government stipulated that without its consent, the Tibetan government could not cede, mortgage or lease any part of its territory to any foreign power and neither could any other foreign power intervene in Tibetan domestic affairs, send representatives to Tibet nor could foreign countries obtain concessions for railroads, telegraphs, mining etc. or receive Tibetan revenues (cf. Shakapba 1967, 217-218; see also Schwieger 2015).

agreement.³⁶ In his position as *Shap-pé*, Tsarong was indeed heavily involved with both treaties and in 1907 he was sent to India to pay the first instalment of the reparation payments, which had been imposed on Tibet as a result of the Younghusband military mission. One year later, Tsarong *Shap-pé* was present at the amendment of the Anglo-Chinese Convention (1906) into the new Tibet Trade Regulations of 1908. Having shown himself to be a reliable negotiator, Tsarong was lastly appointed as assistant to the Regent when the Thirteenth Dalai Lama had to seek political asylum for the second time within six years. Ironically, this time he fled Lhasa to British India from advancing Qing troops under Zhong Ying. Suspected of collaboration with the Chinese representatives in Tibet and of general pro-Chinese leanings, Tsarong and his son Samdup Tsering were assassinated in 1912, a significant event in Taring's family history to which I will return later.

It was during this tumultuous period that the last of Taring's influential male family members came to fame in the Tibetan political pantheon. Although not from an aristocratic family, Chensal Namgang quickly rose in ranks after he had impressed the Thirteenth Dalai Lama with his intelligence as an assistant to the headmaster of the monk-officials' school (Taring 1986, 34). Having accompanied the Dalai Lama into exile to Mongolia, he distinguished himself during the second flight into exile when he "stopped the Chinese pursuers at Chaksam Ferry" (Taring 1986, 34) staying behind the

³⁶ Peter Schwieger summarizes that the 1906 Anglo-Chinese Convention „amendments confirmed that China was not to be regarded as a foreign power in Tibet and that the government of China was the highest authority in Tibetan affairs. ... This also encouraged the Qing government to reduce British influence in Lhasa and to continue military campaigns into Eastern Tibet which had started the year before and by which the entire area of East Tibet should be subjected to direct Chinese rule" (2015, 335). Amy Kellam (2003) argues that Britain's attempt to define the Sino-Tibetan relationship under the term 'suzerainty' was furthermore a political strategy to maintain Tibet as a neutral buffer state in Central Asia. The acknowledgment of Tibet as a tributary state to Imperial China while tacitly confirming it as a de-facto independent country thus meant that Tibet was "neither wholly part of the British Empire nor wholly part of the Chinese Empire" (Kellam 2003, 192). While Tibet was therefore not in a colonial relation with either imperial power, its government was nevertheless prevented from engaging in bilateral treaties with Russia. Britain's fear of a Russian encroachment to the Indian border was therefore curbed.

official entourage to defend it. In honour of his services to protect the Dalai Lama, the “Hero of Chaksam” (Taring 1986, 35) Chensal Namgang was promoted to the role of Commander-in-Chief of the Tibetan army and sent to Lhasa to aid the newly established War Department in ousting the Chinese troops (Shakapba 1967, 241). After the murder of Tsarong *Shap-pé*, the Thirteenth Dalai Lama ennobled Chensal Namgang as the head of the Tsarong household by arranging his marriage to Tsarong Rigzin Chodon and Tsarong Pemal Dolkar. Dasang Damdul Tsarong was a thoroughly progressive Tibetan and was admired and feared for reforming the Tibetan Army along British lines and for being an outspoken advocate for free, modern education and the gradual implementation of modern institutional reform. Although he was later demoted from his positions as Commander-in-Chief and Cabinet Minister, Dasang Damdul continued to work for the Tibetan government in defence and finance roles until the Chinese take-over and was held in great esteem for his services to the Thirteenth Dalai Lama by many of his contemporaries.

In Tibetan aristocratic terms, the Tsarong family was neither exceedingly rich nor particularly highly ranked; a family from the subclass Midrag, the Tsarongs were not as revered as Yabshi (Tib. *yab gzhis*) or Depön (Tib. *mda' dpon*) families. As a noble family which was able to trace their origins to the Imperial period, the Tsarongs nevertheless belonged to the politically and financially influential upper stratum of Tibet. Heidi Fjeld (2005) argues that one's belonging to a certain class division (Tib. *rigs*) would inevitably give information about one's identity as well as about one's participation and influence in Tibetan culture. To be born into a noble family thus bestowed not only a certain amount of wealth and comfort but more importantly, a high degree of respect and belief in their moral superiority (Fjeld 2005, x). Regarded as the repositories and custodians of Tibetan cultural knowledge and values, the aristocracy

held a powerful and elite position in pre-Communist Tibetan society. In *The People of Tibet*, Bell illustrates this position by emphasizing that “[t]he nobility are a class apart. There is in many respects a great gulf fixed between them and ordinary folk who bow down low before them and use a different vocabulary in addressing them” (1928, 64). This respect was granted to families of noble rank *irrespective* of their wealth and was assumed to be linked to Tibetan notions of “ritual purity and morality” inherent to a person’s station in the social and local hierarchy (Fjeld 2005, 25). Fjeld explains this phenomenon in the following way: “There seem to have been two different, coexisting norm systems defining social categories and the subdivisions within each: one based on economic and political standards, and another based on purity, morality and religion” (2005, 25). Social, economic and political influence was thus equally as significant for Tibetans as religico-cultural concepts of purity and values. Though lacking in major material possessions, the Tsarong family seems to have been regarded highly in ‘moral and value’ terms, which Taring harnesses to add legitimacy and historical authority to the political history within her life narrative.

4.1.3 *In the footsteps of her ancestors*

It is this aristocratic background that enabled Taring herself to become part of this illustrious line of modernizers. As the first first Tibetan woman to be enrolled in a Western school in British India, Rinchen Dölma Taring became a lifelong advocate for education in Tibet and in exile. From age eleven to fifteen, Rinchen Dölma studied according to the British curriculum at Queen’s Hill³⁷ in Darjeeling where she also took the name Mary and became henceforth known to Western friends as ‘Mary-la’. When

³⁷ Queen’s Hill School (QHS) was founded by Emma Knowles under the auspices of the Methodist Episcopal Church of America in 1895. It was known as Queen’s Hill School until 1930 when boys were admitted and the school’s name was changed to Mount Hermon School.

political turmoil threatened the position of Dasang Damdul, she returned to Tibet and worked as the secretary in the expanding family import/ export business. From this time onwards, Taring taught both English and Tibetan in both formal and informal settings and to students from all different backgrounds. After the Chinese take-over of Lhasa in 1951, she was ordered by the Kashag to comply with Chinese government wishes to instruct Chinese female soldiers in spoken Tibetan and later also to join the Lhasa Patriotic Women's Association (PWA). In 1954, Taring and her second husband Jigme accompanied the Fourteenth Dalai Lama's delegation to Beijing and in her role as the General Secretary of the PWA, Taring attended the All-China Women's Conference in Beijing in 1957.

One year after the March Uprising, Taring was requested by the Fourteenth Dalai Lama to start "four model schools for Tibetan orphans" in India placed under his direct authority and for which she was to serve as general secretary (Sam 2009, 156). As the head of the Tibetan Homes Foundation (THF) in Mussoorie, India, Taring faced the mammoth task of designing the educational curriculum for the schools, overseeing the building of homes as well as the hiring and training of staff to work in education and administration. First and foremost, it was also Taring's responsibility to raise funds in India and abroad to meet the ever-expanding costs of running orphanage schools and to feed, clothe and educate growing numbers of destitute Tibetan refugee children. From the founding of the Tibetan Homes Foundation in 1962 until her death in 2000, Rinchen Dölma continued to work in various capacities for the education of Tibetan children in exile.

Before making available some information about herself, Taring invokes the illustrious line of "great men" in her family, from the primogenitor of her lineage

Yuthok Yönten Gonpo to the renowned modernizer of the Army Dasang Damdul Tsarong. In so doing, *Daughter of Tibet* reiterates the conventions of traditional Tibetan autobiography, which customarily begins by citing the subject's ancestors or religious teachers. The reason for this formulaic reiteration of one's genealogy rests on the Tibetan belief that, as David Templeman suggests, to be "unaware of one's family's history or position and its past religious affiliations, risks being cast adrift in an unfriendly and hostile world like a wild animal" (2009, 188). Yet while the detailed descriptions of her family lineage, of the most renowned ancestors and the family's position in the fabric of Tibetan society, certainly reflect common assumptions about Tibetan life writing in general, Taring's invocation has, I argue, a different purpose.

As discussed earlier, women's marginal position within a patriarchal society renders them more vulnerable in establishing a link to their heritage from which to speak with authority. In order to counter this authorial invisibility and to establish the right to tell her life story as part of the greater narrative of her family, Taring places great emphasis on the male lineage holders and *their* power in Tibetan society. By establishing a direct link to these powerful men, Taring receives the authority to tell *her* own story. I argue that this rhetorical device is more than simply a reiteration of traditional Tibetan autobiography in which deference to genealogy is an established genre characteristic; in Taring's case, this literary strategy effectively empowers her to speak and to be heard. Having thus authorized herself as a speaking subject, Rinchen Dölma Taring devises a strategy which in turn legitimizes her version of history; by setting up a direct connection between her family and the very nation itself, Taring effectively creates a powerful framework for the life history she presents. The next subchapter will examine how Taring utilizes this bond between the Tibetan body politic

and her family to present an alternative history of Tibet that was uniquely shaped by the minds and deeds of her male ancestors and relatives.

4.2 Of Nation and Family

Tibetans, like their Chinese neighbors, have increasingly concerned themselves with history and historical writing from around the tenth century onwards (Cuevas 2013). Brian Cuevas suggests that this emerging interest seems to have been produced by “concerns for legitimizing claims to religious authority [as well as] a response to very real sociopolitical conflicts and local institutional interests” (2013, 52). History has indeed served many life writers in the past to establish their claims to authority of many kinds, which often took the form of highlighting their close relationship with past rulers of Tibet. Taring closely follows this stylistic tradition and elaborates on her forefathers’ relationship and indeed intimate connection with the body politic since the eighth century. In so doing, she elevates the Tsarong family to a unique position of influence and insight in Tibetan political affairs. Through this, Taring carefully establishes a claim to present an alternative history of Tibet: detailing a long history of Tibet’s international engagement, she simultaneously emphasizes her ancestors’ dedication to serve their country through a commitment to ‘modern’ technologies and knowledge. This sub-chapter will present Taring’s alternative history and examine her claims of the personal and political obstacles encountered by advocates of modernization in the context of Tibet’s encounter with colonial modernity during the twentieth century.

4.2.1 Tibetan Modernity: A *complexio oppositorum*?

In their battle over historical ‘truth’, official rhetoric from both the Chinese and Tibetan side has used the discourse of modernity to further their respective goals. Regardless of the contentious nature of the term ‘modernity’ and its intricate relationship with Western colonialism, questions of Tibetan (anti-)modernity are at the heart of these respective versions of pre-Communist Tibet.³⁸ Furthermore, John Whalen-Bridge purports that “the question of ‘modernity’ is heavily conditioned by the ideological struggle between the PRC and those who believe that the Chinese invasion of Tibet in 1950 was the beginning of an especially oppressive form of colonization” (2011, 103). The discourse of modernity has likewise shaped European responses to Tibet over the centuries. For most Europeans and Americans, Tibet was largely *terra incognita* until well into the twentieth century, and its natural isolation gave way to a host of fantastical and largely unfounded ideas and stereotypes. On the one hand, travelers and spiritual seekers have popularized an image of Tibet as a place of spirituality and mysticism where peaceful people live in harmony with their natural environment (Bishop 1989; Dodin and Räther 2001; Lopez 1998; among others).

This romanticization is firmly anchored in the concept of ‘Shangri-la’, a term that first entered Western mainstream culture via James Hilton’s novel *Lost Horizon* (1933). In Hilton’s novel, Shangri-la is a monastery in an unknown Tibetan valley and its aim is to preserve all that is beautiful and fragile from the destructive forces of

³⁸ Janet Gyatso’s recent work on Tibetan Modernities for an in-depth analysis of the pitfalls and potential benefits of the use of modernity in the Tibetan context. Gyatso’s work is part of a larger movement within Cultural Studies and International Politics that critically questions the ‘universality’ and apparently ‘cultural neutrality’ of the term modernity as emerging from Western Europe and offers instead the use of ‘multiple’ or ‘alternative’ modernities to highlight the contemporaneity of emerging modern thoughts, technologies and knowledge in non-Western societies and the creative adaptations and uses of Western modernity in colonial and postcolonial societies. See here specifically *Reflections on Multiple Modernities* (2001) edited by Shmuel Eisenstadt and Dominic Sachsenmaier and Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar’s edited volume *Alternative Modernities* (2001).

modern civilization. With the social and political cataclysms of the early twentieth century giving rise to a growing ‘disenchantment’ with modern technologies, warfare and rationalism, Shangri-La struck a chord with many who believed Western civilization to have entered a deep moral and cultural crisis and decline with World War I.³⁹ From a place of pure joy and enlightened conversation, Shangri-la has subsequently been connected with Tibet to create, in Calla Jacobson’s words, the image of a “traditional society that was, until the Chinese occupation, frozen in a kind of unchanging stasis, isolated outside of the flow of history” (2004, 54). For those increasingly dissatisfied with the lure of capitalist acquisition, economic competition and the anonymity of conurbation, Tibet holds the promise of one of the last places untouched by the ills of modernity. Robert Barnett (2001) refers to this stereotyping as a discourse of ‘violated specialness’ wherein Tibetans are presented as victims: as helpless, violated, and lacking agency, as well as pre-modern, idealized, otherworldly, and peaceful.⁴⁰

At the same time, Tibet elicited a diametrically opposed view; as a reaction to Tibetan isolationist policies, which affected diplomatic ties with Western (colonial) powers only, nineteenth and early twentieth century European and American travelers popularized an image of Tibetans as ignorant and religious to the degree of bigotry. In these descriptions, Tibetan Buddhism was deviant from the ‘original’, ‘orthodox’ Indian Buddhism; Tibet’s large monastic sector was regarded as responsible for the country’s isolationist policy towards Western powers and their attitude was yet another example

³⁹ Publications such as Oswald Spengler’s *The Decline of the West* (1918) and Paul Valéry’s essay “The Crisis of the Mind” (1919) are just two examples of a substantial body of early twentieth-century philosophical and cultural writings that exemplify a growing concern and indeed pessimism, at the future of Western and particularly European civilization following World War I.

⁴⁰ See also Bishop (1989) and McKay (2001) for a discussion of the change in literary representations of Tibetan society and religion in the decades after the Younghusband mission of 1904, during which the formerly backward and superstitious Tibetan society and clergy were depicted “as decent, virtuous, and of value to the world at large” (McKay 2001, 71).

for Tibet's "barrier of ignorance created by jealousy and fear" (Candler 1905, 241). Overall, the country's political system was viewed as ineffectual and 'medieval', its social structure unequal and Tibetan society at large considered ignorant and backward.⁴¹

Since the 1990s, scholarship on Tibet has investigated this overly romanticized and idealized vision and its far-reaching consequences for the Tibetan political struggle and even their self-perception, particularly in exile (Diehl 2002; Dodin and R  ther 2001, Lopez 1998; among others). Yet Donald Lopez maintains that it is not the overarching fantasy of 'Shangri-La' that has been defining for Tibet and Tibetan people in the international arena; rather it is the constant 'play of opposites' that has shaped the image of Tibet in popular discourse the world over. Slavoj   i  ek succinctly summarizes this phenomenon:

Tibetans are portrayed as leading a simple life of spiritual satisfaction, fully accepting their fate, liberated from the excessive craving of the Western subject who is always searching for more, AND as a bunch of filthy, cheating, cruel, sexually promiscuous primitives... The social order is presented as a model of organic harmony, AND as the tyranny of the cruel, corrupted theocracy keeping ordinary people ignorant. (2001, 64-66)

Adapting Michel Foucault's thesis on *Other Spaces*, Tibet can be regarded as *Heterotopia* for the modern world: a multitude of often juxtaposed, competing, and even mutually exclusive places which simultaneously denoted one specific geographical place (Foucault [1967] 1998; see also Bishop 1989). Whilst ideologically opposed in their appraisal of Tibetan society and culture, Western and Chinese representations were nevertheless united in two aspects: the belief in Tibet's complete *otherness* and its *anti-*

⁴¹ These representations are evident in most Western travel accounts from the 17th century onwards although negative portrayals increased during the 19th century and slowly ebbed after the Younghusband mission of 1904. For an in-depth discussion of the changing representations of Tibet in Western travel literature, refer to Peter Bishop, *The Myth of Shangri-La: Tibet, travel writing and the Western creation of a sacred landscape* (1989).

modernity and in the Tibetans' utter inability "of interacting with modernity on their own terms" (Kellam 2003, 194). Whereas China sees itself as having freed Tibetan society from the two-fold hold of its indigenous feudal powers and foreign imperialist aggressors, Chinese state publications nevertheless utilize Western criticisms of pre-1950 Tibet to their advantage, and describe Tibetan society strikingly similar with terms such as isolated, medieval, feudal, and static (Powers 2004; Schwartz 2008). Though virulent in its denunciation of Western imperialism, the Chinese state nevertheless replicates Western colonial rhetoric of Tibetan society as opposed to the central tenets of modernity and their basis in the European Enlightenment. The Chinese adoption and adaptation of the Western philosophical model of modernity dates back to the Republican Era (1912—1949) and particularly the May Fourth Movement (1915—1923) and is linked to China's "need to survive as a nation" in the face of Western and Japanese colonial aggression (Fung 2010, 4; cf. Yü-sheng 1979 and 1995). Mayfair Yang argues that, "although China was never submitted to full military, political or economic colonization by the West or Japan, a similar process of 'colonization of consciousness' can be said to have taken place among China's modern elite and official classes" (2011, 7). In fact, Prasenjit Duara (1995) proposes that due to China's semi-colonization by Western powers, which neither imposed a colonial administration nor a foreign language, nationalist elites in China were relatively open to the adoption of Western modernity. This had far-reaching consequences for society as well as historiography.

From the end of the Qing Dynasty, Chinese historians of various ideological persuasions began to imagine and conceive of History according to the idea of a linear, progressive mode and abandoned traditional Chinese historiographical periods in favor of (Western) categories of the ancient, medieval and modern periods (Duara 1995, 33-

34). Though the radical anti-traditionalism contained within Chinese Marxist-Leninism defined itself in opposition to the pro-Western groups in Chinese society and politics, it nevertheless retained the powerful discourses of modernity including progress, scientific evolution, secularism, and nationalism (Yang 2008, 2011). Indeed, as Yang lucidly explains, “[t]he Maoist era merely carried forward the discourse of earlier modernizing and secularizing nationalists that had been accumulating for over half a century ... and expanded the movement to the masses while radicalizing these efforts to new extremes” (2011, 14). The Chinese state rhetoric under Mao Tse-tung thus used Western modernity and its attendant values and ideas to create an internal logic of the need to radically transform Chinese society including Tibet, which subsequently justified of the Chinese invasion of Tibetan territories and the subsequent take-over of the country and its administration. While the forceful incorporation of Tibet into the Chinese Communist state proved to be the most dramatic rupture with the Tibetan past imaginable, *Daughter of Tibet* invites us to seriously question the facile adoption of the inherent incompatibility of modernity and tradition; rather than presenting tradition as necessarily ossified, the historical trajectory presented by her signals the possibility of early modernity as well as the tradition of change over the course of Tibetan cultural history (J. Gyatso 2011; Fenner 1996; Akasoy, Burnett, and Yoeli-Tlalim 2011; among others).

4.2.2 *Tibet's Internationalization*

From the very first page of her life narrative, Rinchen Dölma Taring contrasts the negative image of Tibetan society as static, backward and ignorant with a view towards international knowledge exchange and interactions between Tibet and other parts of Asia and Eurasia. Via her ancestral lineage, Taring demonstrates how other cultures and

their knowledge have incited curiosity among Tibetans and indirectly alludes to the interest of the Tibetan ruling elite to foster such exchange for the benefit of Tibet. While many details from the life Yuthok Yönten Gonpo the Elder certainly belong in the realm of legend, several historical accounts highlight the transmission of his medical knowledge from his father and his later studies in India. Taring focuses on the international aspect of Yuthok's education in the initial description of her lineage progenitor: "Yönten Gonpo is said to have visited India to study Sanskrit medicine at Nalanda University" (1986, 15). While Buddhist knowledge exchange has been known to have flourished between India, China and Tibet, current scholarship continues to unearth evidence how Tibetan local culture was significantly enriched through exchanges in other areas as well, such as ritual, the creation of ritual artifacts and costumes, language and medicine (cf. Akasoy, Burnett, and Yoeli-Tlalim 2011). Scholars, merchants and *pundits* visited Tibet from China, Mongolia, Kashmir, Nepal, India and Iran, and Tibetans journeyed in return to some of these countries for trade and scholarly pursuits. Todd Fenner's account of the origins of the Four Medical Tantras (Tib. *rgyud bzhi*) describes this active international engagement with specific regards to the medical tradition:

Tibet may have been known in the modern West as the "Forbidden Land," a model of isolation, but during the reigns of Srong btsan gam po and Khri srong ld'u btsan, in the seventh and eighth centuries, the capital of Tibet was almost cosmopolitan. Before Kri srong ld'u btsan committed Tibet to following an Indian cultural-religious model in preference to a Chinese one, Chinese views competed equally with the Indian. This was also true of medicine: physicians from several areas were invited to come to Lhasa to teach and translate what they knew. Srong btsan sgam po is said to have invited three physicians to his court: Bharadrāja from India, Han Wang Hang from China, and Galenos from Persia. (1996, 466)

Fenner highlights the active interest of these two successive monarchs in attracting bright minds to the royal court and to impart their knowledge to the benefit of practicing

physicians in Tibet. It is therefore likely that Taring's ancestor studied a variety of medical traditions before he went to study at Nalanda University and that he did so with the explicit patronage of the incumbent ruler Trisong Detsen. The knowledge exchange between Tibet and other Asian and Eurasian countries indicates not only a royal understanding of the value of international engagement but also the dedication by the body politic to increase the enrichment of Tibetan indigenous practices. Taring's account indicates that from the beginning, her ancestors shared these values and assisted in this exchange to improve existing Tibetan social, cultural and knowledge, and practices.

Taring's account swiftly moves through the centuries to focus on the last three outstanding male relatives: her paternal grandfather *Tsi-pon* Tsarong, her father Tsarong *Shap-pé* and Dasang Damdul Tsarong, all of whom were officially involved and instrumental in negotiations between the Tibetan, Chinese and British governments regarding Tibetan territorial integrity and sovereignty. The Sikkim-Tibet border dispute at which *Tsi-pon* Tsarong was present may be considered as the beginning of Tibet's political exposure to Western imperialism; however, it is not after the Younghusband mission in 1904 that Tibet experienced both a gradual opening to colonial modernity and a rising resistance to the changes it threatened to bring in its wake. It is for these reasons that Taring's account focuses for the most part on the twentieth century and the two men in her family who were deeply involved in Tibet's hesitant transformation and who are therefore ambivalently portrayed in Tibetan histories.

Like a number of aristocrats at the time, Taring's father can be regarded as a cultural Sinophile: he was well-spoken in Chinese and played several traditional Chinese instruments. However, Taring is at pains to establish that showed as much

interest in facets of modernity that developed in India and other neighboring countries. On his official visit to India to deliver the first installment of the reparation payments imposed by the Treaty of Lhasa (1904), Tsarong *Shap-pé* encountered a colonial modernity that seemed to offer new and exciting avenues for prosperity, some of which the Minister attempted to translate into the Tibetan context. Not only did he learn “how to use a camera and a sewing machine”, Tsarong *Shap-pé* also purchased some of each and introduced them to Lhasa society along with “No.999” cigarettes and the custom of Indian sweet tea, things that apparently “had never before been seen in Tibet” (Taring 1986, 32-33). Photography, and later the introduction of cinema, quickly became a popular past-time among nobles in Tibet and according to Taring, Tsarong *Shap-pé* instructed Dasang Damdul in the art of using a camera. This fascination with visual representation both shattered exotic fantasies of foreign visitors to Lhasa while affording them with an intimate insight into Tibetan society while curiously calling into question ideas about ‘subject’, ‘object’ and the colonial gaze (Harris and Shakya 2003, 8-9).⁴²

According to Taring, her father was furthermore “an excellent organizer, who took advantage of his Indian trip to modernize Tibet by bringing back to Lhasa a Muslim gunsmith and a skilled leather tanner. He then ran a government tannery and a gun factory near Lhasa, and soon a shoe factory was started, because we had lots of strong yaks’ leather” (Taring 1986, 32-33). Apart from the armory in Lhasa, which started to make gun barrels in the late 19th century, Tsarong’s factory description is one of the earliest examples of demonstrated individual interest in re-imagining traditional

⁴² In „The Happy Light Bioscope Theatre and Other Stories, Part 1“, Jamyang Norbu relays the popular Tibetan fascination with both film and photography, in particular the Tsarong and Taring families. Surprised by the fact that Dasang Damdul Tsarong already possessed a film projector by 1920, officers of the British mission used cinema as soft propaganda among Tibetans. The first commercial cinema was allegedly operated by Ladakhi Muslim traders and opened around 1934 (2010, n.pg.).

forms of labor through the implementation of modern changes to product manufacture. Traditionally, it was the men or the male servants of a household who produced shoes for the family and photographs of the first two decades of the twentieth century indicate that traditional shoes were still widely worn among Tibetans of all social classes. Photographs from the 1920s onwards point to the very beginnings of a shift in fashion and we can see Western leather shoes being worn by the Tibetan Army and indeed by some lay officials of the Tibetan government. Although Taring's account reveals nothing about the types of shoes he manufactured (Western or traditional), the success of the shoe factory or the uptake of its products among Tibetans in Lhasa and its surroundings, Tsarong *Shap-pé*'s business venture reveals an excitement of modern ideas of productivity and consumption.

Taring's account skillfully interweaves her father's business acumen with a purported interest in exposing Tibet to its surrounding cultures and in fostering a greater understanding of Tibet abroad. While her emphasis on Tsarong *Shap-pé*'s curiosity of aspects of Western consumer goods and production serves to augment her family's active participation in opening Tibet to the possibilities of modernization, it also seeks to balance her father's partiality to Chinese culture. This confluence of interest is exemplified in Tsarong *Shap-pé*'s cooperation with the Chinese imperial high commissioner Zhang Yintang to create a Tibetan-English-Hindi Dictionary, which was presented to the British officials during the negotiations at the 1908 Tibet Trade Regulations and aimed at fostering understanding through an attempt at translating the Tibetan world into English terms.⁴³ In Taring's narrative, it is Dasang Damdul Tsarong who carries forward this dedication to augment Tibetan knowledge through an active

⁴³ I would like to thank David Templeman for making the *Tibetan-English-Hindi Guide Book* (1909) available to me.

exchange with the world beyond.

With the description of Dasang Damdul Tsarong, Taring enters into the last decades of Tibetan de facto independence, a time of great political efforts to both modernize and isolate Tibet. Without doubt, Dasang Damdul was one of the greatest advocates for modernization in Tibet and yet he would have been unable to initiate a range of programs had it not been for the open-mindedness of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama. Described as strong-willed and circumspect ruler, the Thirteenth Dalai Lama proclaimed Tibetan independence upon his return from exile in 1913 and promoted a number of progressive Tibetans to influential positions within the government to carry out a range of reforms. This included a review of the Army and the taxation system, the introduction of free medical care as well as the sending of four male students to Rugby School in England⁴⁴ and the opening of an English school in Gyantse (Goldstein 1989; Shakapba 1967). Having accompanied the Thirteenth Dalai Lama into exile in Mongolia and in India, Dasang Damdul shared the sovereign's favorable impressions of a strong nation-state as they encountered it in India and benefits of (certain) modern institutional reforms, particularly in the military and in education.

After the fall of the Qing Dynasty and the ousting of the Chinese troops from Tibet, the Thirteenth Dalai Lama declared his intention to rule Tibet independently and to initiate reforms. Dasang Damdul Tsarong's efforts to modernize the Tibetan Army thus dovetailed with the wishes of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama wish to protect Tibetan borders in the face of the fast-changing political climate in Asia. Tsarong oversaw the recruitment and professional training of Tibetan soldiers by British army officers in

⁴⁴ Having completed their secondary schooling, each of 'the Rugby Four' received a different kind of professional training, including mining and electrical engineering, surveying and telegraphing. The youngest, R.D. Ringang, successfully built an electric power station in Lhasa and laid a power line to the Dalai Lama's summer palace.

Quetta and Shillong, even though his initial proposal to increase the military to 25,000 soldiers had to be re-negotiated to receive the consent of the Tibetan government. Although Dasang Damdul was best known as Commander-in-Chief of the Tibetan army, Taring shifts her focus to portray him as a thoroughly progressive Tibetan, well informed and passionate about the ‘outside world’:

Tsarong was always greatly interested in the world outside Tibet and one of his most trusted friends was Surkhang *Dzasa*, the lay Foreign Minister. Though Tsarong had no Western education he was always with a map and knew the geography of the whole world. He received newspapers from many countries and had a pen-friend in Missouri, U.S.A.—Mr. William Englesmann, who first wrote to Tsarong for stamps and afterwards sent him *Life* and *Geographic* magazines. ...He was very curious about anything new and liked to buy cutlery, radios, watches and cameras; he loved photography, which my father had taught him, and had his own darkroom. (1986, 98-100)

Far from a mere self-interest in new gadgets, foreign cuisine and world affairs, Taring’s tribute seeks to establish Tsarong as a democratic modernizer, keen to benefit others and Tibet as a whole by “by opening schools, building roads and improving the Army to make our country really strong and independent” (Taring 1986, 100). Access to education in particular was of utmost importance to Tsarong; it was due to his foresight and connections with the British Political Officers at the time that Rinchen Dölma Taring was the first Tibetan girl to receive a modern Western education in British India. As Tsarong had only received rudimentary education, he ensured that those of similarly humble backgrounds were able to access school. Taring recounts that “[w]hen I was eight I went to Kyire Labtra school [a private school], where the master was Gendak Ugen la. Tsarong was already sheltering in our house a dozen boys—the sons of retainers—from Tsarong Estate and Lhanga Estate, who were going to the same school ... Some of these boys later became stewards, clerks, and traders” (1986, 47).

As discussed in Chapter Three, education was a privilege for those from non-

aristocratic backgrounds and presented one of the few opportunities for social mobility. It is these acts of generosity that help to generate a fuller picture of the private individual Tsarong and serve to highlight his dedication to transforming Tibetan society from the grounds up. Taring employs these anecdotes also to soften criticism of Tsarong's independence in taking military matters into his own hands (Goldstein 1989, 122-124). While self-direction and leadership are qualities much admired in modern society today, these qualities did not endear Tsarong to the conservative faction who belittled him as a parvenu while fearing his rising influence in the government.

Tsarong's enthusiasm for 'the outside world' was not only recognized but also shared by an increasing number of aristocrats, merchants and intellectuals. The growing British influence in the Himalayan regions and the forward-looking policies initiated by the Thirteenth Dalai Lama facilitated the opening of Tibet to British colonial modernity in unprecedented ways (Huber 2008, 268). Though modern inventions did by no means penetrate all areas of daily life and many were content with the superficial consumption of Western commodities, a number of Tibetans were equally "interested in exploring new avenues of thought and new social possibilities" (Schwartz 2008, 3). Those who had studied in British schools, who moved between the Tibetan enclaves of Kalimpong and Darjeeling, travelled abroad for business, pilgrimage or leisure, inevitably encountered a rapidly changing social and political environment in South Asia and knowledge of different ideologies and state systems impressed a number of progressive Tibetans to form political alliances of various persuasions.⁴⁵ With the spirit of change in

⁴⁵ Examples of Tibetan political organizations include the democratic "Young Tibet Party" and the "Tibet Improvement Party". Premen Addy credits Tsarong with the leadership of the former but does not elaborate on the objectives of the party itself (1984, 340). Carole McGranahan (2001) and Melvyn Goldstein (1989) offer discussions of the "Tibet Improvement Party". Neither political association gained traction with the wider public; indeed, both attempts to change the political system were understood as attacks on the institution of the Dalai Lama and thus regarded as threats to the traditional system of 'religion-and-politics-combined'.

the air, officials and private individuals were inspired by new technologies to modernize aspects of Tibetan life: “For instance, Tsarong undertook to build the first steel bridge at Trisam, Ringang undertook to electrify Lhasa city, and Kunphela started a factory at Drapchi and set up a modern plumbing system to pipe clean water to the Jokhang kitchen to make tea for monks during the Mönlam festival” (J. Norbu 2008, n.pg). However, as the next section will highlight, these changes created deep schisms within Tibetan society and ultimately destroyed many of the slowly gained concessions to adopt features of a Western-style modernity.

Taring’s detailed portrayals of Yönten Yuthok Gonpo, of her father and Dasang Damdul as examples of progressive minds serves several purposes. Their high social regard suggests that a number of Tibetans were keen to introduce potentially beneficial commodities to their homeland and open to new knowledge about education, defense and medicine. By stressing Tibet’s adoption of other Asian and, increasingly, of Western material and non-material culture, Taring counters both Chinese claims of a backward, authoritarian, feudal theocracy and Western idealizations of an untainted, isolated Tibetan society. Instead, she establishes an image of Tibet as an outward looking society and a line of sovereigns who were keen to enrich traditional values thorough a variety of foreign cultural, social and political ideas. Delineating an attitudinal shift in the twentieth century within government, Taring’s life narrative unveils sinister machinations, which threatened the lives and reputation of progressive Tibetans who were in danger of being suspected ‘unpatriotic’ and of undermining the religious state. In the next sub-chapter, I will trace the resistance against Tibet’s gradual modernization using the example of the orchestrated downfall of Taring’s male relatives. Through the comparison of Taring’s life narrative with other exile histories, I aim to uncover gaps of knowledge that produce significantly ‘other’ readings of certain

political events in the recent history of Tibet.

4.2.3 *'The Jealousy of a Few': The assassination of Tsarong Shap-pé*

Situated as a natural buffer between the Russian, Chinese and British empires, Tibet became embroiled in the complexities of nineteenth century colonial ambitions that had far-reaching consequences for the integrity of the Tibetan polity and the various political self-understandings of Tibetans across the plateau. With the encroachments of Western imperial powers on Chinese territory, Peking had been more or less forced to abandon its role in the historic patron-priest relationship between the Chinese Emperor and the Dalai Lama, and effectively lost most of its authority in Tibet (van Walt van Praag 1987, 22-23). The Chinese defeat by the Japanese in 1895 showed both the newly incumbent Thirteenth Dalai Lama and the British in India that Qing authority and patronage in Tibet was no more than a myth. The Younghusband military expedition to Lhasa and the signing of the Lhasa Convention in 1904 fueled Qing fears of Western imperial advances via its Western borders and resulted in the formulation of aggressive forward policies towards Tibet (van Walt van Praag 1987, 39-42). According to Tom Grunfeld, these policies aimed to “gain military control of the area west of Sichuan, to ‘modernize’ the Lhasa government, to bring the Dalai Lama back to Lhasa to support Chinese reforms and to reclaim suzerainty over Nepal and Bhutan, thereby undermining British prestige in the region” (1996, 60). While the Qing had established its hold in central Tibet and Kham and effectively marginalized British influence by 1908, Zhao Erh-feng’s inclination to violence in his conquests in Kham and the occupation of Lhasa in 1910 eroded whatever faith Tibetans may have harbored in coming to an agreement regarding the re-definition of Sino-Tibetan relations with the Qing or subsequent Chinese governments (Ho 2008).

Both British and Chinese ambitions to expand their territories and spheres of influence brought them into conflict with power holders across the Tibetan regions. As a result of and in response to Western and Qing imperialism, nationalist sentiments were on the rise on the Tibetan plateau, shaping Tibetan (re)actions to the paradigmatic shifts in the existing power structures in the region (J. Norbu 2013; W. Smith 1996). These national stirrings were shared and encouraged by the Thirteenth Dalai Lama, who became the first Dalai Lama to effectively exercise both temporal and spiritual power since the Great Fifth (W. Smith 1996; van Walt van Praag 1987). After the fall of the Qing Dynasty, the young Dalai Lama radically re-interpreted Tibet's historical relationship with Peking and declared himself the spiritual and temporal ruler of an independent Tibet (Shakapba 1967). Although the Tibetan state and its government were threatened by a combination of British and Chinese military and diplomatic interventions, the portrayal of the tumultuous events between 1904 and 1912/13 elicit particularly strong anti-Chinese sentiments among Tibetan exile historians.

Tibetan officials who found themselves in the undesirable position of having to negotiate the interests of the Tibetan government and its sovereign with foreign occupiers, both British and Chinese, often suffered terrible consequences when they were suspected of collaboration. While individuals suspected of being "pro-British" in 1904 suffered similar fates to those believed to be "pro-Chinese" in 1910, exile historiography has been particularly unforgiving to the latter. As Carole McGranahan has demonstrated in her analysis of the marginalization of Khampa histories within hegemonic Tibetan exile discourse, exile Tibetan historiography "is always written in tension with China" (2001, 202). In re-visiting the events between 1904 and 1912, these tensions are running particularly high. Those considered to have had Chinese leanings are negatively portrayed in historical narrative and in the course of validating the

official exile version of history, their stories are too often simplified and conflated in the process. This practice of silencing from history most ambiguities and ambivalences creates not only a very simplistic narrative of twentieth century Tibet; it also hinders an acknowledgement of the multiple motivations of those Tibetans who are considered ‘too pro-Chinese’, some of which have been brought to light in recent years in life narratives or through academic research (Thondup 2015; Goldstein, Sherap and Siebenschuh 1997; McGranahan 2010a; among others).

Understanding that Taring’s historical account neither offers an ‘unmediated’ nor a ‘disinterested’ view of the past, I argue nonetheless that her interpretation of this crucial period in Sino-Tibetan relations and her insistence of re-visiting the circumstances that led to the assassination of her father, adds so far marginalized historical dimensions that complicate notions of ‘traitor’, ‘collaborator’, and ‘patriot’. Moreover, her attempt to offer a reinterpretation of Tsarong *Shap-pé*’s political career and decisions brings to light the intense polarization among Tibetan nationalists at the time and today, that any public figure evokes who has sought to compromise with the Chinese leadership.

In the past, Sinophile tendencies were not uncommon among Tibetans of the higher classes and neither would these have necessarily aroused suspicions of a person’s integrity or, indeed, their *Tibetanness*. With the formulation and execution of more aggressive Tibet policies by the Qing government following the Younghusband expedition in 1904, this perception gradually changed. In light of British and Chinese aggression, Tsarong *Shap-pé*’s interest in Western-style innovation and Chinese culture seems to have increased suspicion regarding his commitment to Tibetan independence. Taring’s father indirectly benefitted from the demotion of Cabinet Minister Shatra

Peljor Dorjé in 1903: failing to correctly assess British military strength and therefore suspected of having accepted bribes by the British (Shakapba 2010, 652), Shatra and his colleagues were imprisoned and the Thirteenth Dalai Lama selected Tsarong and others to form a new Cabinet. In his new position Tsarong *Shap-pé* was part of the negotiations with Colonel Younghusband and later was sent by the Regent to assist in the amendment of the Anglo-Chinese Convention into the new Tibet Trade Regulations (1908). Participating in the treaty negotiations as the deputy of the Chinese special envoy Zhang Yintang, Tsarong *Shap-pé* drew unfavorable attention towards himself and became unpopular with nationalist factions in the government who claimed that he had signed the Tibet Trade Regulations “without consulting His Holiness, who at that time was in exile in China” (Taring 1986, 33). In volume two of his *Political and Military History of Tibet*, Gyaltsé Namgyal Wangdue describes Tsarong *Shap-pé*’s involvement with the amendment thus:

In 1908, when the British, Tibetan and Chinese representatives met in Calcutta (nowadays Kolkata) to negotiate a treaty on trade regulation, Kalon Tsarong (Wangchuk Gyalpo), the Tibetan representative, signed the treaty at his own discretion, without consulting the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan government. (2010, 3)

Taring attempts to discredit accusations such as these by stressing that these claims had been circulated by “[h]is enemies” (1986, 33) and further, by pointing out that her father never lost the trust of the Dalai Lama who later appointed him as lay assistant to the Regent before seeking exile in British India in 1910.

A range of historical material supports Taring’s assertion that these allegations have little basis in fact and were designed to bring her father into political disrepute. Charles Bell, for example, emphasizes that although Tsarong *Shap-pé* attached his signature to the regulations, he had no real bargaining power since he was only admitted

as the Chinese envoy's subordinate (Bell 1924, 91). This evaluation of his powerlessness is echoed in Wendy Palace's *Losing Face: The British foreign service and the question of Tibet 1904-1922* where she outlines that the status of the Tibetan representative quickly became a source of contention between the British and Chinese governments (1995, 86). Parshotam Mehra similarly stresses that the efforts Zhang Yintang to marginalize the Tibetan representative were indeed effective even though the British representatives were aware that their yielding to Zhang's wishes was supporting the Chinese reclaiming of sovereign rights over Tibet (2012, 126-127). Tsarong *Shap-pé's* innocence is further acknowledged by Tibetan historian Gelek Wangchen Surkhang. In *Tibet in the early 20th century*, Surkhang relieves him of the accusation to have acted of his own accord: "In 1908 the Regent Blo bzang rgyal mtshan, who may be described briefly as a good man, but politically naive, under the influence of the special Chinese envoy Chang [Zhang] empowered the Bka' blon Tsha rong to sign the Tibet Trade Regulations in Calcutta" (Surkhang 1999, n.pg.). In *100,000 Moons*, Shakapba presents the contested matter again in a different light; not endowed with any power to do so, Tsarong *Shap-pé* was present when the Tibet Trade Regulations in 1908 were signed by the Chinese and British representatives *before* him only (2010, 684). Speaking in this situation of a scheme of her fathers' "enemies" (1986, 33) to misrepresent Tsarong *Shap-pé's* involvement in the Tibet Trade Regulations, Taring's narrative indirectly foreshadows her father's assassination in 1912 after the ousting of the Chinese troops by the Tibetan military.

While some consider imperial high commissioner Zhang Yintang's short term in office (1906-7) a 'bright spot' (Shaumian 2000) in Sino-Tibetan relations, the relationship began to consistently deteriorate in the lead-up and during the occupation of Lhasa by Qing troops in 1910 under the watch of Amban Lianyu. Both Chinese

representatives at Lhasa, Lianyu and Zhang, sought to implement a range of modern transformations including the training of an army, the creation of communication infrastructure and the facilitation of education through a Chinese school and a military college (Goldstein 1989, 47). However, their personalities and approaches differed widely and while Zhang secured a degree of cooperation with the Tibetans, the status of the Amban had declined considerable after the death of the Qianlong Emperor and the following period of diminishing Qing influence in Tibet so that Lianyu was left without real bargaining power (Ho 2008, 215-16). Portrayed as both charismatic, headstrong and politically zealous, Zhang is also a somewhat contradictory figure who was both in favor of firmly integrating Tibet into the Chinese Empire *and* of strengthening the Tibetan army and every household for self-defense (Ho 2008, 217-19). The latter is somewhat curious given the concerted Chinese efforts under Zhao Erh-feng to disarm the local population in Kham and was effectively used by Amban Lianyu, alongside Zhang's other reforms, to eventually have him removed from his position in Tibet.⁴⁶

While Zhang Yintang's mission to Lhasa was to 'rectify' things in Tibet and affirm Qing authority, his strategy seemed to have nevertheless been one of cooperation with the Tibetans. After his transfer, however, the Tibetan government was forced to work with Amban Lianyu, who "was known to his contemporaries as a crotchety old curmudgeon ... [and] 'harshly mean, most ungrateful, favoring profit, forsaking virtue'" (Ho 2008, 226). According to British diplomat Eric Teichmann, Amban Lianyu "made himself intensely disliked, and through his unwise and arrogant behaviour appears to have been largely responsible for the Chinese débâcle in Tibet which followed the

⁴⁶ After the negotiations regarding the Tibet Trade Regulations in India, Zhang Yintang did not return to Tibet but was ordered to Peking. From there, he was dispatched as the Qing Ambassador to the United States, Mexico and Peru (Ho 2008, 212).

revolution in China” (1922, 22). At a time of internal turmoil and during the absence of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama, the members of the Kashag walked a tight rope between cooperation and collaboration with the Chinese. These interrelations, though necessary to ensure the functioning of the Tibetan government, proved to be detrimental for a number of high-ranking Tibetan ministers, most famously Taring’s father and her eldest brother Samdup Tsering after the fall of the Qing Dynasty and the subsequent ousting of the Chinese army by Tibetan troops. According to Surkhang, the Chinese representatives blackmailed the Kashag into raising money to avert a Chinese army attack on Sera monastery:

The Chinese, before they carried out their attack, had hoped to receive from the Tibetans more than half a million tranga in silver bouillon so that they might leave the country. The Kashag, headed by Tsha rong, raised the money by requesting that the aristocratic families donate whatever they could. Tsha rong placed his son in charge of the collection, and he soon raised the money which was given to the Chinese. This was regarded by some persons as a traitorous act, but I think that was not the case. Tsha rong’s main object was to preserve the power of the Kashag and hence Tibetan independence through friendly relations with the Chinese, whom he knew were too strong militarily for the Tibetans. (1999, n.pg.)

Surkhang’s portrayal of the events supports Taring’s argument that her father had acted diplomatically and thus “averted bloodshed and the destruction by the Chinese of temples, monasteries and the Potala Palace” she also concedes that “not everybody agreed with his policy of compromise” (1986, 36). It is the interpretation of his motivation for applying a “cautious policy” (Taring 1986, 36) that seems to divide historians on the nature of his relations with the Chinese.

Tibetan military and political Historian Wangdue suggests that Tsarong *Shap-pé*’s “close relations with the Amban Lien Yu ... aroused suspicion among the members of the Tibetan National Assembly and leaders of the Tibetan army about his duplicitous behavior” (2010, 17). This sentiment is echoed also in Melvyn Goldstein’s assessment

in which he claims that “it also appeared that a number of high aristocratic officials had been collaborating with the Chinese; one of these, Tsarong Shape, was murdered in Lhasa, together with his son, by pro-Dalai Lama forces in 1912” (1989, 63-4). In both accounts, the disloyalty of Taring’s father is already assumed and his relations with the Chinese therefore understood to be of a collaborative nature. Tsepon Shakabpa and K. Dhondup on the other hand err on the side of caution in their evaluation of the situation; in *Tibet: A Political History*, Shakapba merely states that “Kalon Tsarong, his son, and Kadrung Tsashagpa, the secretary of the Kashag, were shot for having close relations with the Chinese” (1967, 241) without portraying those as treacherous in nature. K. Dhondup is even more circumspect in his analysis of the historical events of 1912:

Shaken badly by Tengyeling’s protection of the Chinese soldiers and the burning of the Shide monastery, the War Department decided to line up and arrest all the Tibetans suspected of collaborating with the Chinese. One day in April 1912, a bunch of monks from Sera and a few army captains burst into the Potala while the Cabinet was in session and arrested the ministers. Kalon Tsarong Wangchuk Gyalpo, his son and cabinet secretary Tsargur Shagpa were shot dead in front of the Inner Doring (stone edict). ... At times of crisis, just as Shatra and his colleagues became scapegoats and suffered degradation and imprisonment on some very vague charges about their duties when the British invaded Tibet in 1904, Tsarong Shape, his son and other colleagues suffered death for unconfirmed suspicions of collaboration with the Chinese. (1986, 45-46)

Dhondup’s conclusion that the reasons leading to Tsarong *Shap-pé*’s assassination were unverified ties in with Surkhang’s examination of the political intrigues that fueled the Cabinet Minister’s denunciation and subsequent murder: “He was opposed mainly by the rabble, and politically uneducated monks of Sera and Ganden; in addition he was borne a personal grudge by the minister Bshad grwa [Shatra], then in India, who took advantage of Tsha rong’s position by instigating rumors. Bshad-grwa’s [Shatra’s] grudge probably stemmed from the time that he was in prison, during which Tsha rong rose to power” (1999, n.pg.). Surkhang’s representation of the Tibetan government as

divided by power machinations is shared by Taring who writes of “a lot of jealous friction among Tibetan officials” (1986, 36) at that time, as well as by Charles Bell who argues that in the absence of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama, “[p]arty factions and internal jealousies hindered, as ever, the action of the Tibetan Government” (1924, 120). For some, like Taring’s father and brother, these jealousies proved to be disastrous at the time and continue to shape their repudiation in Tibetan historiography.

As these different historical interpretations show, Tsarong *Shap-pé*’s signature (or lack of) to the Tibet Trade Regulations and his supposed ‘closeness’ to the Chinese and particularly to Amban Lianyu give rise to very different historical interpretations. Despite the involvement of other key figures in both decision-making processes and circumstantial imperatives, it is his (perceived) actions that are mainly discredited in Tibetan exile histories. The multiple interpretations of these historical events by different Tibetan historians bring to our attention the much-debated concept of history as storytelling (White 1974, 1987; Southgate 2014, 2015). The necessary employment of historical data to present a coherent story of ‘what happened in the past’ has led to the questioning of the nature of representation and interpretation of historical events in historiography. This includes the “repudiation of any personal ‘ideological’—including ethical—input” (Southgate 2014, 1-2) of the professional historian, which is still treated with suspicion by many.

Following Hayden White’s proposition of employment, the exile Tibetan histories discussed above use a chronicle of events to piece together coherent stories (1974, 280). Applying their “constructive imagination”, a range of stories are put forward to the reader, each aiming to offer a persuasive story of ‘what really happened in the past’ (White 1974, 280). As White so elegantly argues, “no given set of casually

recorded historical events can in itself constitute a story; the most it might offer to the historian are story *elements*” (1974, 281, emphasis in the original). Until they are emplotted by the historian, White argues the events themselves are ‘value-neutral’ (1974) and as such they do not presuppose a particular reading of them. In adapting White’s theory to interrogate the differences in interpreting Tsarong *Shap-pé*’s motivations, we can propose that Tibetan exile historians “sought out different kinds of facts because they had different kinds of stories to tell” (1974, 281); as is evident from the tone of the narratives and the structuring of their argument, some historians pursue the aim to incriminate Taring’s father while others sought to redeem his memory in Tibetan history. Necessary to our understanding of these diverging historical emplotments is an appreciation of the individual historian’s presuppositions, be they ideological, aesthetic, religious or otherwise and those they assume of their audience; although both of these sets of preconceptions are usually conveniently effaced in historiography, our critical reading of these sources needs to take into account the tensions with China and Chinese history that influence both the understanding and writing of the recent events in Tibetan history.

Writing against the trend of several influential Tibetan historians, Taring’s representation of her father’s death as “an important historic event and an honour to the family” (1986, 37) is illuminating in a number of ways: reading his concerted efforts to import modern technologies from India alongside his use of diplomacy over force in order to avoid violent clashes between Tibetans and Chinese, Tsarong *Shap-pé* emerges as a forward-looking and sophisticated politician. In this way, Taring embeds her father’s efforts in the larger argument of presenting her male relatives as contributors to the continuous advancement of the country. Stressing throughout that her father was loyal to the Dalai Lama and that the Thirteenth Dalai Lama never lost faith in his

Cabinet Minister, she indirectly presents his assassination as a violent act against his progressive spirit. Indeed, Taring connects the attack on her father with an attack on the progressive spirit that had been prevalent in Tibet since the Imperial period and which had been nurtured and protected by the subsequent sovereigns. In Taring's narrative, this attack on the forward looking spirit of her father arguably, which had been motivated by the 'jealousy of a few,' was gaining in traction and was to shape not only the fortunes of her family but of the very nation itself.

4.2.4 Downfall, or the Conservative Factions in Tibet

Although the years between 1912 and 1933 were marked by internal turmoil and continuous threats to the integrity of the Tibetan polity, it is also described as one of the most exciting periods in Tibetan history "when Tibetan culture and traditions are believed to have flourished" (Fjeld 2005, 8). Having witnessed the efficiency of a modern bureaucracy and army in British India, the Thirteenth Dalai Lama returned with "a new vision of Tibet" (Goldstein 1989, 54). Taring's life narrative offers a good insight of the type of this new vision and its impact on the social and political life in Tibet during his time of rule:

The thirteenth Dalai Lama was such a strong and strict ruler that during his reign there was little corruption and the monasteries were well disciplined. By playing off China against India he preserved our independence; capital punishment and amputation, which had been common in some regions, were forbidden—except for high treason; a law was made against the demanding of free transport by officials; the rate of interest charged by money-lenders was limited and if landlords neglected their land others were given the right to use it. Doctors were sent to many rural districts and women in childbirth and sick animals were given free treatment. Gambling, drinking and the smoking of opium and tobacco were forbidden, as His Holiness believed that these pastimes made men weaker and wasted a lot of time and money" (1986, 137-138).

The last male figurehead of Taring's paternal family, Dasang Damdul Tsarong, played an important role in realizing parts of the reforms the Thirteenth Dalai Lama had in

mind. In her life narrative, Rinchen Dölma Taring goes to great lengths to showcase Dasang Damdul's goodwill and foresight in turning Tibet into an independent, strong nation-state. Not shying away from Dasang Damdul's complexity, Taring nevertheless foregrounds his good intentions and by doing so hopes to achieve to restore his rightful place in the collective memory of the Tibetan community in exile as one of the most influential and yet misunderstood individuals in the years before the invasion.

While some historical commentators commend Dasang Damdul for his forward-thinking approach and progressive ideas, others found him to be high-handed and arrogant, and unverified rumors persist that he was involved in a plot to overthrow the Tibetan government (McKay 1997). Some Tibetan historians and Tibetan life writers portray Dasang Damdul as a highly competitive and jealous individual, who fiercely guarded his influence in Tibetan politics against the two other protégés of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama, namely Finance Minister Lungshar and Thubten Kunphela, the personal attendant of the sovereign (Shakapba 1967; Wangdue 2010; Thondup 2015). Taring, however, dismisses these characterizations repeatedly throughout her life narrative by stating that “[t]hough Tsarong had his enemies he hated nobody, not even those who plotted against him, and he was good and helpful to all, high and low” (1986, 100) and again in the context of his demotion: “Tsarong never considered Lungshar his enemy but other people, in speculation, did think so” (1986, 143). Taring describes Dasang Damdul as having displayed “a great desire to help Tibet. He did some great work, always with the Dalai Lama's approval, but unfortunately had the reputation for being pro-British or pro-American, pro-Japanese or pro-Russian, because he was keen that Tibet should have good relations with all countries” (1986, 100). In this, she draws a direct parallel to her father and suggests that Dasang Damdul's friendly attitude to foreigners and his involvement with the British representatives in Tibet played a major

role in his fall from grace in the mid-1920s.

The progressives in government and society, and chief among them Dasang Damdul, strongly believed that only military strength could protect Tibet from Chinese encroachments. He himself had acquired military training in Russia and India while accompanying the Thirteenth Dalai Lama in Mongolia and British India. Under the explicit orders of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama, Dasang Damdul was entrusted to restructure the military, send officers to be trained in British India and acquire modern weaponry from abroad. His proposal to raise the Army by a further 15,000 soldiers to effectively counter the border war with China in eastern Tibet, however, met with fierce resistance from the conservative bloc in government and was thus amended to gradually increase the numbers over a twenty-year period (Goldstein 1989, 94-95). Despite these concessions, Charles Bell reports that in the lead up to the 1921 Mönlam Festival, “[t]he feelings between the monks and the military party have become more bitter, and the people are fearing an outbreak by the monks against the army officers, and especially against Tsa-rong” (1946, 289).

As the prominent figure of the modernization process and the enlargement of the Army, Dasang Damdul became an easy target for the conservative segment in government and the monasteries: “in the 1920s, a bitter dispute emerged over the Thirteenth Dalai Lama’s plan to enlarge the army. The Dalai Lama saw this as necessary to preserve Tibet’s integrity vis-à-vis China, while the monks saw it as a threat to their superiority with regard to both coercive force and the institutionalization of alien British values” (Surkhang 1999, n.pg.). Bell echoes this description of the tense atmosphere in *A Portrait of the Dalai Lama* (1946) and throws an interesting light onto the precarious situation of progressives such as Dasang Damdul, who “being so strongly

hated by the monks ... felt afraid to return to his house with only one or two servants, after he had left the [Dalai] Lama. He feared lest a monk in one of the dark little rooms should assassinate him from behind” (1946, 283). Linking the fate of Tsarong *Shap-pé* with the threats to Dasang Damdul’s life, these fears of being assassinated by the monastic orders powerfully reflect on a dark history of Buddhist involvement in violence in Tibet. They also reveal a deep chasm between popular assumptions and historical facts: while the Central Tibetan Administration and many of its supporters circulate the image of pre-1950 Tibet as a non-violent and harmonious society thanks to the influence of Tibetan Buddhism, there are many examples of violent clashes between Buddhist sects as well as civil unrest in Tibetan history. Moreover, as Federica Venturi shows, a number of these violent incidences “were both perpetrated and endorsed in various ways by the higher echelons of the Tibetan Buddhist hierarchy” (2015, 483), particularly, we might assume, when monastic privileges were at stake.

For the monastic segment, and particularly for the three powerful Gelugpa monasteries Drepung (Tib. *’bras spungs*), Ganden (Tib. *dga’ ldan*) and Sera (Tib. *se ra*), “military expansion cut right to the heart of their traditional power, draining resources that otherwise went to the monastic system and also neutralizing the coercive force of the large number of uneducated and fighting monks” (Goldstein 1989, 91-92). Furthermore, the conservatives among the clergy and aristocracy viewed the growing influence of the Army officers and their ostentatiously modern attitudes with disdain and suspicion (Goldstein 1989, 89-93). On top of these misgivings, the reorganization of the military produced a budget deficit, which the Dalai Lama sought to address by levying higher taxes for landholdings. As it was the aristocracy and the monasteries that were thus greatly affected, a clash between the modernizers and the conservatives was soon becoming inevitable (Goldstein 1989, 87). In their joint hostility towards the

incursions of modernity into their traditional sphere of influence and the curbing of their established privileges, both factions worked in unison to oppose the establishment of a modern military as well as other modern reforms. Growing military strength furthermore gave rise to speculations over Dasang Damdul's motives and soon rumors circulated of a military coup fueled by a set of controversial military deployments in and around Lhasa (Dhondup 1986, 70; McKay 1997).

These stories gained momentum when a violent clash erupted between army soldiers and the newly created police force, which the Commander-in-Chief Dasang Damdul dealt with rather harshly, ordering the amputations of a leg for one offender and the cutting off of an ear for two others—punishments that had previously been outlawed by the Thirteenth Dalai Lama. Dasang Damdul's opponents in the government and the monasteries used this incident to set the Dalai Lama against his favorite. Attending school in Darjeeling at the time and thus removed from the action in Lhasa, Taring relates the events from afar:

During my third year at school many very worrying rumours came from Lhasa saying that the monasteries might attack Tsarong because they suspected him of being pro-British and were afraid that the reforms he wanted to carry out quickly would lessen their own power. He was then busy reorganising the Army, as he saw more clearly than anybody else how necessary this was for the sake of Tibet's independence. But his enemies accused him of wanting to become more powerful than the Dalai Lama and to take over the country himself. (1986, 85)

Stressing that like in the defamation of her father, those who saw their privileges being weakened misconstrued Dasang Damdul's dedication to the welfare of the country. Presenting their views as clouded by jealousy, Taring casts doubt on historical representations that credit him with plotting against the Thirteenth Dalai Lama and the Tibetan government. Indeed, to this day, no agreement has been reached regarding the

existence of a *coup d'état* and Dasang Damdul's knowledge of or involvement in it. Despite their inability to prove any actual plot to overthrow the government, the conservative factions nevertheless successfully swayed the opinion of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama against the potential threat of a strong military. This had far-reaching and ultimately devastating consequences:

Although the Dalai Lama realized the importance of the military both for national defense and for control of the unruly monks, he had thought a strong and professional military, under the control of his trusted favorite Tsarong, would be completely subordinate to the government. He now found this to be unrealistic. Goaded on by the Drönyerchemmo [the leader of the conservative faction], he chose in the end to weaken the military rather than risk their deposing him. (Goldstein 1989, 135)

Dasang Damdul eventually received his dismissal from the post of Commander of the Tibetan Army when he returned from a pilgrimage to India and Nepal. As in the case of her father, Taring's narrative points not to any faults in the behavior of Dasang Damdul but to the combined work of "his enemies", who "had been working hard against him while he was out of the country" (1986, 91). Having already succeeded in demoting a number of progressive army officers on trumped-up charges, such as cutting their hair short or wearing Western clothes, the conservatives eventually had Dasang Damdul removed from the Kashag as well, effectively marginalizing him in Tibetan politics. Taring candidly admits that he had certainly "sometimes acted very strongly and independently" (1986, 91), an evaluation shared also by historian K. Dhondup, who nevertheless sees in the demoted modernizer a victim of extremely narrow-minded political game playing:

As a matter of fact, Tsarong could not have survived in the political jungle of Lhasa infested by the most unscrupulous and ambitious minds of the Tibetan aristocracy and monastic powers. He was a common Tibetan who was graced with the favour of the Dalai Lama due to his cleverness and courage. Having stayed in Urga, Peking and India at various stages of his life and having actively challenged the Chinese in mortal combat, he had more experience and shared a broader outlook than many of his

contemporaries. His one aim was a gradual modernization of Tibet with the help of a strong military. Inspired and encouraged by the Dalai Lama, he embarked on his modernising mission but was soon blocked by the solid conservatism of the monasteries and the aristocracy. (Dhondup 1986, 72-73)

After Dasang Damdul's demotion in 1925, army training and recruitment was scaled back significantly and a string of ineffectual Commanders effectively greatly diminished the inroads that had been made in creating a strong self-defense for Tibet. In their collective antipathy against reforms, the conservative bloc also halted many other projects, such as the introduction of English schools in Tibet.

Through contact with the British education system in India, the Thirteenth Dalai Lama had understood the need to modernize the Tibetan curriculum. To this end, the British civil servant Frank Ludlow was put in charge of introducing a school in Gyantse where male "students received a combination of both British- and Tibetan-style educations" (Thondup and Thurston 2015, 57; cf. Rank 2003). The school opened in 1923 but was closed again in 1926 because "the monasteries feared that it might harm the Buddhist religion" (Taring 1986, 90). Taring comments further that the conservative factions, and above all the Abbots of the three major monasteries Ganden, Drepung and Sera, "were completely opposed to any change in the life of Tibet and to all influences from other countries. The great monasteries had such power that they sometimes objected successfully even to His Holiness's plans" (1986, 90). Similarly, Gyalo Thondup relates that

[i]n 1944 another effort was made to open a modern British-style school in Lhasa similar to Ludlow's in Gyantse. It had a British headmaster named Ronald Parker and classes were taught both in Tibetan and English. Many people were excited by the prospect of this new style of education, but the conservatives triumphed once again. The school was ordered closed only months after it opened. (Thondup 2015, 58)

While these attempts reinforce the genuine attempts at introducing change into Tibetan

society on many levels, they are also lamentations at the refusal by conservative monastics and aristocrats in the government to allow Tibetans to benefit from certain forms of European modernity. As Thondup (2015, 58) emphasizes, parents who wished for a modern education for their children were therefore forced to send them abroad, mostly to British India for schooling.

Although Shakapba generally agrees with Taring's assessment that it was the monastic sector that defied the introduction of Western-style education, his appraisal seeks to establish a purely religious motivation for its opposition to foreign influence: "Religious interests continually obstructed progress in such matters. However, they were done without realizing the nature of the foreign realms and because of a very strong and exclusive commitment to Buddhism" (2010, 810). The last British Political Officer in Lhasa Hugh Richardson shares this benevolent view and stresses that

[t]he lay nobles were always more open to new ideas and more interested in the world around them than the monks were, in general, opposed to innovation or change of any kind and simply wanted to preserve the state of affairs exactly as it was. Although that sequestered conservatism was deliberate, it was not cynical and there was no conscious exploitation of the religious devotion of the people for selfish ends. (1962, 128)

Other historical commentators, including Rinchen Dölma Taring, view the conservative factions' rejection of modern reform programs far more critical and regard the argument of protecting Buddhism against foreign encroachments as a convenient excuse for protecting the status quo and above all, monastic privileges (Dhondup 1986; Goldstein 1989; Wangdue 2010). In stark contrast to the progressive attitude and dedication to the enrichment of Tibetan culture of her male ancestors, Taring's life narrative leaves no doubt that the so-called defense of Buddhism against modern encroachments was not, in fact, inspired by faith but an intolerant attitude and insular self-interest. Despite the

political testament of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama, in which he had warned Tibetans to work in unison to protect Tibet's independence, particularly against the rise of Communism in the region, these attitudes flourished unchecked and in Taring's words, "all the good rules were relaxed and there was much corruption among the officials, who were very fond of mahjong and neglected the duties of government" (1986, 138). Describing the interregnum period as one of decadence and discord, K. Dhondup strengthens Taring's lament about the state of affairs in Tibet from 1933 onwards:

As a dismal fact of modern Tibetan history, the regents Radreng and Tagdra fulfilled the Dalai Lama's warning to the letter by their extremely callous handling of the Tibetan administration, by treating it merely as a source of personal enrichment and an avenue of rewarding friends and supporters and punishing enemies and critics. It was one of the darkest period [sic] of the Tibetan history when corruption at every level was rampant and an undercurrent of tension and rapid deterioration in social and moral standards was gradually seeping across Lhasa. (1986, 92)

The next section gives a reading of Taring's juxtaposition of conservatism with Buddhism and of 'superstition' with non-modernity. In contrasting Tibet's history of internationalism with the contemporary climate of suspicion and 'moral degradation', *Daughter of Tibet* offers a compelling argument how the lost opportunity to create an indigenous modernity can effectively be carried out in exile with the help of progressives like herself.

4.3 Tibetan conservatism in the light of Buddhist Modernism

Throughout this period of reform during the early twentieth century, a number of influential monasteries ⁴⁷ justified their condemnation of any forms of modern encroachments in terms of an incompatibility of Buddhism with modernity. Taring,

⁴⁷ These were most notably the powerful three Gelugpa monasteries, Drepung (Tib. 'bras spungs), Ganden (Tib. dga' ldan) and Sera (Tib. se ra) situated near Lhasa.

however, questions the legitimacy of this claim. Having already established the welcoming attitude and openness towards foreign knowledge and technologies displayed by Tibetan rulers since the Imperial period, her narrative is overshadowed by the changes in attitude to this tolerance and interest in the twentieth century. While Taring's predecessors were commended for their attempts at introducing new and foreign concepts into Tibet, which were believed to enrich Tibetan culture and society, both her father and Dasang Damdul suffered adverse consequences for the same efforts.

Although she repeatedly states in her life narrative that many of the intrigues and plots were orchestrated by 'a jealous few', Rinchen Dölma Taring also leaves no doubt that their influence in Tibetan society was nevertheless decisive and their power considerable. Moreover, it is clear that the greatest opposition to any changes came in fact from the ultra-conservative monastic sector whose monks "were completely opposed to any change in the life of Tibet and to all influences from other countries" (Taring 1986, 90). In their united dislike and fear of any threats to the status quo, the conservative factions even opposed the wishes of their sovereign, the Thirteenth Dalai Lama.

In contrast to this isolationist and xenophobic attitude emerges from *Daughter of Tibet* an image of the inclusive, far-sighted and tolerant practices of Tibetan Buddhist rulers throughout the centuries. If Tibetan rulers have been open to the new and the modern *and* they were practicing Buddhism and even believed to *embody* Buddhism,⁴⁸

⁴⁸ The first transmission of (Indian) Buddhism into Tibet can be traced to the reign of Songtsen Gampo (~618—650 AD) „who was later recognized as the first of the three ‚Chögyel‘ (*chos rgyal*), or ‚Religious Kings‘ (the others were Trisong Detsen and Relbachen)“ (Powers 1995,126) These religious kings are believed to have been a reincarnation of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara (Tib. *Spyan Ras Gzigs*) to spread the Buddhist doctrine in human form. The Dalai Lamas are considered emanations of Avalokiteshvara as well thus linking their temporal and spiritual position to the early Chögyel. Michael Walter explains that Avalokiteshvara came to be connected with Tibetan rulers for political reasons as he

then Buddhism must be inherently compatible with modernity. Logically, the rejection of modernity in twentieth-century Tibet is a sign that the ‘true Buddhist morals’ have been neglected in favor of ‘un-Buddhist’ convictions. This sub-chapter will firstly elaborate how Taring forms this distinction by using superstition as the antithesis of Buddhism and develops this argument to distinguish the politics in twentieth century Tibet from the enlightened rule of previous centuries. Lastly, I will demonstrate how Taring uses this reasoning to establish herself as the worthy inheritor of her lineage as the bridge between Tibetan tradition and modernity.

4.3.1 Bön versus Tibetan Buddhism, or, superstition versus Truth

Daughter of Tibet is saturated with explanations of Tibetan customs and festivals and contains ample references to ‘folk’ beliefs and ‘superstitions’, which provided Tibetans with a framework to understand and deal with the world at small and at large. These beliefs concerned the whole life cycle of Tibetans and necessitated a range of practices to ensure auspicious results from the preparation and cooking of food, to the interpretation of dreams and rituals to avert misfortune or illness, to those concerning births and deaths. In his seminal work on Tibetan religion, Giuseppe Tucci summarizes Tibetan attempts at pacifying the numerous deities and spirits who inhabit the earth, water, and mountains: “the Tibetan lives in a permanent state of anxious uneasiness; every physical or spiritual disturbance, each illness, every uncertain or threatening situation leads him to embark upon a feverish search for the cause of the event and the appropriate means to ward it off” (Tucci 1980, 172-173). Listing the

was considered “a rescuer of those in danger and protector of the defenseless in a violent world” (2009, 216). In later texts, Avalokiteshvara skillfully combined soteriological and worldly powers, thus making him a powerful emblem for the unique Tibetan system of politics-and-religion combined (Walter 2009).

usages of these rites and rituals in a variety of contexts, Taring is also careful to explain their widespread existence as remnants of a pre-Buddhist past:

We Tibetans are very superstitious, *contrary to the Lord Buddha's teaching*. ... If one spills any food accidentally on departing from home for a distant place that is considered unlucky. ... To dream of an eclipse of the sun or the moon is considered to be an indication of the death of a king, a lama or a parent ... These—and various other Tibetan religious customs connected with weddings, births, deaths and so on—are *not real Buddhist activities*, but remnants of our original animist religion, called Bön.” (1986, 151-152; emphasis mine)

The repeated declaration that “We Tibetans are very superstitious, which as Buddhists we should not be” (1986, 107) and Taring’s subsequent clarification that these superstitions derive from pre-Buddhist beliefs, sets up an inherent difference between illogical and mystical Bön and rational, logical Buddhism. Taring further suggests that the original doctrine of Buddhism has somehow become overlaid with archaic vestiges of a pre-Buddhist past. This setting up of a difference between Bön and Buddhism, which intimates a distinction between non-modernity and modernity, is indicative of Taring’s intellectual indebtedness to the broader movement of Buddhist modernism.

Considered a revival movement, Buddhist modernism emerged during the nineteenth century, partly in response to an aggressive Christianity that was encountered in the context of European colonization in South and Southeast Asia.⁴⁹ As a reaction to the growing influence of Christianity and as a response to colonial modernity, lay and monastic followers understood that in order to be ‘rescued’ Buddhism needed to be ‘modernized’. David McMahan (2008) defines Buddhist modernism as “a revival movement spanning a number of geographical areas and schools, a movement that

⁴⁹ David McMahan’s *Buddhist Modernism* (2008) as well as Donald S. Lopez’ *Modern Buddhism: readings for the unenlightened* (2002) and *Buddhism & Science: A guide for the perplexed* (2008) give excellent overviews of the emergence and development of Buddhist modernism in South Asia and beyond.

reinterpreted Buddhism as ‘a rational way of thought’ that stressed reason, meditation, and the rediscovery of canonical texts. It deemphasized ritual, image worship, and ‘folk’ beliefs and practices and was linked to social reform and nationalist movements” (2008, 6-7). Instead, it emphasized meditative practices, social, community and political engagement (Bechert 1966; McMahan 2008). In order to achieve this, Buddhism in its different guises had to be “purged of mythological elements and ‘superstitious’ cultural accretions” (McMahan 2008, 5). Donald Lopez regards this ‘reinterpreted’ Buddhism as perfectly in tune with modern ideas of “reason, empiricism, science, universalism, individualism, tolerance, freedom, and the rejection of religious orthodoxy” (2002, x).

In short, the discourse of Buddhist modernism depicts Buddhism

as a world religion on a par with other world religions, particularly Christianity: having its own founder, sacred scriptures, philosophical tradition, etc. But in other respects Buddhism is not considered as being just on a par with other religions, it is in many ways superior to them. Buddhism, it is claimed, is based on reason and experience and does not presuppose any blind acceptance of authority. (Dreyfus 2005, 4)

Since the 1980s, this rhetoric has been successfully adapted in the self-representations of the CTA and many Tibetan monastic scholars, where Buddhism is portrayed as “based on reason and experience and does not presuppose any blind acceptance of authority. As such, it is highly compatible with modern science, to whose authority it appeals” (Dreyfus 2005, 4). Conflating the many regional and sectarian interpretations of Buddhism into one, Tibetan Buddhism is depicted as non-traditional and rational, deemphasizing ritual and other cultural specificities. This ‘modernist’ interpretation seeks to counter China’s claim of the hierarchical and oppressive nature of Tibetan Buddhism by seeking to establish it as a universal *philosophy* and moving away from the spiritual and indeed magical aspects of the religion. Moreover, Dreyfus argues, the strong ethical guidelines of cultivating compassion and non-violence are shown to be achieved not

through devotion and ritual but through introspection (meditation), itself again a rhetorical device to bring Tibetan Buddhism in line with rationality and modernism.

Before the exile administration became conscious of the rhetorical value of Buddhist modernism, Tibetans had already encountered this new interpretation of their faith on trade ventures on the Subcontinent, educational stays in Darjeeling or Kalimpong, and during pilgrimages to the Buddhist sites in India and Nepal during the early twentieth century. As Toni Huber argues in *The Holy Land Reborn* (2008), pilgrimages in particular shaped the understanding of many Tibetans about a South Asian colonial modernity and within that, of a ‘pure’, ‘original’ Buddhism as it was publicized by Buddhist revivalists and Western Orientalists alike. Rinchen Dölma Taring herself likely came into contact with the views of the Buddhist reform movement through the Mahabodhi Society⁵⁰ when she accompanied Dasang Damdul and her sister as their translator on a pilgrimage to “Bodh Gaya, Benares, Kushinaga and Kathmandu” (Taring 1986, 87), the very places of Buddhist worship that were being revitalized by the Society. As the most visible organization for the advocacy of Buddhist modernism in South Asia, the Mahabodhi Society also had a large presence in Darjeeling and Kalimpong and a number of influential Tibetans, such as Gergan Tharchin, the owner of the first Tibetan-language newspaper, and the intellectual Gedun Choephel were supporters of the reform movement. Gergan Tharchin was a close friend of Dasang Damdul Tsarong as well as Rinchen Dölma’s father-in-law Taring Raja (Fader 2002) and we can thus infer that Taring was exposed to the ideas of the Buddhist revival movement and the Mahabodhi Society from an early age onwards. While no

⁵⁰ Anagarika Dharmapala, a young Sinhalese Buddhist, was greatly influenced by the Theosophist movement and became an ardent supporter of the Buddhist reform movement. In May 1891, he founded the Mahabodhi Society with the aim to revive Buddhism in its original heartland of India and the subsequent restoration of the ancient Buddhist sites of Bodhgaya, Sarnath, and Kushinagara.

comparable reform movement took root on Tibetan soil, some families, among them the Tarings and Tsarongs, were nevertheless influenced by Buddhist modernism as it was flourishing in South Asia.⁵¹

During the time Buddhist modernism flourished in other parts of Asia, Tibetan Buddhism was in fact harshly judged: its pantheon of peaceful and wrathful deities was frequently described as an idolatrous aberration (Lopez 1998; Waddell 1895; among others). By separating ‘superstitious elements’ from ‘true’ Tibetan Buddhism, Rinchen Dölma Taring echoes the criticisms leveled at Tibetan Buddhism at that time, which described it in its totality as “a repulsive corruption of the Buddha’s rational teachings, polluted with demon worship and sacerdotalism to the point that it could no longer be accurately termed ‘Buddhism’ at all, but became instead ‘Lamaism’” (Lopez 1998, 252). Yet while her call for self-directed meditation and study of the Buddhist scriptures, her socially engaged Buddhist practice and rejection of hedonism, lead me to identify her as a Buddhist modernist, her critique of the prevailing superstitions is directed mainly at the aristocratic and monastic elites in Tibet. While Taring seems to regard the performance of rites in the context of a person’s private life as something akin to ‘cultural baggage’, she bemoans political actions that were informed by superstition. Her condemnation of what she believed to be ‘un-Buddhist’ considerations is evident from her reaction to the Tibetan government’s decision regarding the airlifting of the British Political Officer for treatment in 1935:

A few years later the Williamsons came to Lhasa ... While in Lhasa Mr. Williamson became very ill and the British government wanted to send an aeroplane to take him to Calcutta, but the Tibetan government refused to allow an aeroplane to land in Tibet because the monasteries felt that this would be inauspicious—so Mr. Williamson died. The government was very sorry and all his Tibetan friends were sad. (Taring 1986, 145)

⁵¹ Although a fascinating area of research, I am not aware of any study concerning the influence of Buddhist modernism on Tibetan society in the first half of the twentieth century. My appraisals of certain Tibetans and their indebtedness to (forms of) Buddhist modernism must therefore remain tentative at this point.

While Taring's tone is indulgent in recounting beliefs in auspiciousness and accompanying rites concerning the private lives of Tibetans, the incident quoted above distinguishes from these the ill-fated consequences of being governed by consideration of (in)auspiciousness. Stressing in an almost off-hand manner the fatal consequences of the government's decision not to allow a plane to land near Sera monastery, Taring thus highlights what she calls elsewhere a superstitious attitude 'contrary to the Lord Buddha's teachings'. This quote also serves to show the degree of influence the major monasteries exerted in major Tibetan political decisions—an influence that, in Taring's line of argument, was not Buddhist in nature but indebted to the 'superstitions' of pre-Buddhist beliefs.

Taring's view of the state of Tibetan governance becomes even clearer when we read this incident in combination with the blinding of Minister Lungshar. Once a favorite of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama and among the most powerful men in government, he was convicted of scheming to harm another Minister, *Shap-pé* Trimon, in order to "control the whole country by replacing the *Drong Drak Makhar* regiment with monks who would be faithful to him" (Taring 1986, 141): "Lungshar was imprisoned and an enquiry into his behaviour showed that he had been planning to overthrow the government, so he was condemned to lose his sight and be imprisoned for life. Poor thing! I feel as sorry for him as for my own father and I am ashamed that our Buddhist country gave such a punishment. Yet it was not the fault of the whole country, but was done through the personal jealousy of a few people—the cause also of my father's death" (Taring 1986, 142).

Linking the cruel verdict to ‘the jealousy of a few’, Taring emphasizes that they—and therefore their decisions—are neither representative of the majority of Tibetans nor representative of Buddhism even though these influential men hailed from both aristocratic and monastic backgrounds. The widespread reluctance to modernize Tibet was thus at odds with the essentially progressive spirit of Tibet; and in her view, the reliance in government circles on ritual and divination for political decisions is indeed wholly contrary to Tibetan values. The retreat into superstition and against the opening up of Tibet was, however, not only antithetical to the progressive spirit of Tibet, but did in fact prove to be disastrous for the welfare of her fatherland. Taring thus links the government’s failure to protect Tibet from colonization to ‘un-Buddhist’ practices and an “unTibetan” shortsightedness that was fueled by the ruling classes’ jealous protection of their power and privileges.

What emerges from *Daughter of Tibet* is a powerful narrative about the abandonment of Buddhist values in favor of superstition, personal intrigues and power machinations in the decades leading up to the Communist invasion. What makes the argument radical in many ways, particularly for the time of its publication in 1970, is its embedded critique of the shortsightedness of the jealous and powerful few who nevertheless shaped Tibetan politics during the first half of the century; it is furthermore a critique that particularly takes to account the conservative monastic bloc and questions the Buddhist spirit of those who are intimately linked to the teaching and interpretation of its very values. The Buddhist spirit, we can surmise from Taring’s life narrative, lives in those who carry forward and protect Tibet’s century-old engagement with the world around its borders to enhance existing knowledge and practice for the benefit of all Tibetans. As I will show in the last sub-chapter, it is Taring herself who may be the ideal fit to provide Tibet with precisely this kind of progressive mindset. With her father

assassinated and Dasang Damdul effectively marginalized in politics, Rinchen Dölma Taring herself emerges as the heir to this legacy of progressive modernizers of Tibet.

4.3.2 '*A modern Tibetan*': *The re-selving of Rinchen Dölma Taring*

Nothing about Rinchen Dölma Taring's life has been ordinary: born into a noble family with impeccable pedigree and privy to all kinds of foreign acquisitions, Taring enjoyed an exceptionally fortunate childhood. Her life would normally have proceeded along very predictable and comfortable lines had it not been for the assassination of her father in 1911 and the death of her mother only a few years later, which left her in the vulnerable position of an orphan. With Dasang Damdul as the new head of the household, her privileges dissipated to a certain degree:

As we were now orphans I had to assert myself on my own and Changchup Dölma's [her younger sister] behalf. Tsarong's steward controlled the household food and gave us badly cooked meals ... Once I threw the whole tray through the window into the courtyard and it nearly hit a servant on the head. Everybody thought that I had a very bad temper, yet it was only by behaving like this that I could get the things we needed." (1986, 60)

While Janice Willis sees this behavior as showcasing "class superiority" (1989, 157), I argue that Taring acts from the realization of her precariousness—as an orphan and with a non-blood relative in charge of the household, her former position as daughter of the house was being crucially redefined. While the steward may have tried to marginalize the late Tsarong *Shap-pé*'s daughters, Dasang Damdul's treatment of the sisters is described as caring and he affords them the hitherto unknown opportunity to receive education in British India (Taring 1986, 68). Although Taring recounts that family friends were suspicious of Dasang Damdul's motives, she stresses her delight at the prospect of being enrolled at Queen's Hill Methodist School: "About a year after Sir

Charles Bell and Mr. MacDonald had left Lhasa Changchup Dölma and I were asked if we would like to go to Darjeeling. Changchup Dölma took no interest in the idea but as I was most anxious to go I was told that I would be sent away to school in the following autumn” (1986, 68). Although at this point, Rinchen Dölma Taring could not have been aware of the magnitude of this choice, it was to prove the most defining decision that set her on a completely different trajectory from the ordinary life of a Lhasa aristocratic woman and was to play an important role in her understanding of Tibetan traditions and Western modernity.

Having already been accustomed to some modes of Western and especially British life and consumer goods, Taring showed great aptitude in adapting to the very different environment in India. The headmistress Carolyn Stahl remarked that Rinchen Dölma “was an energetic high-spirited girl, quite capable of holding her own among the other girls. She dressed in English clothes and quickly learned English and entered into all the school life” (Stahl, n.pg.). Reminiscent of Dasang Damdul’s enthrallment with all things foreign, Taring recounts bemusedly how she had become absorbed by this new and exciting world to the extent that she wanted to showcase how completely assimilated she had become to Western culture upon returning to Lhasa for the summer holidays:

Though I had been at a European school for such a short while I thought I was now very Westernised. From Kalimpong I had written to Pema Dolkar, telling her that I must always have bread or scones for breakfast, as I had forgotten how to eat tsampa, and saying that I would be sleeping on a bed and not on cushions on the floor. ... I felt I had learnt a lot and was very superior to Changchup Dölma and all my old schoolmates. (1986, 77-78)

The ease with which Taring adopts Western dress and customs is mirrored in the simplicity with which Taring relates her encounters with Christianity at the British Trade Agency in Gangtok, and later in Darjeeling:

The MacDonalds were devout Christians who ran a day school in which Vera and Vicky taught English and two Nepalese teachers taught Nepali and Hindi. A few conversions were made, but they never tried to convert me. At this school they called me Dölma, which is the Tibetan name for the Indian goddess Tara and means 'Protector'. Then Annie [MacDonald] asked me if I would like to be renamed 'Mary' before I went to Darjeeling, Mary being the Lord Jesus' mother's name. To me it sounded like Dölma, as Christ's mother is also a protector, so I accepted it and have since been known as Mary to all my friends. (1986, 75)

Tibetans are indeed accustomed to name changes, which can happen several times throughout people's lives. New names may for example be given after a severe illness or when someone enters monastic life to indicate a break with the past. Nevertheless, Taring's response to the suggested name change exhibits a readiness to step into a different cultural milieu and shows of a great degree of tolerance towards another set of (spiritual) values even though the somewhat comparable devotion to Dölma and Mary within the respective religions would have helped to make the transition slightly easier. This open-mindedness can be detected also in relation to the religious nature of her education at Queen's Hill: "I went to church regularly with the other girls, took scripture lessons and respected Christ. Yet I kept my faith in the Lord Buddha and in Dölma as my karma deity – the goddess who had been my protectress in all previous incarnations" (1986, 76-77). While tolerant, Taring's openness is not one of blind acceptance. Showing respect towards Christianity did not diminish her core belief in the tenets of Tibetan Buddhism.

Her fascination with and openness to adopt new practices and beliefs also led her to review certain aspects of Tibetan tradition. While in some instances, such as

religious education, this seems to have strengthened her indebtedness to her own Tibetan heritage, at other times we can detect a heightened sense of awareness towards the difference between Tibet and the outside world: “Gradually I was dressed in European style and gave away all my Tibetan clothes, but going to Darjeeling I had to use my own trunk, which was covered with hide. It smelled and this embarrassed me” (Taring 1986, 74). With her entry into the British school, Taring seeks to discard many of the outer attributes of ‘Tibetanness’—her reference to the hide trunk as ‘smelly’ and therefore ‘embarrassing’ also encapsulates a growing awareness of *difference* whereby certain features of Tibetan culture evoke in her a feeling of un-sophistication, of non-modernity, which Taring is keen to shed. This relatively minor incident shows, however, the beginning of a heightened sense of awareness and self-consciousness regarding Tibetan culture *vis-à-vis* Western norms and cultural values and Taring’s ensuing self-reflexivity was formative for her later formulations of Buddhist modernism as well as her position on Tibetan education and politics.

Moreover, the ability to adopt facets of Western culture while remaining anchored in her traditions distinguished Rinchen Dölma Taring from the majority of her Tibetan contemporaries and endeared her to the Western visitors at Tsarong house for whom she often acted as a linguistic and cultural interpreter. The Head of the last British Mission in Lhasa (1936-1940 and 1947-50), Hugh Richardson commends Rinchen Dölma Taring and her British-educated husband Jigme for their insights into both cultures: “They had learnt perfect English and spoke it beautifully and they had gained a good understanding of Western ways of living and thinking – very different in some manifestations from those of Tibet – so that they were able *to act as a bridge between the two worlds* and to give us a better insight into Tibetan life and thought” (Richardson in Taring 1986, 9; emphasis mine). Taring’s ability to ‘act as a bridge’

underlines both her intercultural awareness and sensitivity and points to her capacity to translate and integrate Western elements into her own culture without succumbing to colonial mimicry.

In adopting and adapting what elements of Western culture she deemed beneficial to Tibet, Rinchen Dölma Taring was most passionate about spreading modern education in English and Tibetan and the practice of vaccination. The British Trade Agents had started an immunization program against smallpox around Gyantse and Taring had received instructions on how to administer the vaccinations (Taring 1986, 122; McKay 2005). Richardson praises Taring's discerning attitude in his Foreword to *Daughter of Tibet*: "But whatever the Tarings acquired from outside – and what they took was chosen with good taste – they never ceased to be sincere and devoted Tibetans. They saw the weak points in the Western world as well as the good and could poke quiet fun at foreign pretensions, always with innate, good-natured, politeness" (Richardson qtd in Taring 1986, 9-10). In this selective practice, Taring took inspiration from her ancestors who she portrays as not having desired to supplant Tibetan culture or religion with foreign imports but attempted to enrich and improve what was already present in Tibet.

Dasang Damdul in particular emerges as an astute observer of Western culture, including its benefits and downfalls: "Most of the few foreigners who visited Lhasa were entertained at Tsarong House and in 1947, when the American writer Mr. Lowell Thomas, came with his son, I was their interpreter. I remember Mr. Thomas asking Tsarong his opinion of the world situation: Tsaring replied that the big countries of the world have too much greed and want to devour each other" (Taring 1986, 100). Bell underlines Dasang Damdul's balanced attitude to Western values on the one hand and

the virtues of Tibetans on the other: “Tsa-rong and I have many talks together. He believes fervently in the superiority of his own people. He considers that Tibetan soldiers are hardier than British soldiers or the soldiers of other countries” (1946, 300). This careful evaluation of aspects of Western culture in the light of their value and practicality for the local context shows how progressives in Tibet managed to remain anchored in their traditional background while also adapting to modernity (Dreyfus 2005).

Despite their indebtedness to Tibetan values, Rinchen Dölma Taring and her family repeatedly came under attack from the conservative factions in society and government for their pro-Western leanings and later also from the Communist cadres stationed in Lhasa. Ordered by the Chinese Communists to teach female soldiers and later to serve as the Secretary of the Chinese-founded Patriotic Women’s Association, Taring is aware of the danger of being suspected of collaboration because “of what had happened to my father and brother when they were expected of being pro-Chinese” (1986, 205). In defending her decision to engage with the Chinese Communists, Taring is careful to stress that these activities were sanctioned by the Tibetan government (1986, 213) and offers her religious devotion as a sign of her patriotism:

As usual, Jigme and I were suspected of being pro-British or pro-American, because of knowing English and having a standard of living that mixed English ways with Tibetan—for instance producing knives and forks at meal-times and using a table cloth. *Yet we were nothing else but true Tibetans.* Then as now, our hearts were with religion and we were both seeking earnestly for the truth, believing strongly in karma, meditating and praying. (1986, 192; emphasis mine)

This fervent defense of her *Tibetanness* also allows us to understand the kind of ‘modern Tibetan society’ Taring envisions: one which imports certain Western comforts and customs but not to the detriment of core Tibetan values, above all Buddhist

practice. Setting herself apart from the hedonistic lifestyle of partying, fashion, and playing “mahjong for high stakes” (1986, 156), Taring extols the virtues of serious religious study, meditation, physical work and social responsibility. Read together with her earlier criticisms on the intrigue and power machinations in government circles, Taring portrays Tibetan noble society as self-indulgent and quick to turn away from the political realities to attend to enjoyment and a luxurious life style, which Taring seems to hold responsible for the nobility’s inability and ultimate failure to deal with the Chinese leadership adequately.

The syncretism Taring displays was (and remains) a common feature among many Western-educated Asian Buddhist, who were skeptical of a wholesale adoption of Western modernity. Instead, as David McMahan argues, these elites

represent what we might call ‘indigenous modernities,’ which selectively embrace many elements of Western modernity but are not fully assimilated to it. ... Their teachings combine Buddhist and Western ideas and practices into complex hybrids that strategically adopt, reject, and transform elements of both modernity and tradition. (2008, 42)

While their vision of an ‘indigenous modernity’ in Tibet was destined to fail due to the constant opposition by the ultra-conservative bloc, the disruption of the Tibetan status quo after 1959, paradoxically offered an opportunity to shape Tibetan society in this way.

After the failed uprising in March 1959, Taring escaped with thousands of other Tibetans over the Himalayas to be eventually reunited with her husband in India. Shortly after her escape, Taring taught English to refugees in Kalimpong but was soon asked to join the newly established Central Tibetan Administration in its attempt to establish schools and orphanages for the destitute refugee children. It is thus in India

that Taring's early exposure to colonial modernity and Western education become highly sought after within a community thrust into an alien environment. In fact, it was this fusion of modernity and tradition that progressive Tibetans embodied that opened up an avenue for Rinchen Dölma Taring to re-position herself as a worthy heir of her family and as a prominent educator in the exile community. Understanding the Tibetan and Western education system and experienced in teaching, Taring is finally able to help create a curriculum that was able to transmit Tibetan cultural and religious values as well as to prepare Tibetan children for the 'modern' world. The result of her efforts at the Tibetan Homes Foundation is a fusion of Buddhism and modernity, a unique model that stands not only for the compatibility of the two systems of thought but, in Taring's view, must be understood also in terms of their intrinsic connection.

With the loss of the homeland and the painful crossing into exile, Taring suggests, a new time has come for Tibetan society: with the colonization and disruption of Tibetan traditional life, the old hierarchies have also been dismantled. For Taring, it seems that finally her forefathers' vision of a modern Buddhist Tibet can be realized. In order to deal with the demands of modern and the alienation caused by the condition of exile, Taring emphasizes a return to those intrinsically Tibetan values of equality, undogmatic rationality and curiosity about the unknown. The only way forward for Tibetan society in exile is now to remember the progressive spirit of Tibet and to "combine sacred elements of Buddhism with the major Western discourses and practices of modernity" (Jacoby and Terrone 2012, 160). In her most outspoken plea to learn from the mistakes in the past and to create an 'indigenous modernity', Taring foretells: "When we get back our own country, Tibet can never be the same as before. The next generation will not be fooled by superstitions and delusions; they will be more knowledgeable, and by preserving our religion and culture at the present time we can

make sure that in future the Truth will be practised by all Tibetans” (1986, 308-309). This frank and critical evaluation of pre-Communist society is an eloquent summary of Rinchen Dölma Taring’s attitude towards the need for a return to the core values of Buddhism and the emancipation of Tibetans from harmful superstitions.

While these sentiments were radical and potentially inciting when *Daughter of Tibet* was published in 1970, a remarkable shift has occurred since then in exile Tibetan rhetoric which highlights the compatibility of Tibetan Buddhism with science and modernity in general: “This perspective considers Buddhism to be strongly ethical, devoted to nonviolence, and providing valuable resources for social action. Its recommended practice is said to be meditation, while ritual is devalued as popular superstition or adaptations to the demands of the laity” (Dreyfus 2005, 177). The official proposition of the reconcilability of Tibetan Buddhism with modernity now sanctions Taring’s criticism and indirectly supports her argument that superstition, intrigue and an anti-modernist stance are antithetical to the original progressive spirit of Buddhism and by extension of Buddhist Tibet. Rinchen Dölma Taring has seemingly achieved to restore her family’s reputation as one of the great lineages of modernizers and her own elevation to an enlightened example of a truly Tibetan modernist.

4.4 Conclusion

Rinchen Dölma Taring’s life narrative challenges our assumption of the boundaries between life writing, and women’s life writing in particular, with history. By focusing on the recent events in political history and the failure of Tibet’s indigenous modernization project, *Daughter of Tibet* questions both narrow generic and gender boundaries that equate women’s life writing solely with domestic and family memoirs.

Daughter of Tibet does incorporate elements of family history and relations in the branched house of Tsarong; yet it does, so, in order to advocate for the recognition of the intimate and intrinsic relationship between the private and the public and the necessity of seeing the connections between both spheres to understand History in its entirety. The history we come to know here is revisionist in a number of ways: establishing a vision of Tibetan society as international and interested in the outside world and detailing the modernizing efforts in the first half of the twentieth century, Taring counters a host of romantic and negative stereotypes about pre-Communist Tibet. Not shying away from the complexities of traditional Tibetan society, her criticism of the conservative ‘anti-modernizers’ also runs counter to the idealized version of Tibet circulated by the Central Tibetan Administration.

As a Tibetan who combines Western education and a modern Buddhist outlook, Taring affirms her central role as the bridge between tradition and modernity. Through her work in the Tibetan Homes Foundation, Taring continues the legacy of modernizing efforts and fulfils her filial duty to honor both nation and her ancestors. Yet by shaping future generations in her family’s progressive spirit, Taring is not only able to complete her forefathers’ vision of a modernized Tibet. As the worthy heir to her lineage, she thus carries forth and completes her forefathers’ vision of Tibet. And so, Rinchen Dölma Taring finally fully emancipates herself from a filial position to a subject in the modern history of her nation where she can lay claim to her family’s name as the one that signifies herself.

CHAPTER FIVE

Voicing the Untold:

Women, War, and Difference in *Ama Adhe* and *Sorrow Mountain*

In 1956, Tibetans across Kham and Amdo revolted in great numbers against the Chinese. With thousands of others, Ani Pachen Dölma joined the resistance: “With my country threatened and my family in danger, I set about making preparation for war” (Pachen 2000, 123). Taking over the role of chieftain of Lemdha, she led several hundred men into the surrounding mountains from where they launched attacks against the Chinese army. During that time, Adhe Tapontsang “formed a small underground group of Tibetan women” in the district of Nyarong and “decided to fight with whatever means available” (Tapontsang 1997, 72) against Communist policies and actions. Like Pachen and Tapontsang, many women took active part in the eastern Tibetan resistance movement from the very beginning of the anti-colonial struggle. Rather than passively enduring the changes in their daily lives that the Chinese colonization brought in its wake, women provided information and provisions to the freedom fighters, took up arms and even led troops into battle to defend their households and villages. Like many male resistance fighters, women suffered imprisonment for their involvement in the anti-colonial uprisings and a number of them were executed for their leadership roles in the movement. Although they played a significant part in this period of eastern Tibetan history, women’s contributions are neither fully recognized in the stories of male resistance fighters nor are they part of official exile history.

To this day, male veterans represent the history of the resistance “as a grand

heroic male narrative” (Aretxaga 1997, 103) by stressing that women had only had supportive roles and by denying that they had engaged in armed combat (McGranahan 2010a). In presenting the uprisings in eastern Tibet solely as a male affair, the contributions of Adhe Tapontsang, Ani Pachen Dölma, and other female resistance fighters have been silenced in resistance history. Challenging the masculinist myth of an exclusively male Tibetan guerrilla movement, the life narratives *Ama Adhe. The Voice that Remembers* (1997) by Adhe Tapontsang and *Sorrow Mountain. The Journey of a Tibetan Warrior Nun* (2000) by Ani Pachen Dölma unearth the voices of women who supported the struggle in various ways and who fought alongside Tibetan men in the battles against the Chinese army. Hence, both texts work against the marginalization of women in the history of the Tibetan resistance; moreover, they call into question traditional characterizations of war as a male activity and the battlefield as a masculine arena, in which women appear as passive victims in need of male protection from male aggression (Herrmann and Palmieri 2010).

Detailing women’s involvement in the planning and execution of anti-colonial resistance strategies, Tapontsang and Pachen not only undermine the dominant imagery of women as being on the margin and as being silent but also resist having their experiences rendered ‘unimportant’ compared to the stories of male fighters. By disrupting the grand male narrative of the resistance, Tapontsang’s and Pachen’s life writing reveals, in Joan Scott words, “new interpretations, stresses different understandings of events, exposes hitherto hidden connections” (1984, 5) that are salient for a gender-sensitive reading of recent Khampa history. Yet apart from challenging the masculinist resistance history, their focus on the eastern Tibetan resistance also disturbs the order of standard exilic discourse.

Regardless of gender, making the resistance movement the focus of historical inquiry is a fraught undertaking. As Carole McGranahan observes, references to the resistance movement are generally excluded from official history because they challenge Tibetan self-representations and outside perceptions of the exile community (2005, 571). The resistance's military character and its non-governmental status raise questions about the exile portrayal of Tibet's recent history as one of pure diplomacy and non-violence. Moreover, as a predominantly eastern Tibetan phenomenon, the resistance movement acted independently of any directions from the Lhasa government and in certain instances, against the wishes of the Kashag and the Fourteenth Dalai Lama. Tibetan resistance (hi)stories thus challenge the image of a homogenous, centrally ruled pre-colonial Tibet by highlighting the complicated relationship between the eastern Tibetan regions and central Tibet. In their insistence on remembering the period of 1949-59 as one of war and of regional difference, resistance histories challenge, in Jamyang Norbu's words, "the cherished fiction of our official non-violent history and ideology" (2004, 113). Combined with the troubled status of the resistance and the difficulty of narrating violence in relation to the Dalai Lama's policy of nonviolence, little public space exists for histories of war.

To turn our attention to resistance stories pursues a political agenda: the retrieval of Tibetan resistance histories points to a crisis of the official exile representation of the Chinese colonization and challenges the attempts by Dharamsala to represent the nation as a coherent whole. In the attempt to rescue the stories of the resistance fighters from dominant historiography, it is nevertheless necessary to acknowledge the gendered nature of the movement and the power hierarchies that operated among its members. While no explicit ban exists in relation to resistance history, the telling and writing of resistance stories is not encouraged by Dharamsala (McGranahan 2010a), which makes

it difficult for veterans to voice their stories in public. However, while the censoring of resistance stories effaces the efforts of both male and female resistance fighters, the denial of female participation by male veteran's places "the female as subaltern ... even more deeply in the shadow" (Spivak 1988, 83). To work against this double effacement of women in elite historiography, Gayatri Spivak (2006) suggests an engagement with literary texts because these offer an alternative site for subaltern women to articulate their histories (2006, 241-268). By examining Khampa women's voices and their representations of resistance and of gendered suffering in prison, we gain an understanding of the otherwise under-represented categories of 'gender' and 'region' in Tibetan exile discourse. *Ama Adhe* and *Sorrow Mountain* facilitate an alternative remembering of Tibetan history in which both gender and region are placed at the center of inquiry.

Although accounts of the resistance and women at war are considered both politically and culturally dangerous, Tapontsang and Pachen insist on telling their experiences as an integral part of national history. Carrying within them the stories of other Khampa women and men, both accounts aspire to become a "living testimony" (Tapontsang 1997, 241) for those who did not survive. In transcending the personal to give testimony of the collective plight, Tapontsang and Pachen firmly place their life narratives in the service of their community. Their motivation to support the national struggle by telling "the story of all Tibetans who have suffered under the Chinese Communist occupation" (T. Gyatso in Tapontsang 1997, vii) invited the personal endorsement of the Dalai Lama. Despite the representation of politically and culturally charged topics, the will to make the history of Kham known to the world thus seems to mitigate the prohibition on the resistance with the result that their refusal "to bend to the Chinese will" is re-defined by the Dalai Lama as "unflinching patriotism" (T. Gyatso in

Pachen 2000, xi). Thus, the framing of their life narratives in the service of the nation characterizes them as patriotic acts even though they also challenge the grand narrative of Dharamsala.

In order to mirror the complex layers of conformity and contestation in these two life narratives, this Chapter is divided into four sections. In the first part, I will show how the portrayals of Kham and its people fit within official exilic parameters of representing recent Tibetan history. Secondly, I will consider how at the same time both life narratives reject popular notions of Tibetan passive victimization and non-violence by drawing attention to the resistance strategies against Chinese colonization. Lastly, my analysis will concentrate on the experiences of women in the male dominated sphere of resistance and their challenges in asserting their position within the movement.

5.1 Fitting Kham into Dharamsala's historical narrative

For the Chinese government, Tibetans are one of the five minorities of China since 'ancient times' and their territory extends from the banks of the Upper Yangtze River westwards to include the provinces Ü-Tsang and Ngari. The borders of the subsequently established Tibet Autonomous Region thus correspond to the administrative areas that had been under the direct control of the Lhasa government in 1950. These territorial borders may constitute historical facts beyond dispute for China yet the Central Tibetan Administration operates under very different concepts regarding Tibetan ethnicity and national territory. The national territory to which the Central Tibetan Administration lays claim to covers the TAR, the whole of Qinghai province, Western parts of Sichuan, areas of Yunnan and a small part of Gansu. This territorial model, often described as 'Greater Tibet', is based as much on historical facts as it is on

“a variety of other factors that divide Tibetans and Chinese, such as language, culture, and religion” (Sperling 2004, 4). This section examines how Tapontsang and Pachen legitimize this national narrative within their life writing. Firstly, I will examine the claim to national territorial unity in light of current historical research and show how the idea of Greater Tibet is intimately linked to an understanding of ethnic differences between Tibetans and Chinese. Secondly, I will show how this difference is used to evaluate (and condemn) the Chinese invasion and colonization.

5.1.1 Mapping the Unity of Greater Tibet

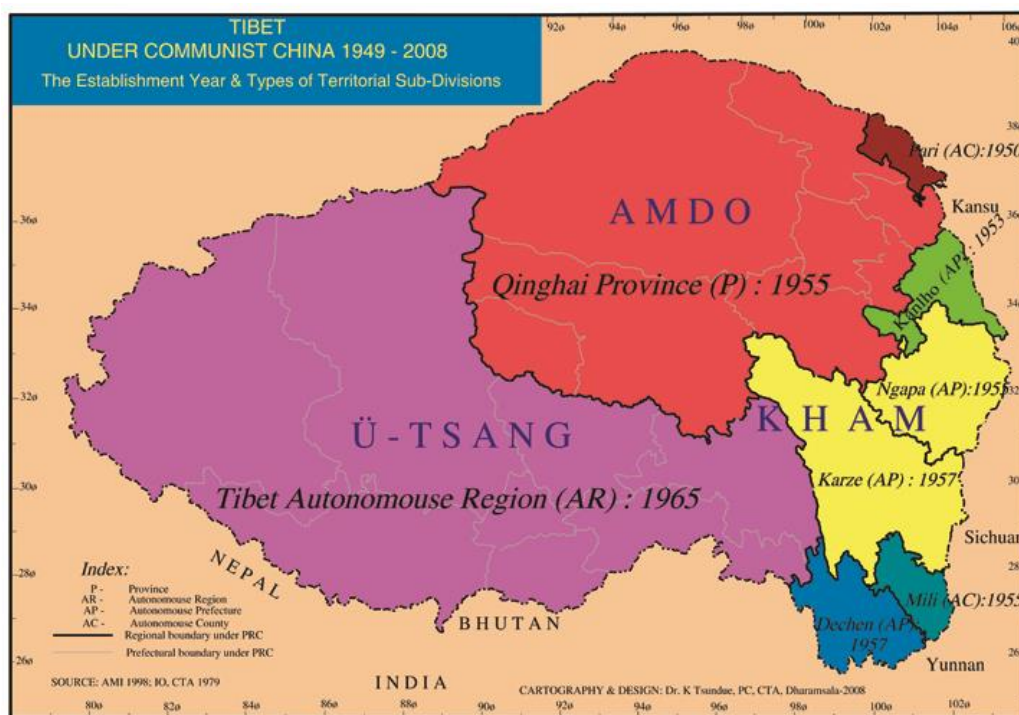


Image courtesy of The Tibet Museum, Gangchen Kyishong, Dharamsala.

The opening pages of *Ama Adhe* and *Sorrow Mountain* feature a map that is commonly found in Tibetan exile publications: It shows the three provinces Amdo, Kham and Ü-Tsang, which together constitute the entity Tibet, framed by uninterrupted and recognizably *national* borders. This map corresponds to the official exile position

that ‘Tibet’ “means the whole of Tibet known as Cholka-Sum (U-Tsang, Kham and Amdo)” (CTA 2016, n.pg). Representing the eastern provinces as an integral part of the entity Tibet, the map situates China to the east of Kham and Amdo, a view expressed in the autobiography of the Fourteenth Dalai Lama, *Freedom in Exile*: “On the eastern borders of both Kham and Amdo lies Tibet’s national boundary with China” (1990, 6). Ani Pachen signals her alliance with the official exile position from the opening paragraph of *Sorrow Mountain*:

during the reign of the Fifth Dalai Lama, the area stretching from the Western region known for its nutmeg trees to the eastern region known for brocade was brought under the administration of the Tibetan government. ... As the years passed, Tibet divided into three provinces: U-Tsang, the province of religion to the west; Amdo, the province of superb horses to the north; and Kham, the province of the black-headed people to the east. (2000, xxi; all emphasis in original)

This quote seeks to affirm the historical validity of cholka-sum by suggesting the continuity of Tibetan territorial integrity from the time of the establishment of the Ganden Phodrang until the mid-twentieth century. As one of the traditional three provinces, Kham is firmly placed within this historical territory of Tibet and therefore under the political and spiritual authority of the Dalai Lama’s government. Myth-like in its depiction, the excerpt seeks to establish the uninterrupted administrative control of the Ganden Phodrang over all three provinces as a historical fact; in doing so, however, *Sorrow Mountain* gives more insight into nationalist desires than into Kham’s political history.

Exile Tibetan evocations of historical unity notwithstanding, the geopolitical realities of the twentieth century paint a decidedly different picture that complicates any claims to continuous political affiliations of Amdo and Kham with central Tibet. As a number of Tibetan scholars point out, Lhasa’s administration was fairly fluid and flexible, and

relied on the authority of local leaders throughout the eastern Tibetan areas where they held both political and judicial powers (Goldstein 1989; McGranahan 2010a; Samuel 1993; W. Smith 1996; among others). Rather than a unified nation under centralized administration, Amdo and Kham were more like the semi-autonomous states, in which tribal leaders defended their local authority and freedom against Chinese encroachments often without the help of the Tibetan military. In *Civilized Shamans* (1993), Geoffrey Samuel therefore contends that the relationship between the three Tibetan provinces needs to be understood not in terms of a centralized or decentralized state, but as a series of societies existing in and through continuous social exchange and power relations.

Though these eastern states owed nominal allegiance to the Lhasa government (Shakya 1999), they were not governed by the Ganden Phodrang in any modern sense. Rather, authority in eastern Tibet was established “by a complicated network of overlapping allegiances” (Dreyfus 1997, 136) that sometimes included alliances with Lhasa, and sometimes with Peking. Adhe Tapontsang’s description of the political instability in Kham in the first decades of the twentieth century alludes to this complexity. Stressing that her native Nyarong “had experienced periods of freedom and alliance with Tibet in the centuries preceding [her] birth [in 1932]” Tapontsang further records that “[a]fter the fall of the Manchu Dynasty, the region fell to the embattlements of ruthless warlords and eventually came under the increasing control of the warlord Liu Wenhui” (Tapontsang 1997, 10-11). While not undermining exile claims of the eastern provinces as an integral part of Tibet, the passage makes clear that at least since 1911, the incursions of Chinese troops and local warlords into the borderlands continuously interrupted Lhasa’s political and military power over Khampa territory.

The Lhasa government rejected Chinese territorial claims in eastern Tibet at the Shimla conference in 1913/14, “demanding the reunification of all Tibetan speaking peoples under the administration of the Dalai Lama including all of Amdo and Kham” (Goldstein 1989, 68-71). To reinforce its claims over the borderlands, Lhasa sent troops to aid the Khampa tribal leaders against Chinese aggression; yet despite these attempts at securing border territory, “after 1932, none of the ethnic Tibetan (Khamba) areas east of the Yangtse River was under the control of the Tibetan Government” (Goldstein 1994, 86). Just as the Lhasa government never accepted the loss of Kham and Amdo “as permanent or *de jure*” (Goldstein 1994, 86), the Tibetan exile government has continuously denied the legality of China’s separation of ethnic Tibetans based on these earlier border demarcations: “Since China’s invasion of and occupation of Tibet, the Chinese have incorporated the whole of Amdo and parts of Kham into the neighbouring Chinese provinces of Qinghai, Szechuan, Kansu and Yunnan—leaving only U-tsang and other parts of Kham as the so-called Tibet Autonomous Region [TAR]” (Thonden 1991, 12).

The refusal to acknowledge any model but *cholka-sum* is anchored in the belief that only the unity of the three provinces is an adequate reflection of the “much deeper cultural and historical realities” (McGranahan 2010a, 49) that connect ethnic Tibetans across the plateau. Although China claims that Tibetans have been “closely connected with the Han ... in blood relationship, language, culture and other aspects” (CCP 2011, n.pg), the Tibetan government has continuously argued that “Tibet is completely different from China in race, language, religion, clothing, customs” (CTA qtd in Shakapba 2010, 919-920). While the Lhasa government’s stance is undeniably influenced by nationalist fervor, Tapontsang repeats this evocation of pan-Tibetan sentiment as she stresses that “we who lived in Kham were undeniably Tibetan, and we

lived as Tibetans live” (Tapontsang 1997, 29-30). Like Tapontsang, Pachen echoes these ethnic ties by describing both Kham and Tibet as “our country” that was “still free” in 1950 until the “Chinese crossed the Yangtze River” and defeated “Tibetan soldiers” at Chamdo (Pachen 2000, 13, 40). Even though their native Kham had been under varying degrees of Chinese influence over the past two hundred years, both Tapontsang and Pachen reaffirm the exile government’s position that “no matter how far these Eastern Tibetans were away from Lhasa or even how relatively close they were to the Chinese provinces, they behaved and acted like any other Tibetan” (D. Norbu 1979, 79).

It becomes evident that Tapontsang’s and Pachen’s concept of being Tibetan does not accord with modern notions of the state and citizenship; rather, it denotes a sense of belonging that is anchored in collectively shared origin myths, a common language, religion and social structure. Tibetan claims to an ethnic basis of their nation are close to the ethno-symbolist model, which acknowledges that nations are often powerfully linked to pre-existing *ethnies* (A. Smith 1999, 13). Pachen’s and Tapontsang’s assertion that their native Kham has always been part of the Tibetan nation must thus be seen as an act of ‘aspirational mapping’, by which pan-Tibetan nationalist aspirations are transferred onto a geographical area. More than claiming this particular area as the rightful territory of the Tibetan nation, aspirational mapping is a process whereby Tibetans (re)create a sense of national identity through the depiction of an “imaginary homeland” (Rushdie) while offering a form of tangible resistance to China’s cartographic imagination of ‘Tibet’.

It has been widely argued since Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* (1983) that nationalism and the rhetoric of national identity can be analyzed as a *narrative* of the

unity of a certain people. Nationalist aspirations are embodied in a variety of cultural artefacts yet the national map must surely be *the* most important material sign of “*national* imaginings” (B. Anderson 1983, 9) and national longing. As the map of cholka-sum is being reproduced in print—on posters and flags, in life writing, fiction, and government statutes—it becomes one of the pivotal symbols of the national struggle. Its importance for the exile community comes from the unique potential to offer “a symbolic affirmation of the political reality of an entity whose very existence [is] at the time increasingly called into question” (Craib 2002, 38). In their avowal and circulation of this aspirational map, the two life narratives are thus product and re-producer of the Tibetan nationalist imaginary.

While Tibetan aspirational mapping draws its inspiration from the past, particularly from the period of the Fifth Dalai Lama to create a commonality among Tibetans in exile and within Tibet, the map of cholka-sum represents also the future aspirations of the Tibetan community to re-create the imaginary homeland within these physical borders. On the surface of the map, all historical ambiguities and inter-regional difficulties can be transcended to create the image of “a coherent historical and geographical entity; that is ... a legitimate nation-state” (Craib 2002, 45). More than designating the traditional territory of ethnic Tibetan populations, the map *embodies* and *naturalizes* their ethno-nationalist aspirations for a Greater Tibet. The prominence of the map in both life narratives thus shows their commitment and avowal of a Tibetan nation based on ethnic affiliation. In order to strengthen this position, Tapontsang and Pachen weave examples of Tibetanness as a distinct and separate identity through their texts. The next section will analyse how both writers seek to consolidate claims of Tibetan values that are shared throughout the provinces and which are believed to distinguish Tibetans as a group from ‘the Chinese’.

5.1.2 *'The Violence of Liberation': Tibet under Communism*

In Tibet there were two things that seemed constant: the Dharma, and the innate intelligence of nature to renew itself. ~ Tapontsang (1997)

The borders of modern nations are never merely geographic demarcations to separate one territory from another; they are important claims to uniting a majority of people who share a common culture, language, and history. Even though Kham has not always been under the political authority of Lhasa, Tapontsang and Pachen regard themselves unmistakably as *Khampa Tibetans*. While certain local traditions may prevail, both writers maintain that Tibetan Buddhism was “the central component of the Tibetan society” (Tapontsang 1997, 17). Like the official exile position that regards “[t]he pervasive influence of Buddhism and the rigours of life amidst the wide open spaces of an unspoilt environment” as the main reason for the development of “a society dedicated to peace and harmony” (T. Gyatso qtd in Donnet 1994, viii), both life narratives use Buddhism as the prism through which they make sense of their lives prior to and after the Chinese invasion.

Having already established the claim that all of Tibet has been ruled by the Ganden Phodrang under the successive Dalai Lamas since the mid-seventeenth century until the Chinese invasion, Pachen extends the connection between Tibetan rulers and Buddhism to all levels of the administration: “*Since that time, a succession of lay and monk district officials carried out the land’s administration in accordance with the Buddhist principles of compassion and justice*” (Pachen 2000, xxi; emphasis in original). Buddhism, the quote suggests, has had benevolent effects on politics in Tibet. According to Pachen’s experience, it guided the ruling classes to act according to the principles of “compassion and justice” to the effect that lay and monk administrators

and local chieftains were “men of virtue, honest and widely learned” (Pachen 2000, xxi). Under the rule of Buddhist kings, most notably the Dalai Lamas, the land “prospered” and “there was great happiness” (Pachen 2000, xxi). Like official exile portrayals of pre-Communist Tibet as “a place of stability, peace and harmony” (T. Gyatso 1987, n.pg), Pachen’s description evokes the image of Shangri-la, a place that is “frozen in time” (Jacobson 2004) where people live in a state of innocence and pre-modernity.

Tapontsang also opens her text with scenes that have an ostensibly mythic flair. Calling Kham “*Metog Yul*, or Land of Flowers”, she recalls spending her summers “laughing, spinning, and falling in fields of flowers beneath an endless open sky” (Tapontsang and Blakeslee 1997, 5). She further explains that people’s enjoyment of the natural environment is inextricably linked with considerations of nature’s special status in Tibetan cosmology: “We considered the trees the ‘jewelry of the mountains,’ and the varied and beautiful wildlife as belonging to these trees. ... Tibetans consider the earth a living being. The deities of the soil, mountains, water, and sky protect it and give it nourishment. Our culture has always existed in perfect balance with our surroundings” (Tapontsang 1997, 15, 65). The Central Tibetan Administration and its supporters circulate similar descriptions of the harmonious relations between nature and people and Tibetans’ awareness of the interrelatedness of nature and humanity. As much as Buddhism is credited with having ensured good governance, the doctrine is also presented as harmonizing social relations among Tibetans and with other living beings, including the natural environment: “Tibetans have a great respect for all forms of life. This inherent feeling is enhanced by the Buddhist faith, which prohibits the harming of all sentient beings, whether human or animal” (T. Gyatso 1987, n.pg). Buddhism, this quote suggests, has influenced the very nature of Tibetans and created a society that was

peaceful and non-violent.

The suggestion of the widespread belief in karmic interconnectedness between people and nature is most effective in establishing the differences between Tibetans and Chinese. As a defining factor of Tibetan society, Buddhism subsequently becomes the most apparent contrast to atheist Communist China. Pachen establishes this incompatibility of worldviews early on through the voices of older Tibetans who seek council with her father: “‘Ah,’ the old monk said sadly, ... ‘the Chinese ... have forced men to work on their roads, they have even ordered them to kill helpless creatures. With shovels Tibetans have beaten field mice, with their bare hands they have had to twist the necks of small birds, with their feet they have stamped on beetles and spiders.’ He raised his eyes in anger. ‘Our vow to protect all living things has been violated’” (Pachen 2000, 103).

The incomprehensibility of these actions and the anger towards being forced to carry them out against their religious beliefs is further developed in *Ama Adhe*. Tapontsang’s descriptions of Communist struggle sessions, *thamzing*, expand on the topic of Chinese cruelty and their apparent disregard for life by recounting incidents of senseless cruelty towards other human beings:

In *thamzing*, the prisoner could be manhandled and humiliated by twenty, fifty, or even one hundred people. Children and family members sometimes were forced to commit acts of violence against their own families, through fear of being tortured themselves. Many people died as a result of these sessions. ... Neither the ideology nor the *thamzings* made sense to us. It was as if suddenly the Communists had gone completely mad. Though we did not trust them, we never imagined this kind of cruelty. (Tapontsang 1997, 67-68)

These portrayals of the Chinese as duplicitous and merciless to the point of sadistic create a very negative impression of Communist reforms and their implementation in

Tibetan areas; they also serve to increase the readers' appreciation of their ideological difference from the Tibetans who could only regard these actions as blasphemous within their own worldview. Both quotes reinforce ideas of Tibetans' non-violent nature; even more, these extracts propose an image of Tibetans as victims who were forced to execute harmful and destructive deeds for which they believed to accumulate bad karma in their next life.

From the paradisiacal state of affairs, life in Kham under Communist rule is portrayed as general social, religious, and environmental demise. Pachen details how her native Kham was characterized by "vast open spaces stretched as far as the eye could see" where "[w]ide pastures lay like a blanket of green on the valley floor; crops of wheat, barley, mustard grew in abundance" (Pachen 2000, n.pg). After her release from prison in 1980, she returned to those vast and rich plains only to witness how they had been transformed into a moonscape where the "hills were bare, the forests were gone" (Pachen 2000, 231). In her account of Karze County, Tapontsang offers a strikingly similar evaluation of the changes that occurred in the built and natural environment since the Chinese invasion:

We took a bus to Karze. The ride was depressing, for we kept passing so many recent ruins of Tibetan monasteries, forts, and other historical sites. The normal sights of a Tibetan locality—prayer flags and *mani* shrines, small stones with inscribed prayers—were not in evidence. The environment was desolate. ... My region has been a land of pristine beauty, a place of great religious sanctity ... But now, the mountains around Lhobasha were barren: there were no forests left. (Tapontsang and Blakeslee 1997, 202-203)

In clear contrast to the previous depictions of Tibetan care for the environment, both narratives accuse China of turning the pristine land of their youth into a desolate and inhospitable landscape. Destroying also the material signs of Tibet's culture and religion, Tapontsang insinuates that Tibetans' connection to their land and their spiritual

home, have been irrevocably transformed. In their accounts of the environmental damage they have witnessed, both texts are also reiterating concerns voiced by the exile government regarding the exploitation of Tibet's natural resources.

Tibetan exile publications claim that since the Communist take-over, Tibet has suffered “wide-spread environmental destruction ... resulting in deforestation, overgrazing, uncontrolled mining, nuclear waste dumping, nomads removal from the grasslands and other perils” (CTA Environment and Development Issues, n.pg). Like Tapontsang's and Pachen's accounts, exile government publications understand the reason for what they term exploitation to be connected to the very different attitude of the Chinese Communist state towards the natural environment. Rather than “[g]uided by Buddhist beliefs in the interdependence of both living and non-living elements of the earth”, greed and the “materialist Chinese ideology” is the primary reason for this shortsighted resource management (CTA Environment and Development Issues, n.pg).

While Chinese state publications stress that the material conditions of Tibetans have drastically improved since the complete Communist take-over in 1959, exile Tibetan publications argue that despite some material improvements, life in Communist Tibet is devoid of freedom and happiness. Remembering the ‘happiness’ and ‘abundance’ of pre-Communist Kham, Pachen's description contrasts sharply with the conditions in her village in the 1980s: “As I made my way toward Gonjo, the countryside seemed different. It was as though the land had lost its happiness. People were in rags, they appeared to be weak, emaciated, ashen. Each had a basket on his back, a broom or spade in his hands, and was driven to work in a drab-coloured truck” (Pachen 2000, 238). The absence of color as metaphor for deprivation, poverty, and the destruction of Tibetan is used to show how in Pachen's experience, Communist

liberation has proven to be ineffective to alleviate suffering. Instead, Pachen surmises that the Chinese promise of liberation was in name only, instead, “they would destroy monasteries, plunder homes, burn sacred texts, and drive people to poverty and despair” (Pachen 2000, 13).

In their attempts to “liberate” Tibet, both narratives suggest that China’s policies, informed by materialist Communist ideology, turned Tibet from ‘a place of the gods’ into a land of sorrow. The fairytale-like imagery of Tibetan pristine environment that was destroyed by colonization dovetails with Western idealizations and exile Tibetan self-representations. In both texts, pre-Communist Tibet is turned into an emblem of moral statehood and enlightened social relations; this romantic description disregards, however, any ambiguities that are part and parcel of all historical contexts. To elude, for example, the turbulent and violent political history of the Tibetan central state and the Tibetan borderlands may be a tactical move not to detract from the overall political goal of independence/ genuine autonomy. The image of Tibet as a united, isolated, and peaceful Buddhist state that pursued spiritual liberation over material progress only serves a nationalist agenda. Yet the portrayal of Tibetan history seen and evaluated through modern nationalist eyes obstructs a constructive debate about the historical nature of Sino-Tibetan relations and the legitimacy of Tibetan and Chinese claims regarding the status of Tibet in the past and today.

As is evident from this discussion, both life narratives reinforce the official narrative of Tibet as a peaceful, Buddhist realm and firmly anchor Kham’s history within the greater national narrative. However, despite avowals of similarity and affiliation to central Tibet, both *Ama Adhe* and *Sorrow Mountain* are also heavily invested in presenting the particular history of Kham and the reactions of eastern

Tibetans to the changes that the Chinese government sought to establish in order to model Tibetan societies according to Communist ideology. The life narratives thus show how hegemonic narratives are never complete or total but are continually “resisted, limited, altered [and] challenged” (Williams 1977, 112). By introducing two under-represented issues, namely the early reforms in eastern Tibet and the resulting resistance against Chinese rule, both texts depart from the narrow script of official Tibetan history and offer insights into a hitherto marginalized chapter in Tibetan national history. The next section will thus discuss the early reforms and the rise and spread of the eastern resistance.

5.2 A neglected story: reforms and resistance in eastern Tibet

Emerging from the headquarters of the Central Tibetan Administration and sanctioned by the Dalai Lama, Tibetan exile history evokes “the erroneous idea of a homogenous and harmonious group” (Nagar and Leitner 1998, 102) united by their collective suffering under Chinese colonization. However, the experiences of eastern Tibetans during the first years under the Chinese rule are not commonly found in exile histories; instead, the period between 1950 and 1959 is told from a central Tibetan perspective and very little attention is being paid to the cataclysmic events that took hold of Amdo and Kham and the violent clashes between eastern Tibetans and the PLA during this period. Jamyang Norbu contends that “[s]uch lack of information ... has enabled the Tibetan leadership to successfully rewrite history, playing down the role of the armed revolt and fostering the fiction that popular resistance was non-violent” (2004, 112-113). Arguing that knowledge of the events that took place in eastern Tibet during this period is crucial for understanding the Tibetan Uprising of 1959 and the

subsequent flight of the Dalai Lama into exile, this section examines first the representation of early reforms in eastern Tibet and Tibetan reactions to these reforms in *Sorrow Mountain* and *Ama Adhe*. Secondly, this section will show how the implementation of Democratic Reforms in 1956 was met with fierce opposition and soon erupted into a region-wide rebellion that threatened to destabilize the precarious Sino-Tibetan coexistence.

5.2.1 *'Words like Honey on a Knife': early reforms in Kham and Amdo*

In the beginning, relations between the Chinese and the local populace were cordial and daily life did not change very much for eastern Tibetans during the first years following the Chinese invasion in 1950. The first Chinese soldiers were respectful and generous; they paid for food, transport and shelter, helped during harvest season, and lavished lay people and monks with presents of silver, silks and brocades. Like many Tibetan life narratives, *Ama Adhe* gives a positive account of the early encounters with the PLA; the Communist soldiers would “help Tibetans who were carrying water, help them with their harvesting and making hay” (Patt 1992, 47). Goldstein explains that during the initial period from 1950 to 1953, the Chinese Communists “made an elaborate show of support for the status quo in Kham (and, by extension, in Tibet), with the aim of alleviating the fears of the Khambas, who were firmly committed to the traditional social, political, and economic systems” (Goldstein 1989, 643). Assured by this ostensible benevolence, many eastern Tibetans did not envisage life to change dramatically (McGranahan 2010a).

Like Tibetans in central Tibet, Khampas and Amdowas were promised that religious freedom and local customs would remain untouched and that political and

religious leaders would remain in power; changes would only occur in regards to the improvement of *social* conditions, such as a reduction in the heavy government taxes. Tapontsang acknowledges for example the positive impact of freely available healthcare and education: “The occupying forces fulfilled their promises of building schools, hospitals, and veterinary clinics. A primary school for the children of poor families was built in Karze, and 1952 brought the completion of a hospital that gave free treatment to Tibetan patients. When we rode by its entrance we often saw lines of people waiting for examinations” (1997, 49). Particularly monasteries benefited from early Chinese patronage and the Communist soldiers are portrayed as showing initial respect towards religion and an interest in learning about Buddhist doctrine and rituals.

While early Communist policies towards Tibetan Buddhism and its attendant institutions were supportive, these measures were arguably pursued to placate Tibetans and to ensure cooperation with the Chinese on both local and state level. Despite attempts to ingratiate themselves with the local population, many, particularly local leaders, were nevertheless wary of Chinese proclamations of solidarity and help to modernize Tibetan areas. Pachten records her father castigating those easily impressed by using a Tibetan proverb: “[The Chinese] put words like honey on a knife ... If you lick the honey your tongue will be cut” (2000, 55). Claiming thus that the Chinese “aren’t to be trusted” Gonor Pomdha elaborated that they were only ““trying to win our trust with bribes and promises” (Pachten 2000, 55).

Until 1965, Mao Tse-tung continued to pursue a policy of moderation in central Tibet, which exempted the provinces Ü and Tsang from early reforms and collectivization in order to create cordial relations between the Han and the Tibetans. Hence, between 1951 and 1959 “no aristocratic or monastic property [was] confiscated,

but feudal lords were permitted to exercise continued judicial authority over their hereditarily bound peasants” (Goldstein 1997, 52). Excluded from the Tibet Autonomous Region and therefore not protected by the Seventeen Point Agreement, Kham and Amdo however underwent the first wave of social and agricultural reforms the first years after the colonization. While no consensus seems to exist about the exact year when reforms began to be introduced, George Patterson, a Scottish doctor who had lived in Kham at the time of the invasion, asserts that land reform and re-distribution began as early as 1952 in Amdo and was quickly adopted in other areas of eastern Tibet (1960, 96).

In *Sorrow Mountain*, Pachen notes that earliest accounts of these reforms in Amdo filtered back to Kham in 1953, when they “heard that the soldiers had begun to denounce local Tibetans. There were confrontations, arrests, executions, even isolated incidents of fighting, and as a result several thousand Amdoans were killed or sent to labor camps” (2000, 51-52). Already one year later in 1954, Pachen records the testimony of an old monk from Amdo, who relates that ““in the north ... the Chinese have begun to turn against our religion. They have said that it is “useless” to society. They have entered monasteries, taken our precious statues and sacred texts, and sent them to China”” (2000, 103). As Shakya argues, this was also the first year in which the first confrontations between eastern Tibetans and the PLA occurred over the implementation over reforms (1999, 138).

During these first years of the colonization, the Lhasa government and the Fourteenth Dalai Lama operated on the assumption that cooperation with the Chinese was ultimately the safest and best solution, particularly in the absence of international assistance and given Tibet's lack in trained soldiers. The beginning of resistance

activities along the eastern borders were therefore neither officially supported nor welcomed by Lhasa authorities (Conboy and Morrison 2002, 20). Only in 1954, when the Dalai Lama traveled through Kham following Mao's invitation to Beijing, was he to be privy to the extensive reforms that had already been implemented in eastern Tibet. The Fourteenth Dalai Lama recalls traveling in the border areas where reforms had been forcefully implemented with a “heavy air of foreboding” (1962, 99). Learning from local abbots that the Chinese had “already started to enforce collective farming [which] the peasants bitterly resented” (T. Gyatso 1962, 98), he was confronted with mounting anger among Tibetans about enforced collectivization: “Here also resentment was boiling, and people told me stories of oppressions and injustices, of peasants dispossessed of land, and of promises which the Tibetans had believed at first but the Chinese had always broken” (T. Gyatso 1962, 99). The remote territory of eastern Tibet may have lent itself well to facilitating a rigorous enforcement of land reforms, yet in an area that was notoriously hostile to the Chinese, the policy itself was bound to be an explosive issue. Faced with the dismantling of their traditional society, Pachten describes how the chieftains of Kham united in opposing the Chinese: “They agreed not to send workers for the road being constructed through Gonjo. They pledged to withhold meat, grain, horses, and ammunition when asked to supply them. They vowed to disrupt Chinese activities in any way possible” (2000, 114).

While the first waves of land distributions and the restructuring of society had begun to irrevocably change the social and political fabric of eastern Tibet, by 1955, the reforms started to take a more hostile stance towards religious institutions. Despite early demonstrations of religious tolerance, ultimately, Chinese state policy towards religion was driven by Marxist ideology in which religion is regarded as “the sign of the oppressed creature” and “the opium of the people,” which eventually needs to be

“abolished as the illusory happiness of the people” (Marx and Engels 1955 [1844], 37-8). Tapontsang’s life narrative speaks of 1955 as the year when, “the first persecutions of the monasteries began” (1997, 61). After years of outward support for religious institutions and practice, Tapontsang recalls that “[s]uddenly, the Chinese declared religious life useless to the society. ... The Chinese said that ... monks and nuns should [get married] in order to play a more useful role in the society. ... Suicides within the monastic community began to occur on a large scale in order to prevent the breaking of vows” (1997, 61). Tibetan monks and nuns had been declared “feudal reactionary poisonous weeds hiding under the cloak of religion” (MacInnis 1972, 9) and were frequently singled out in *thamzing* as symbols of Tibet’s ‘feudal serfdom’.

The communalization had already aroused eastern Tibetan opposition yet it was the attacks on Buddhism, their local monasteries and abbots that united tribal leaders in their plans to oppose the PLA. As one of the nine leaders of Gonjo, Pachen recounts that her father Pomdha Gonor

rode tirelessly from town to town meeting with leaders from our area. He met with lamas, chieftains, local townspeople making plans to counter the Chinese. Together they swore to one another that no matter what the outcome, they were prepared to resist. Each chieftain committed a number of men and arms. In addition, it was decided that each well-to-do family should prepare three armed men with horses to be used in the effort. (2000, 109)

Pachen’s recollections illustrates that the recognition of the Chinese as a common enemy united chieftains and families from different tribes put aside their feuds and divisions and soon widespread fighting broke out. The next section will discuss in more detail the background to the mass-scale uprising in eastern Tibet and the consequences of the rebellion for Kham and central Tibet.

5.2.2 *The Great Rebellion of 1956*

With the full-scale introduction of the so-called Democratic Reforms in early 1956, eastern Tibetans experienced unprecedented changes to the social and religious fabric of their lives: farm cooperatives were introduced, and the properties and herds of monasteries seized. Furthermore, Tapontsang reports that “[t]he populace was informed that all personal land, herds, seeds, and agricultural implements would be collected and used for betterment and modernization of the collective Tibetan society” (1997, 64). According to Jamyang Norbu, these reforms were designed to eradicate monastic and tribal authority as well as to destroy traditional social structure (J. Norbu 2006, para 4). It further involved the widespread adoption of *thamzing*, in which individuals suffered public humiliation, beating, torture, forced confessions, and often executions. Tapontsang gives a vivid account of the use and structure of struggle sessions: “In 1956 the struggle sessions known as *thamzing* first occurred in the Karze region. ... Children were called on to denounce their parents; servants their employers; and the peasants and monks on the monasteries their lamas and abbots” (Tapontsang 1997, 67). Following on from the changes that had occurred in Chinese Communist action against religious institutions since 1955, Buddhist teachers, or lamas (Tib *bla ma*) became the prime targets during the Democratic Reforms:

[The Chinese] tied them up with rope, put cloth gags in their mouths, made them kneel, then they started accusing the lamas, saying, “You have been practising religion. You have been using religion to cheat the people.” They tried to force them to drink urine from female Chinese soldiers. When the lamas refused to drink it they would splash it in their face” (Tapontsang qtd in Patt 1992, 52)

When the campaigns against local religious and political leaders began to increase in frequency and violence, “[m]ost of the able-bodied men decided it was time to take their

arms and ammunition and retreat to the forest to prepare to fight” (Tapontsang 1997, 69). Pachen, too, recounts that when property was confiscated, people humiliated and the first communes forcibly introduced, “leaders in Derge, Kanze, Nyagrong, Ba, and Lithang assembled thousands of their people. Armed with swords and rifles, they rode into Chinese army camps, killing and looting” (2000, 109).

Dawa Norbu explains that the “unprecedented Chinese presence in the country caused great resentment and anxiety” to eastern Tibetans; however, it was only when they “tried to alter the functioning and sacred social system” that Khampas began to revolt (D. Norbu 1979, 81). Carole McGranahan (2010a) further states that the revolt entered a new stage when the Chinese began to retaliate with air raids; with the bombing of Lithang monastery, she argues, the Khampa resistance declared open war. Ani Pachen asserts that in response to the bombing of Lithang

[a]ll over Kham people rose up in resistance; knowing the terrain, they were often successful. The Chinese began to bring massive numbers into Tibet in attempts to stop the attacks. Their soldiers were well trained and well equipped; one on one the Tibetans were no match for them. Soon many people left their villages and fled to the hills. By the end of 1956 the number of Khampas who had taken to the hills had grown from hundreds to tens of thousands” (2000, 114-5)

In the beginning, the familiarity with the terrain, as well as the physical vigor that came from living at a high altitude in a harsh climate meant that the Khampas were at a clear advantage. Their guerilla tactics were effective even though they were severely outnumbered by PLA troops (Goldstein 1994, 88-89).

Having suffered heavy losses, the Chinese government sent more and more troops into eastern Tibet. American journalist and Communist supporter Anna Strong had travelled on a Chinese government tour to Lhasa in 1959 and described the eastern Tibetan uprisings as follows:

This “Kanting rebellion” broke in winter of 1955-56, and took the form of murdering central government officials and Han citizens, there being no PLA in the area. As soon as any PLA troops arrived, they easily put down the rebels, but these fled into deeper hills and eventually into Chamdo. It was estimated that there were 10,000 armed rebels at the highest point. Arms were easy to get, for at least 50,000 rifles had been left in that area from the warlord battles between Tibetan and Szechuan warlords. The Szechuan-Chamdo rebellion was “basically suppressed” by the end of 1956, though isolated groups would remain as “bandits” as long as any monastery fed them ... They were the Khampas, or Sikang troops, cavalry, wild, undisciplined, accustomed to living by loot. (1965, 65-66)

With the resistance gaining momentum, the retaliation by the PLA, too, became more sustained and widespread. Pachen recounts that PLA troops were moved from Yunnan and Sichuan to Kham in order to “crush the rebellious Khampas” (Pachen and Donnelley 2000, 135). As Pachen points out, the increased retaliation against eastern Tibetans also required additional deployment of troops with the result that “[b]y the beginning of 1958, the Chinese had committed eight PLA divisions and at least 150,000 men in Eastern Tibet alone” (Dunham 2004, 234). This had the devastating effect that “[b]y mid-1957, a ruthless pattern of attack and reprisal developed, turning much of Kham into a wasteland” (Avedon qtd in McCarthy 1997, 238). As a result, an ever-growing number of fighters took to the mountains so that in some villages only women, children and older people remained. All of Kham seemed to set aside tribal differences in the fight against a common enemy, and as villagers, Pachen recounts that they did “what we could to supply them with foods and other supplies” (Pachen 2000, 136).

With monasteries and villagers supporting the Khampa resistance, the Chinese propaganda increased its attack on ‘splittist’ and ‘reactionary’ activities, attacking particularly Buddhism and its institutions as exploitative and counter-revolutionary. The following excerpt from the Karze newspaper *Karzey Nyinrey Sargyur* on November 18, 1958, exemplifies the hardening line of Communist engagement with eastern Tibetans:

There are 390 monasteries in the Karzey District which are engaged in lawlessness and sabotage. All the monasteries are reactionaries under religious guise. They are all instruments of exploitation, the stronghold of autocratic feudal lords who stand in the way of progressive socialistic production and they are the centre of rebellion against the reform. If they are completely destroyed then the autocratic feudal oppression and exploitation can be destroyed. (from *Karzey Nyinrey Sargyur* qtd in International Commission of Jurists 1959, 41-43.)

In response to the growing reprisals in eastern Tibet, thousands of Khampa refugees and resistance fighters moved into central Tibet. Pachen recounts that “[m]any who had left their homes in Kham to fight the Chinese had begun to move toward Lhasa or flee to camps of Chushi Gangdruk, the principal resistance force” (2000, 140). Yet during this entire period of social and political upheaval, the “government in Lhasa was slightly sitting on its hands” (Mills qtd in Boyle 2008, n.pg). Although the uprisings in eastern Tibet have been described as “the gravest episode of internal disorder (in the People’s Republic of China) prior to the Cultural Revolution” (MacFarquar 1974, 8), the Lhasa government extended neither military help nor encouragement to Khampa fighters. In fact, since Lhasa had had little concern for, or power over, the easternmost regions of Tibet during the first half of the twentieth century, eastern Tibet did not feature prominently on the Lhasa government's agenda. Instead, their focus was to spare central Tibet from drastic measures, even if this meant not to confront the Chinese Communists regarding the drastic and violent measures they adopted in Kham and Amdo. In attempting to work with the Communists, the Lhasa government believed to be able to avert the social and political restructuring that the rest of mainland China and the eastern Tibetan provinces were already undergoing.

The official Tibetan representation of Kham during the first years of Chinese colonization is therefore heavily truncated: despite resistance to the introduction of social, political and economic reforms in eastern Tibet from the very beginning of the

Chinese colonization, the two official Tibetan histories, *Tibet: A Political History* (1967) and *100.000 Thousand Moons* (2010) by Tsepon Wangchuk Shakabpa, mention the situation in Kham and Amdo only after the mass-scale revolts that followed in the wake of the Democratic Reforms in 1956:

We had heard that the Chinese were resorting to ‘forced reforms’ in Kham and Amdo and that these reforms were being strongly resisted by the local people. We had also heard that the Chinese were violating the 17 Article Agreement and were killing monks and destroying religious institutions in those regions. We ... questioned members of the Dalai Lama’s party as to their reliability and whether there was danger that such atrocities would be committed in Ü-Tsang as well. (Shakabpa 1967, 312)

This passage clearly indicates that the interest of the Lhasa government lay in maintaining the status quo in central Tibet; a spreading of the revolt was therefore perceived as a direct threat to the order and stability of Ü-Tsang. Although the Fourteenth Dalai Lama had encountered the repressive measures adopted by the Communists in eastern Tibet, and hundreds of Khampa refugees were bringing devastating news to Lhasa, the Dalai Lama as well as the *Kashag* refused to extend support to the Khampa fighters.

As Tsering Shakya argues, this failure of support was a “great setback” for the morale of the Khampa resistance (1999, 163). With growing pressures from the PLA, many Khampas had moved towards central and southern Tibet where they had taken to the mountains to wage guerrilla warfare. Although they saw themselves as defending Buddhism, the Dalai Lama, and Tibet, their revolts were perceived as a threat against the precarious equilibrium between the Lhasa and Chinese governments. Thus, Shakya contends, “[o]nce in central Tibet, the Khampas were faced with enormous hardship, besides the loss of family and friends back home. And at first they were met with, at best, indifference and, at worst, hostility from the people in central Tibet” (1999, 163).

As tensions rose in Lhasa, Pachen elaborates further that “a group of resistance fighters came together into one large army in Lhokha, a town south of Lhasa. Weapons were purchased from India, and eventually the American CIA provided support” (2000, 136). On June 16, 1958, this group founded the “National Volunteer Defense Army”, Chushi Gangdrug. The newly established volunteer force escorted the Dalai Lama into exile in 1959 and continued to fight the PLA until 1974 when the soldiers were asked to lay down their weapons by the Fourteenth Dalai Lama. However, despite the centrality of the Chushi Gangdrug for the Tibetan anti-colonial struggle, the group did not received support at the time and only tentative acknowledgement by the exile Tibetan government today.

In order to comprehend the violent revolts in eastern Tibet, it is necessary to understand how differently Kham and Amdo were affected during the early period of Chinese Communist rule. Both life narratives record the efforts of Khampa resistance fighters in defending their home and religion, which was met with a crushing response from the PLA and insufficient support by the Lhasa government. The lack of support and recognition the Khampas have received since the early uprisings, is, however, not the only silenced story of these early years under Communist rule. The next section will therefore focus on the contentious subject of women fighters as it is described by Ani Pachen and Adhe Tapontsang who were both actively involved in the eastern Tibetan resistance. The next section will therefore discuss how women at war were regarded as transgressing gender boundaries before moving on to analyze how reactions to women-as-fighters differed even among Tibetans.

5.3 “Everyone has to fight until Tibet becomes free again”: Women and the Resistance

“War is represented as a disorder; disorder is represented as sexual disorder” ~ Scott (1985)

Stories of the resistance are difficult to tell in the Tibetan community in exile. Over the last decade, a nostalgic self-reflection of Tibet’s imperial warrior past has nevertheless opened some space for a moderate appraisal of male resistance fighters, particularly among Tibetan exile youths. The Tibetan Youth Congress (TYC) is thereby at the forefront of re-claiming Tibetan resistance (hi)stories and the Tibetan Oral History Project also includes interviews with former resistance fighters. However, women’s involvement in the resistance is still largely ignored. If their stories enter the public discourse, they are usually told within the framework of the community’s non-violent struggle. Thus, for the most part, public commemoration of women’s participation in the anti-colonial resistance focuses only on Women’s Uprising Day, the all-female demonstration on March 12, 1959 (McGranahan 2010b).

Carole McGranahan (2010b) points out that community-wide sanctions on the resistance affect male and female veterans differently. Cultural ideas of women’s bodies as dangerous and polluting buttress not only male veterans’ denial of women on the battlefields but have led women themselves to “acknowledg[e] that these experiences were really not to be narrated at all” (McGranahan 2010b, 776). By insisting on telling their own and other women’s war stories, Adhe Tapontsang and Ani Pachen resist this culturally enforced absence of narration. Their records of individual and collective female action as well as of community reactions to their participation in the struggle, enrich and illuminate our scarce knowledge of women in the resistance. Yet as avowed supporters of Dharamsala’s non-violent campaign, their narratives exist in the tension

between subversion of and deference for the official stance on resistance history. The following section will trace this complexity of conformity: firstly, I will identify the various roles of Khampa women in conflict as they are depicted and evaluated in the life narratives as well as in other Tibetan histories. This will also involve a discussion of culturally normed gender behavior. Secondly, I will discuss how the two women writers justify their resistance strategies within the existing cultural and current political framework.

5.3.1 Transgressing Gender(ed) Boundaries

Women and their bodies play an integral part in the construction of national community and form, in Deniz Kandiyoti's words, "an ideological terrain where broader notions of cultural authenticity and integrity are debated" (Kandiyoti D 1988, 246). If women's roles and conduct are already intimately tied to the survival of the nation or community, war and conflict further heighten anxieties about women and their "appropriate place" (Kandiyoti 1988, 246). During wars and civil conflicts, masculine and feminine positions are further demarcated and constructions of gender difference often exaggerated: men are presented as active and aggressive while women—connected with home and hearth—are portrayed as passive and inactive. Not only does the iconography of war present such bifurcated gendered figures, in fact, it seems to depend on essentialized gender identities. Jacklyn Cock (1991) lucidly observes in this context that when men fight wars as protectors of the home(land), "women often take on a particular objectified importance as 'the protected.' Women are the custodians of the social values that the men are fighting for; the 'woman left behind' becomes a repository of these values" (Cock 1991, 119). Constructed as passive and weak, women are expected to show their appreciation for male protection by offering support

structures that serve their fathers, brothers, husbands or sons (Enloe 1983). Women's compliance with traditional gender roles signify, according to Kandiyoti, a "patriarchal bargain" by which women indicate to men that they are "worthy of protection" (1988, 283). However, to sustain this ideology of gender and war, men also need women, but they need them "to behave as the gender 'women'" (Enloe 1983, 212).

Male veteran histories of the Tibetan resistance also rely heavily on gender differences and reinforce these by representing women's activities only within the framework of their traditional roles. As Mikel Dunham (2004) reports from an interview with the resistance fighter Nawang Chenmo, women are recognized for their support of the fighters:

[The women] were the ones who kept us informed. They knew our hiding places and, at night, they would sneak up into the mountains where we were grouped and update the positions of the PLA. They also came up with a clever way of communicating with us in the daytime. When we approached our villages, we always knew if the communists were around, because our women would hang red clothes—and only red clothes—out to dry. (Chenmo qtd in Dunham 2004, 168-9)

Although the quote emphasizes the importance of women in their support of the fighters, it does so by locating women's resistance strategy within the home and thereby away from the battlefield.

This reiteration of the division of war and peace into masculine and feminine domains echoes Tibetan ideas of gender(ed) spheres whereby women were associated with affairs "inside" the household and men with the prestigious ritual and political affairs "outside" the household. Extending this division, Tibetan society also strictly enforced a sexual division of labor that excluded women from performing certain tasks, such as ploughing, tanning, and *hunting* and the use of their associated implements (Aziz 1985, 29). *Ama Adhe* gives a vivid account how these boundaries were policed

and transgressions were quickly addressed. In a society where weapons were important signs of masculinity and status, Tapontsang's male relatives "appreciated the precision of a fine weapon and the discipline of marksmanship" (Tapontsang 1997, 23). Despite the prohibitions surrounding the use of weaponry for women, Tapontsang was taught by her elder brother Jughuma to excel in shooting a gun: "Jughuma allowed me to accompany him when he went for target practice. After a short while of watching him, I, of course, insisted that he should teach me how to shoot. Ever patient Jughuma fulfilled my wish and enjoyed giving me lessons. It was quite exciting, because *I did not know of any other girl who could shoot*" (Tapontsang 1997, 23; emphasis mine)

Tapontsang's excitement at being the only girl who learnt how to shoot implies that her shooting lessons were, at the very least, highly unorthodox. Her mother's reaction to this 'unfeminine' activity suggests, however, that Adhe's own and her family's reputation is at stake for knowing how to and using a weapon. Reprimanding Jughuma for teaching her daughter marksmanship, Adhe's mother explained that "it is considered improper for a woman to take up a gun" (Tapontsang 1997, 23) and subsequently forbade her daughter to accompany the men on their hunting excursions. Despite protestations to the benefits of "determined self-discipline" (Tapontsang 1997, 23) developed through the practice of weaponry, Tapontsang's mother defended her decision within the framework of a patriarchal system that ordered space and activity according to gender difference. Being instructed to comply (and therefore sustain) this system, Tapontsang later critiques her compliance with this prescribed femininity as the source of her struggles: "The day after my husband's death, I awoke in fear ... Having been a protected and privileged child, I had grown to be a typical wife, fully dependent on husband and family" (1997, 63).

While Tibetan society is not unique in its denial of women's use of weaponry (Herrmann and Palmieri 2010), it is important to understand that the prohibition of women in war is further linked to Tibetan ideas of female bodies as agents of pollution and danger. In his ethnographic account of Kham from 1934, Marion Duncan sheds light on the perceived danger for a soldier's protection derived from women and their bodies: "He with all Tibetan soldiers carries a charm box which has been blessed before the battle by high ranking Lamas and Living Buddhas and will ward off bullets as long as he does not touch women, or objects handled by women, and blood" (1952, 145). As Huber (1999) and McGranahan (2010b) explain, Tibetan culture considers menstrual blood as one of the most powerful forms of contamination (Tib. *grib*). Huber explains that *grib* "is generally conceived as a form of both physical and social pollution that is associated with various substances and prescribed social practices and relations, as well as with deities inhabiting both the body and the external world" (1999, 16). Due to their bodily functions, female bodies were both physically and morally dangerous for the well-being of the community and "to the efficacy of ritual" (Makley 1994, 78). Contact with women constituted thus a very real danger for Tibetan soldiers. Believed to have the ability to bring cultural and spiritual disorder at any given moment, female bodies and their menstrual blood held very real physical repercussions for soldiers because female pollution could cancel the powers of protective amulets and sacred spells. In fact, soldiers believed that "a blood-dipped bullet would kill you" (McGranahan 2010b, 772).

However, despite boundaries of acceptable gender behavior and the very real dangers associated with female bodies, both narratives show that women in fact defied normative femininity by actively participating in war. Both Pachen and Tapontsang in fact preface their own resistance activities by recounting the stories of Khampa women

warriors who fought before or during the same time as them. Countering her mother's prohibition with the story of the "irrepressible female chieftain, Chimi Dölma" of Nyarong, Tapontsang expresses her conviction that there always "were exceptions" among women: "[Chimi Dölma's] intelligence and bravery had placed her in the position of a chieftain, and her leadership in battles with rival clans, the army of Liu Wenhui, and the soldiers of the Long March ... who had at various times entered her region, made her name a legend throughout eastern Tibet" (1997, 23). It is this exceptional attitude that is repeated in Pachen's account of Dorje Yudon who took her husband's men to battle in 1956. In response to the murder of the chieftain Gyurme Chipa's family by Chinese soldiers, Dorje Yudon, second wife of the chieftain Gyari Nyima of Nyarong, assumed the leadership role from her husband who was away on business:

The people of Nyagrang were enraged [at the deaths of their chieftain's family]. Two weeks later, the beautiful young wife of Chieftain Gyari Nyima, decided to launch a revolt. She gathered her husband's men and, after they'd collected their weapons and mounted horses, she led an attack on the castle of the Female Dragon where the Chinese soldiers had secluded themselves. The Chinese were well fortified with supplies and refused to come out. The fighting went on for days. (Pachen 2000, 113)

Both Tapontsang's and Pachen's narratives work against the relegation of women to the periphery of the struggle and the denial to present them as agents in the struggle. Dorje Yudon's story is also repeated in Aten's life narrative *Horseman in the Snow* (1979) in which he even connects the beginning of the 1956 revolt with Yudon's attack on the castle of the Female Dragon:

The actual revolt began on the 14th day of the first moon on 1956, at Upper Nyarong. The Gyari Tsang family was traditionally the chieftains of that area. Gyari Nima, the chieftain and his elder wife were away at Dartsedo. Nima's younger wife, a beautiful and fearless woman, Dorjee Yudon was left at home to look after the family affairs. As the course of events drew to that one unavoidable conclusion, *she made the decision that launched the revolt*. Dorjee Yudon gathered her men and weapons, and also

dispatched missives all over Eastern Tibet urging people to rise against the Chinese. Dressed in a man's robe, and with a pistol strapped to her side, she rode before her warriors to do battle with the enemy. (1979, 95-96; emphasis mine)

All three accounts testify the presence of women in battle and their leadership roles and *Ama Adhe* and *Sorrow Mountain* contain further evidence that Khampa men acknowledged and respected female warriors. Tapontsang recounts that her father held Chimi Dölma in high regard and “spoke with admiration of her abilities in strategic planning and her outspoken determination to regain Tibetan control of Nyarong [from the Chinese]” (Tapontsang 1997, 28). Similarly, Pachen recalls her father ordering his ministers and the other chieftains to send a joint contingency to support Dorje Yudon's battle against the Chinese (2000, 113). Albeit brief, these signs of admiration for women's aptitude show that cultural ideas of women's pollution and their exclusion from the battlefield neither constituted a total ban nor obviously a total belief.

Pachen's own experiences in her role as chieftain exemplify the far-ranging attitudes towards women's leadership in battle and in fact her involvement in ‘public affairs’. Pachen received widespread support when she took over as chieftain to lead her tribe, including into battle. Having made a firm decision to “do whatever is asked. Even kill” (2000, 128), Pachen begins organizing the local tribes for the fight against the PLA and recounts that “[e]verywhere I went, people welcomed me as their leader. ‘Pomdha Pachen,’ they called when they saw me, ‘Pachen our leader’” (2000, 128). This seemingly unconditional acceptance from the villagers in Lemdha is however counterbalanced by the reaction of her father's ministers at Pachen's presence at their council meetings: “At times I joined them at my father's request, but I never felt entirely accepted by the others. From time to time I noticed them watching me when they thought I wasn't looking, with a mixture of curiosity, disbelief and dismay on their

faces, as if they thought their meetings were no place for a woman (2000, 111). Their ‘curiosity, disbelief and dismay’ over her presence during their gatherings suggests that the enthusiasm over women’s forays into traditional male spheres was certainly not shared by the tribal leaders. For the custodians of law and order, women’s involvement in these matters indicated not only chaos but also potential danger.

As long as her father was present at those meetings, Pachen’s ‘transgression’ into the male reserve of strategy and defense was duly tolerated. In an incident that occurred after her father had deceased, we can however detect the tensions inherent in the struggle between the old patriarchal system and the newly emerging order in which women were ready to take action. In her efforts to strengthen the forces of Lemdha, Pachen began to send messengers to other tribal leaders to send troops; while most responded in their joint effort against the PLA, one leader disregarded her messages. As she recounts, “I sensed that because I was a woman, he did not respect me and was trying to undermine my authority” (Pachen 2000, 132); consequently, Pachen saw herself forced to take more drastic measures:

The thought kept entering my mind that he’d disobeyed me because I was a woman, and I felt enraged. If I let him go unpunished, I thought, rationalizing my desire to punish him, others might disobey. With the fighting nearby, that wouldn’t be wise. ... Whipping was a punishment reserved for severe misbehavior ... but it seemed important to let others know that I could mete out punishment as well as a man” (2000, 132-33).

While the whipping of Dhondrup Norbu signaled Pachen’s determination to defend her position as chieftain at the time, it also highlights the complex situation in which these women found themselves within their communities. Although they were fully committed to support their community’s struggle against the Chinese, patriarchal norms and cultural ideas about pollution nevertheless presented various obstacles to women’s

acceptance as leaders in their own right. The next section will therefore discuss how Pachen and Tapontsang framed their participation in culturally accepted terms in order to uphold and support the existing worldview operating within the Tibetan community in exile.

5.3.2 Troubled Times: Women and Leadership

As is evident from the two life narratives, Tibetan women were not just passive victims but frequently active agents in all aspects of war. However, living in a highly gender-regulated society, Tibetan women also knew (and know even today) that those “who break the mould of feminized subjectivity and refuse the obligatory roles of chaste and dutiful wives and daughters [can] become the target of attack” (de Mel 2001, 3). It is therefore perhaps not surprising that if and when Tibetan women are recognized in the category of soldier, both men and women always present their actions as an *exception* to the rule, referring to their outstanding qualities or the special situation that called for such unusual action. The narration of women’s extraordinary qualities on the one hand and the relegation of their stories outside normative history simultaneously encourage and undermine women’s agency (Ortner 1974, 69-70). As both the undermining and the encouragement are anchored in dominant ideas about and practices of gender difference in Tibetan society, Tapontsang and Pachen faithfully re-enact the very gender boundaries in narrative that they implicitly and explicitly challenged through their resistance activities against the Communist Chinese.

In descriptions of their own initial involvement, both women writers emphasize compelling circumstances that forced them to act. Pachen stresses her devotion to a spiritual path throughout the narrative and her reluctance to assist her father in his role

as chieftain: “‘*My dear Lemdha Pachen,*’ my father wrote, addressing me in a formal manner. ‘*It has been six months that you have been gone. It is time to come home, and begin to learn your duties as heir of a chieftain...*’ My heart sank, but I knew it was my duty to go” (Pachen 2000, 88; emphasis in original). Her deferral to patriarchal authority becomes more pronounced after her father’s death when she is called upon by her filial piety to become involved in the management of troops and the defense of her country. Pachen legitimizes assuming the leadership as Lemdha’s chieftain by stressing the filial duty to honor her dead father’s wishes: “That day I passed from my childhood. In a moment, I knew that my dream of a life devoted to meditation and prayer was no longer possible. Unable to follow my heart, I was bound by duty to carry on my father’s work. With my country threatened and my family in danger, I set about making preparation for war” (2000, 123; emphasis mine).

Similarly, Tapontsang’s involvement with the resistance is triggered by the loss of male relatives. However, rather than taking over a male role like Pachen, Tapontsang needed to carve out an alternative space as a young widow with two children and without the immediate protection of her male relatives:

Life became more uncertain by the day as changes began coming quickly. ... Now the men in my family were disappearing, and I remembered the brief period of my life when my brother had sought to teach me the value of properly directed determination. I realized the necessity of aiding our men in the forests and keeping them informed of what was happening in Lhobasha and Karze. Now it seemed this was my best opportunity for taking a course of action. Approaching only trustworthy friends, I formed a small underground group of Tibetan women. ... My work was mainly in arranging contacts and communications and going to inform the men of new developments on the Chinese side. I made appointments for certain women to meet at a designated place after nightfall, when we took supplies and information to the men in the forest. (1997, 63, 73)

While Tapontsang established the women’s underground group without the urging of a male figure like in Pachen’s case, her activities are nevertheless described as the result

of a new order. With the men of her family either dead or fighting in the mountains, Tapontsang's transformation from dependent housewife to undercover spy is nevertheless portrayed as direct outcome of these unstable and violent times.

Male patronage and the absence of male protection may thus have allowed women to "fight with whatever means available" (Tapontsang 1997, 72); yet it is the pronounced belief that their actions are necessary for the protection of the Buddhist teachings which sanctions their transgressions into traditionally male spheres. Pachen's initial reluctance to join the resistance is completely transformed when her local lama, Ratri Rinpoche, impressed upon her that fighting the Chinese was, in fact, a religious duty. To this end, Pachen should take responsibility: "'Your leaders are able, the people are well-off, your men are strong, and your horses are swift,' he said. 'But now Buddha Dharma is facing extinction. It is a matter of the survival of the teachings'" (2000, 128). As a devout Buddhist, this encouragement from a respected lama works to change her attitude towards her chieftain duties: "Survival of the teachings! A new sense of purpose came over me when I heard the words. Centuries of wisdom, innumerable sacred texts, all threatened. If I can contribute something to protecting the great teachings of Buddha, I thought, I will do whatever is asked. Even kill" (Pachen 2000, 128).

With the blessing of the Buddhist institution, Pachen is both able to and allowed to transgress boundaries—both gendered and religious. Although she still pined for "stillness and prayer", this new purpose compelled her "to do everything I could do to defend the country. For the sake of my father, for His Holiness [the Fourteenth Dalai Lama], I plunged into organizing the forces of Lemdha" (Pachen and Donnelley 2000, 132). The motivation to protect the Buddhist teachings and teachers was highly pertinent for the Khampa fighters to transcend their tribal disputes and come together as

one resistance force in the face of a common enemy. For women, however, the religious aspect gave them permission to transgress into hitherto unfeminine spaces; furthermore, the explicit endorsement by Buddhist clerics for women to fight seemed to temporarily offset all religiously informed cultural ideas of women's pollution and danger.

Despite the various forces contriving against the telling of women's histories of war, Pachen and Tapontsang tell their story and the stories of other women as part of the larger history of the invasion, colonization and Tibetan resistance. By offering new insights into women's participation and by reinterpreting male (re)action, their stories constitute an important part of the political history of modern Tibet. Through them, we can ask how women's stories figure in the 'larger' play of national and cultural politics and we gain a new understanding of these politics. In the case of women in the Tibetan resistance, we learn about the permeability of gendered borders; at the same time, the politics of non-violence in the exile community necessitate that women faithfully reenact the very borders they challenge. As such, these two life narratives show, in Joan Scott's words, "not what was the impact of the wars on women, but what does the history of women during that period reveal about the politics of war" (1984, 6).

5.4 Conclusion

I have argued that *Ama Adhe* and *Sorrow Mountain* contain multiple layers of history through which they enforce, confront, and expand official Tibetan exile history. In their support for the official representation of Tibetan history, both life narratives evoke and reinforce the image of Tibet as a mythical Shangri-la that has been violated by the invasion of Communist China. Blurring the lines between history and political rhetoric, the texts seem to uncritically reproduce the binary opposition between Chinese

and Tibetan political and social systems that has been adopted by the CTA. At the same time, the women writers bear witness to the traumatic events that unfolded in eastern Tibet and the roles women played in the resistance movement. Therefore, Tapontsang's and Pachen's life narratives insist on remembering *difference* in history. In the commemoration of the experience of invasion and colonization through categories of gender and region, the life narratives revise a Lhasa-centric hegemonic history: they show how as Khampas, they have been marginalized by central Tibetan voices within the larger Tibetan narrative and how as women they have been excluded by the male voices within the Khampa community. Though framed by their commitment to the Tibetan community at large, their life narratives thus call for a separate historiography, one that is sensitive to the specific experiences of Tibetans in the east and that places women's experiences on par with those of men.

This insistence of telling multiple stories—official, unofficial, and silenced ones—and the resistance to simply reiterate the “definite” story circulated by Dharamsala is what makes Tapontsang's and Pachen's life narratives *revisionist histories*. The expansion of official narrative through a focus on regional and gendered difference is what connects these works with the previous life narratives of Dorje Yudon Yuthok and Diki Tsering. Similar to Rinchen Dölma Taring, both women furthermore significantly extend ‘official’ history to include aspects of Tibetan politics and social life that run counter to the current (romanticized) representations of pre-1950 Tibet that are circulated by the CTA and a number of Western supporters. Like the three women before them, Pachen and Tapontsang, embark on a process of bringing region, political difference and gender into the purview of official history; moving from the peripheries into the center, Pachen and Tapontsang reveal the challenges and obstacles for Tibetan women from the eastern regions to be recognized in the social and political

telling of exile Tibetan history. By expanding the lacunae identified by Yuthok, Tsering and Taring, Tapontsang and Pachen thus continue the effort to write a more inclusive, nuanced, and gender-sensitive Tibetan history.

CONCLUSION

Things are certainly in flux in the Tibetan community in exile. Over the last six decades, Tibetan women have become much more visible in the public sphere in the fields of education, art and literature, social work and, to some extent, in exile politics. The number of Tibetan women life writers has significantly increased during this time, and their stories offer a plethora of insights into the social and political intricacies of Tibetan society in pre-Communist Tibet, in Tibet today, and in exile. Nevertheless, Tibetan history has been, and continues to be told as a string of ‘public’, ‘political’ and ‘heroic’ events. As a result of this, women’s voices, their stories, as well as their versions of History are mostly omitted from official exilic historiography and the Tibetan nationalist narrative. The history of Tibet is thus a highly gendered affair, and one that is overwhelmingly gendered male.

As I have highlighted throughout this dissertation, for the Tibetan community in exile, the telling and writing of national history is a highly fraught exercise. As a nation-in-exile, without territory and legal status, history has become the most important tool in defending Tibetan claims for independence from China. Despite efforts by the

Fourteenth Dalai Lama to democratize the telling of history, a range of mechanisms—both overt and concealed—operate in the exile community to ensure that the official exilic version of historical events is upheld. Historiography is and remains a contentious domain where ‘public’ and ‘political’ events have precedence over ‘private’ ones: in its concerted effort to use history as a weapon in the battle for international recognition of the Tibet issue, the CTA and its attendant institutions continue the practice of ‘historical arrest’ (McGranahan 2001) whereby stories deemed contentious or dangerous for the image of the Tibetan community are being sidelined or ‘forgotten’. As I have argued in agreement with other scholars, this has resulted in the neglect of a range of historical experiences that leave Tibetans in exile with an incomplete and impoverished national narrative.

Moreover, this situation also has a very real impact on how Tibetans in exile understand and experience the possibility for telling alternative histories. Controversial topics such as regional difference, class hierarchies, gender inequality and armed resistance are often met with disapproval from the community, especially if they (directly or indirectly) challenge the Fourteenth Dalai Lama’s public message. As the three textual analyses have demonstrated, women’s experiences in and memories of pre-Communist Tibet share many of these conflicting and overlapping allegiances. Nevertheless, female and male Tibetans in exile *do* tell alternative histories and it is my contention that life writing has become an important avenue to tell these stories even if they contest the official nation narrative. However, as Chapter Three, Four and Five show, much of this transgression “inheres in the gaps, fissures, and silences of hegemonic narratives” (Mohanty 1991, 38). It is therefore only through a historically contextualized close-textual analysis that we are able to tease out the nuances and intricacies of these alternative histories. I contend that it is through close reading of the

life narratives by Diki Tsering, Dorje Yudon Yuthok, Rinchen Dölma Taring, Adhe Tapontsang and Ani Pachen, that their stories of women's roles in the home, within the family, in the resistance as well as their understanding of political events, come to the fore. As the title of my thesis indicates: theirs are complex challenges and complex conformities to the official exilic historical narrative that defy easy categorization or a unitary approach.

My exploration of Diki Tsering's *Dalai Lama, My Son* (2000) and Dorje Yudon Yuthok's *House with a Turquoise Roof* ([1990] 1995) in Chapter Three brings to light so-far neglected realities and experiences by Tibetan women in the domestic sphere in the first half of the twentieth century. Although memories of the home and of the house have rarely been regarded as important historical material, this Chapter highlights the extent to which reading women's life narratives provide us with essential information about Tibetan society as a whole during a particular historical time and in a specific place, in this case of Central Tibet and Amdo. Reading these two narratives alongside anthropological and sociological material about the status of Tibetan women in Tibet and in exile, allows us to appreciate the complexities of Tibetan household hierarchies and the manifold variations of women's position therein. I have argued that it is precisely by endorsing and complicating idealized representations of Tibetan women that these two life narratives add to our collective understanding of women in Tibet.

Chapter Four explores Rinchen Dölma Taring's self-authorization as a historical subject and a historian of Tibet through her life narrative *Daughter of Tibet* ([1970] 1986). By using a plethora of historical material and political histories, I show how Taring in fact offers a nuanced and yet challenging alternative history of Tibet during the first decades of the twentieth century. Departing from both Tibetan exile and

Chinese versions of history in many ways, *Daughter of Tibet* is forthright in tackling a number of uncomfortable truths about Lhasa governance while providing a fascinating historical vision of Tibetan modernity. It is my contention that her vision of a lived Buddhist modernity as a guide to preserving Tibetan traditional identity in exile that makes Taring's life narrative a key text for a fuller understanding of Tibetan history.

Bringing our attention to women's active roles in resisting the Chinese colonization, the two life narratives discussed in Chapter Five, Adhe Tapontsang's *Ama Adhe* (1997) and Ani Pachen's *Sorrow Mountain* (2000), significantly add to existing scholarship on Kham and the Chushi Gangdrug. In their efforts to create a space for women's battle histories, both life narratives challenge the silences imposed upon resistance stories in the Tibetan exile community as well as the marginalization of female participation by male fighters. As historical documents, Tapontsang and Pachen's life narratives are moreover inspiring accounts of Tibetan women's tenacity and bravery and thus offer vital alternative versions of femininity for future generations of male and female Tibetans.

In redirecting the historical gaze from the centre to the margins, I would like to build on the steps I have commenced and would like to open up avenues for future research in this area. Firstly, though I have chosen to focus exclusively on women's life writing that depicts life in pre-Communist Tibet to offer a gendered narrative to the official exilic version of history, a comparative study of male and female life narratives provides a fascinating opening for further research. While the majority of male life writings published in exile have been written by members of the aristocracy and the clergy, a small number of male authors also provide a perspective from the margins. An exploration of Tibetan history through the prism of class and region would therefore

shed light on the commonalities between women and men from similar social and regional backgrounds.

Secondly, a new generation of Tibetan women have started to published their life narratives in which they depict the challenges and opportunities in exile. While some female authors grew up in pre-Communist Tibet and offer insights into both ‘old’ Tibetan society and the changes underway in exile, some Tibetan women authors experienced Tibet only under Chinese colonization. Their life narratives thus reveal fascinating insights into the lived experiences of women in Communist Tibet as well as the dangers of attempting the flight into exile. Tibetan exile women life writers who were born under Chinese colonization furthermore disclose uncomfortable truths about the difficulties of settling into the established Tibetan exile communities in Nepal and India and the identity politics (and suspicion) surrounding newcomers from Tibet. All of these facets offer rich and meaningful areas of future research through which we can enrich our knowledge of women in Tibetan society and of Tibetan society as a whole.

Most importantly, making Tibetan women’s life writing the focus of scholarly inquiry will help “disturb those ideological manoeuvres through which ‘imagined communities’ are given essentialist identities” (Bhabha 1990, 300) and help to rectify the unrecognition and misrecognition of women in Tibetan history. It is only through a process of disturbing closely held fantasies and questioning what has been imagined that significant insights into the true role of women in Tibet’s complex history will be made. It has been my hope that this thesis has added to this crucial and on-going debate.

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