

**Encountering (Post)Colonialism: Tibetans Migrating from Tibet to India and Beyond**

## **Abstract**

This study contributes to the scholarly call to increase studies on migration from the perspective of postcolonial thought. It examines a novel ethnographic case; the migration motives and aspirations of Tibetans who have migrated from Tibet via Nepal to India, often also aspiring to migrate onwards. It demonstrates that although their reasons to migrate are heterogeneous, (post)colonialism-related power relations, such as visible unequal distribution of wealth and opportunities, increase their migration aspirations both in China and in India, where they have a minority position. It is also demonstrated that although repressive power structures push Tibetans from Tibet in a marginal position in both countries, their migration reveals an active agency taking advantage of the various opportunities during their migratory processes, such as the international attention that the Tibetan diaspora gets.

**Keywords:** postcolonialism, colonialism, transit migration, agency, Tibetans

## Introduction

This article explores migration from the perspective of postcolonial thought by examining the migration-related motives and aspirations of Tibetans who have migrated from Tibet via Nepal to Dharamsala, a town located in North Indian Himalayas. I ask why and how migration occurs among the Tibetans, how (post)colonialism-related power structures affect their migration, and how the Tibetan agency exhibits itself in the context of migration. The Tibetan migration has not been discussed scholarly from this perspective before although some studies have concentrated on Tibetan migration (Anonymous 2014; 2017) or Tibetan diaspora<sup>1</sup> from different theoretical orientations (e.g. Choedup 2015; Diehl 2002; Hess 2006; Houston and Wright 2003; Prost 2006; Swank 2011; Yeh and Lama 2006), and Anand (2007) has discussed geopolitics and International Relations (IR) in the context of Tibetan diaspora from the postcolonial perspective.

Consequently, this study answers to the scholarly call to increase studies on migration from the perspective of postcolonial thought (see Mains & al. 2013). The data reveals that Tibetan migrants often have a marginal position both in China and in India, which triggers their migration aspirations. It also reveals that despite the oppressive structures that the Tibetans encounter, they take advantage of the international attention that their diaspora gets in order to promote their cause and increase mobility among the Tibetans. Paying attention to their active agency challenges the victimising and objectifying image about the Tibetans that, according to Chen (2012) and Choedup (2015), for example, is still too often represented by foreign actors such as media or scholars (see also Lopez 1998).

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<sup>1</sup> The concept of diaspora has gained criticism among the scholars of postcolonialism and the related fields (e.g. Ndhlovu 2016). According to Chen (2012, 264), categories like 'diaspora' easily strengthen an oversimplified image of the Tibetans as these kinds of categories are often promoted by 'diaspora elites'. Nevertheless, I agree with the scholars who consider that it describes the situation of the Tibetans outside Tibet rather well in comparison with other concepts (see Anand 2003; Houston and Wright 2003; Wangmo and Teaster 2010), and depicts the common yearning of the lost homeland among Tibetans (Anand 2000). Although it is not exactly a bottom-up concept, different voices inside diasporas can be discussed within it.

The large-scale Tibetan migration began when their leader, the 14th Dalai Lama, fled to India via the Himalayas with his delegate in 1959 during the Tibetan uprising in their capital Lhasa, held against the People's Republic of China's (PRC) actions in Tibet. It is estimated that up to 85,000 Tibetans followed within the next months. After this migration flow, commonly called the 'first wave' of Tibetan migration, the PRC strengthened its border controls for twenty years and out-migration was scarce. In the beginning of the 1980s, in the post-Mao era, more movement was allowed, and the so-called second wave of the Tibetans started to migrate to India (de Voe 2005). It is estimated that around 130,000 Tibetans live in diaspora and that India hosts around 95,000 of them (CTA 2010).

Although many Tibetans took a direct route to India during the first wave of their migration (e.g. Subba 1990), their most common method to 'escape' has been for long to cross the border of China and Nepal paperless, illegally from the perspective of the PRC, having no intentions to stay in Nepal but move forward to India. They head to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) refugee reception centre from where they are transferred to India as asylum seekers since Nepal does not take in new Tibetans anymore. As I have argued in my previous study (Anonymous 2017), their migration can be compared with the type of migration that is commonly called *transit migration*, particularly if the concept is not connected simply to its origins, i.e. the fringes of Europe, but a more global approach is taken (see Bredeloup 2012; Oelgemöller 2011; Menjivar 2014; Schapendonk 2013; Servan-Mori & al. 2014; Wissink, Düvell, and Eerdewijk 2013).

Dharamsala, hosting around 14,000 Tibetans, has often been called the capital of the Tibetan diaspora; their religious leader, the 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama, lives there and it is the place where the major diaspora institutions are located, including the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA) which governs the Tibetan diaspora settlements in South Asia (Diehl 2004; McConnell 2009; Roemer 2008). Most of Dharamsala's Tibetans live in a part of the town called McLeod Ganj,

a name referring to the colonial history of this former British hill station, ruled by general McLeod during the British Raj in the 1860s (Diehl 2002, 38–40). It has become a migration hub for the Tibetans as those who have travelled from Tibet to India often head there to meet the Dalai Lama and stay there. It is also a place where complex onward migration practices take place.

The article is constructed as follows. After reviewing relevant postcolonial literature in the context of minorities and migration, I present the research methods. In the two empirical chapters that follow, I explore the colonialism-related reasons and representations behind the Tibetan migration from Tibet to India and their subaltern<sup>2</sup> positions that trigger onward-migration aspirations in Dharamsala. In the penultimate chapter, I discuss Tibetan migration and subaltern agency from the postcolonial perspective. I conclude by summing up and suggesting how to examine transit migration ethnographically within postcolonial thought.

### **Towards Diverse Understanding of Postcolonial Migration**

Within postcolonial studies, Blunt and McEvan (2002, 3) describe the problematics of 'post' as follows:

[T]he 'post' of 'postcolonialism' has two meanings, referring to a temporal aftermath – a period of time *after* colonialism – and a critical aftermath – cultures, discourses and critiques that lie *beyond*, but remain closely influenced by, colonialism.

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<sup>2</sup> I do not use the term subaltern in the strictest Spivakian sense. For Spivak (1988), the subaltern is not truly able to speak for herself but rather represented by the others. Although Tibetans encounter repressive (post)colonial structures and are rather often represented by others, I consider they are also active agencies.

As these meanings often have a problematic interaction and they do not necessarily coincide (Blunt and McEvan 2002, 3), it needs to be addressed that although I refer to colonialism when discussing the reasons why the Tibetans migrate in the first place or temporal aftermaths of colonialism in the Indian context where the Tibetans encounter the postcolonial power structures, the ‘critical aftermath’ is most important for this study; the study is located under the postcolonial thought that has widened from a critique of colonialism to an approach that concentrates on repressive power structures more widely (Blunt and McEvan 2002; Mains & al. 2013). I agree with Nash (2014, 104), who argues that a ‘postcolonial spatial narrative’ should not only concentrate on colonialism but also on current complex and unequal power structures. As Nair (2013, 4) states, postcolonialism ‘sheds light on and uncovers – and thereby deconstructs – the dynamics of power structures that have held the colonised in abeyance’.

There are also certain risks in applying postcolonialism in studies on minorities as it is problematic to regard conditions of indigenous people or ethnic minorities as legacies of colonialism when they should perhaps rather be described as pure colonialism (see Byrd and Rothberg 2011), and the risk of undermining their struggles as ‘post’ should be avoided (Goss 1996). Nevertheless, I do not want to draw too strict a line between colonial and postcolonial as it is often difficult to separate them rigorously without tight structuralist categorisations that postcolonialism tends to avoid, having its roots in poststructuralism and deconstruction. I agree with Koh (2015, 433), who argues that it should be possible to deal with colonialism and postcolonialism by not necessarily ‘being delimited to colonial/postcolonial timeframe’ (see also Blunt and McEvan 2002). Therefore, I often use the form ‘(post)colonialism’ in order to highlight the continuation of colonialism in the postcolonial era or the simultaneous appearance of colonialism and postcolonialism, particularly when I discuss the empirical aspects of the study.

According to Mains & al. (2013), migration has not been sufficiently tackled from the postcolonial perspective and there is thus a need for more studies that would improve and increase theoretical understanding of various forms of migration from this perspective. Nevertheless, postcolonial studies that tackle migration from different perspectives demonstrates that the thought is capable of revealing various aspects related to migration and unequal global and local power structures. There are a number of postcolonial studies about expatriates and mobile professionals living in global cities, for example (e.g. Armbruster 2010; Coles and Walch 2010; Korpela 2010; Leonard 2010). These studies do not only examine the 'privileged migrants' from Europe or North America that live in former colonies but also 'reveal how racial hierarchies and power inequalities persist, as well as how they are being reconfigured and challenged' (Fechter and Walsh 2010, 1198).

I focus on migration in and onwards from the Global South in the context of the Tibetans, building upon postcolonial studies on migration that highlight unequal access to mobility, opportunities, and wealth that affects people's choices to migrate (see Koh, 2015 for a review). Koh (2015, 1) crystallises the most important aspect of postcolonial approaches to migration from this perspective as follows:

[S]uch approaches shed light on fundamental issues of inequality, through which migration occurs as a response to differential access to opportunities and resources. By tracing how and why migration occurs in specific locations through a postcolonial lens, we can then map out the underlying power inequalities and discover possibilities for agency and social change.

In this vein, Mohammad and Sidaway (2012; 2016) demonstrate how global postcolonial power relations that favour the rich are present in the lives of the South Asian migrants in Abu Dhabi or in Doha, Qatar, where migrant workers from the Global South are

being pushed to a subordinate position; few are ever able to climb the social and economic ladder and reach the standard of living of the locals or wealthy expatriates. Yet, their migration and circulation between these places and their home countries reveal a strong agency whilst their volume and role shape the socio-spatialities and economic structures of these places (Mohammad and Sidaway, 2012). This example also demonstrates that while postcolonial migration is often considered 'intercontinental journeys to the heartlands of empire and subsequent relocation' (Nair 2013, 4), these 'heartlands of empire' can not refer solely to the West anymore.

It is important that postcolonial studies on migration focus also on non-Western empires or the countries that have not been colonised by the West because migration-related inequalities connected to unequal power structures concern also these countries and their policies in various ways. As Raghuram, Noxolo and Madge (2013) demonstrate, 'rising Asia' shapes the global power structures and the postcolonial theory also needs to address this if wishing to remain relevant. Thus, Sidaway et al. (2014), for example, pay attention to the changing world order and changing colonial power relations by discussing China's presence in Africa. Additionally, Park (2017) explores Japanese colonial attitude in early twentieth century, revealing geopolitics related to population discourse in the context of East-Asian imperialism and a non-Western empire (see also Avila-Tàpies and Domínguez-Mujica, 2015).

It is equally important to notice that the native/coloniser binary is not always straightforward since postcolonial thought pays attention to the subaltern agency (Mains & al. 2013). Mains & al. (2013), for example, discuss the struggle over Kashmir by India, Pakistan, and the Kashmiri diaspora. They demonstrate how the locals remained rather voiceless in international arenas and give an example of how various subaltern voices easily become suppressed by major colonialism-related narratives. Therefore, I avoided interviewing only the



diaspora elites in Dharamsala, such as the representatives of the CTA, whose voice is most often heard, and paid attention to the Tibetans from Tibet without any official position.

Also migration-related phenomena, such as diasporas, can be fruitfully explored through postcolonial thought (see Anand 2007; Bailey 2001; Walters 2005). Anand (2007) focuses on Tibetan diaspora from the postcolonial perspective, demonstrating how Tibetans organise their community in Dharamsala and how they have learned to use combining the Tibetan history and the orientalist image they have to their advantage. As Anand (2000, 274) argues, '[h]ad it not been for factors including Chinese colonial rule, the forces of modernity, the salience of nation states in the international community, and the experience of exile, Tibetanness could have taken a radically different form', and so would have the Tibetan migration. Anand's (2007) study has a well-working balance between structure and agency; while it discusses the structures and boundary conditions of the Tibetan diaspora, it also recognises the active Tibetan agency that has maintained the Tibetan diaspora communities and attracted foreign support. This resonates with such postcolonial thinkers like Jazeel (2014) who do not see the colonised as mere victims but highlight their agency and resistance despite that unequal global postcolonial power structures affect them.

### **Ethnographic Fieldwork in Dharamsala**

In this study, the agency and (post)colonial power structures that Tibetans from Tibet encounter are researched through qualitative ethnographic methods. I consider them the most suitable methods as they allow deep but flexible discussions and encourage various voices to arise. The empirical material is based on over ten months of ethnographic fieldwork in Dharamsala in 2009–2015 (see Anonymous 2014; 2015); the longest fieldwork trip in 2009–2010 lasted around eight months, and the last trip took two weeks in December 2015. I used methods such

as non-participatory and participatory observation, interviewing and writing a reflective fieldwork diary. As common in ethnographic methods, such as grounded theory, I also paid attention to written materials produced by diaspora Tibetans, including internet sites of the CTA and different Tibetan NGOs (Clarke 2005; Strauss and Corbin 1990; Gobo, 2011).

Altogether, 52 Tibetans participated in semi-structured interviews and a few key informants were interviewed twice. Of the interviewees, 31 were lay Tibetans from Tibet, all young adults or middle-aged, and 21 were Tibetan officials either from the CTA or different NGOs concerned with issues regarding the newcomers. The interviewees from Tibet had been living in diaspora from a few weeks up to more than twenty years at time of interview. The officials who I interviewed were mostly men as the officials in Dharamsala often are. Twenty Tibetans from Tibet were men and 11 were women, a ratio somewhat comparable to the ratio of male and female newcomers in town as more men migrate to India (see CTA 2010).

I was hesitant to contact the interviewees from Tibet without them knowing me at all because of their vulnerable position. Hence, the interviewees were usually selected with the method of snowball sampling. I also interviewed Tibetans I met through people who already knew me (see Mikkelsen 2005). Acknowledging the risk of a sample of this kind, I chose the interviewees from various social groups so that I would not interview only people from the same social circles. Since I am a beginner in Tibetan language but did not want to completely exclude those who could not speak English, eleven interviews of Tibetans from Tibet were translated by different Tibetan interpreters from different social circles. Most of the interviews were recorded, but I made handwritten notes if the interviewee did not want to be recorded, or if I knew that the interviewee was thinking to migrate back to Tibet, for instance.

Conducting ethnographic fieldwork necessitates critical self-reflection in the context of postcolonialism as its roots lie in times of colonialism when Western researchers were interested in the exotic Other (e.g. Livingstone 1992; Said 1978), and it has been accused of

being a colonial method which should be de-colonialised (Gobo 2011: 15). In the context of the Tibetans, Western researchers have been criticised of seeing the Tibetans as overly homogenous and harmonious people, as a part of the exotic 'Shangri-la'<sup>3</sup> myth of Tibet (Houston and Wright 2003; Lopez 1998). As I have first reached Dharamsala as a backpacker and a Western university graduate interested in Tibetan Buddhism and involved in NGOs related to human rights and indigenous people, I have also been influenced by this image at first. As Chen (2012) argues, fieldwork in Dharamsala requires certain flexibility and attempts to go beyond the most typical – and thus possibly less informative – narratives that Tibetans tend to tell the foreigners.

Therefore, participatory observation was an important method which allowed deeper encounters with Tibetans and improved my understanding of the heterogeneity of the Tibetan diaspora (e.g. Mikkelsen 2005). I volunteered in an English conversation class in one of the biggest grassroots NGOs in Dharamsala for several months in 2009–2011 and one week in 2015, for example. As the participants were mostly Tibetans from Tibet, volunteering increased my understanding about their lives in India more than if I had been just an outsider without conducting participatory observation (see Chambers 2008). Although I volunteered also in order to contribute to the community, not solely for research purposes, I was open about my status as a researcher. Moreover, none of the discussions in the conversation classes are used directly in this study in order to protect the rights of the participants and the anonymity of all Tibetans is protected throughout the study (Ryen 2011).

My analysis started already in the field and directed the next steps of the fieldwork (Strauss and Corbin 1990). Although I did not follow any analysing method dogmatically, the analysis has elements of the grounded theory method, particularly constructivist grounded

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<sup>3</sup> Shangri-la refers to an exotic place located in Tibet, first introduced in colonial literature in Hilton's *Lost Horizon* in 1930s (Anand 2007; see also Kolås 2004).

theory and situational analysis, which makes the grounded theory methods suit better with the epistemological shift of the postmodern turn, bringing discourse into the core (Charmaz and Bryant 2011; Clarke 2005). After the fieldwork periods, I analysed the interviews by flexibly using selective coding although I consider all categories fluid (Charmaz 2014; Clarke 2005); the loose core category being '(transit) migration' explored through postcolonial thought. Commonly after the postmodern turn, discourse is seen referring to forms of representation, customs, and uses of language, which produce 'culturally and historically located meanings' (Brooker 2003, 78). However, as Barnett (2015, 174) states, postcolonial theory is 'less interested in reading representations as evidence of other sorts of practices, and more concerned with the actual work that systems of cultural representation do in the world'.

### **Reasons to Leave Tibet and Representations of Colonialism**

I am not going to discuss the Tibetan history and relation to the PRC in detail as it has been much debated elsewhere (e.g. Goldstein, 1991; Hsiao-ting 2006; Khan 2015; Shakabpa 1967; Smith 1996). It is worth noticing, however, that issues connected to them still trigger Tibetan migration.

The PRC and the Tibetan diaspora commonly have different opinions about their shared history and political relations. Tibetan-run diaspora organisations regard Tibet's situation as colonialism, reminiscent of the situation of many indigenous people who often feel they are living under colonial rule (see Byrd and Rothberg 2011) – even though the Tibetans do not identify themselves as indigenous people as such (e.g. <https://www.ft.com/content/15f1d964-c1a3-11e0-acb3-00144feabdc0>). Despite that colonialism is not truly a bottom-up concept, it stands out from the rhetoric of the various websites of Dharamsala-based NGOs or institutions, for example. Tibet Post International, an NGO run by Tibetan journalists, states that 'Chinese

colonialism on Tibet[,] referred to as roof of the world, has been the biggest disaster the Tibetan people had to confront in thousands of years of its history' (<http://thetibetpost.com/en/news/international/5336-tibet-is-not-a-part-of-china>). A radical NGO that demands full independence for Tibet, Tibetan Youth Congress, in the actions of which some of the interviewees of this study sometimes took part, lists the PRC's actions in Tibet, such as 'population transfer' and 'militarisation' under the topic 'colonisation' (<http://www.tibetanyouthcongress.org/colonisation>). Additionally, the CTA states that 'Colonialism Underlies China's "Modernisation" Drive for Tibet', criticising the PRC's top-down modernisation policy (<http://tibet.net/2001/01/colonialism-underlies-chinas-modernisation-drive-for-tibet>).

Field Code Changed

The PRC disagrees and holds that it conducted a 'peaceful liberation of Tibet' (e.g. <http://www.china.org.cn/english/13235.htm>) by liberating the Tibetans from feudalism (Ardley 2002; Hartnett 2013; Khan 2015). Hartnett (2013, 287), who has studied Tibet-related rhetoric used by the PRC, Tibetan dissidents, and the 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama from the perspective of postcolonial critique, states: 'As is true of much colonialist rhetoric, the CCP<sup>4</sup> strives to portray the Tibetans as pre-historic heathens in need of modernity; the Party therefore argues that rescuing Tibet from oblivion can best be accomplished by rapid integration into the People's Republic of China... and global capital'. Obviously, what is considered colonialism according to Tibetan dissidents and the CTA is considered liberation and modernisation by the PRC. Hartnett (2013, 287) calls the PRC's rhetoric as 'the patriotic rhetoric of communist modernity' and the rhetoric of the Tibetan dissidents as 'the testimonial rhetoric of catastrophic witnessing'.

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The lastly mentioned rhetoric, rooted to Tibetan history, has also been carried over to diaspora. It is based especially on the experiences of the first and second major waves of

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<sup>4</sup> Chinese Communist Party

Tibetan migrants who left their homes mainly because of the political and cultural persecutions before and during the cultural revolution in the 1960s and 1970s (e.g. Ardley 2002; de Voe 2005; McConnell 2009; Wangmo and Teaster 2010; Vasantkumar 2013), a memory that especially many elderly Tibetans in diaspora still share (Choedup 2015). This resonates with Rajendra's (2014) notion that structures like colonialism or power relations that suppress some to subaltern positions often pre-exist migration, particularly in the Global South.

As the PRC's policies towards the Tibetans have softened a little (e.g. Ardley 2002), both the Tibetans from Tibet and the Tibetan officials whom I interviewed agreed that the most common reasons to migrate to India have lately been getting an affordable education from Tibetan premises, religious or secular, and meeting the Dalai Lama, which is not possible in China (e.g. Personal communication, March 25, 2011; see also Swank 2011, 52). Sometimes the migration motives were a mix of educational and political reasons, like in the case of a young Tibetan adult who had been living nine years in India when I interviewed him in 2010. Several of his elderly family members were killed during the cultural revolution, including his grandfather, and several had also been in jail. This family history affected his will to escape, but the major reason was that he had to go in a Chinese school where he needed to study in Chinese and do pro-Chinese rehearsals; he wanted to get education from the Tibetan premises without pro-PRC propaganda (see e.g. Anonymous 2015). Hence, he tried to migrate to India but was jailed during his escape. When freed after a month and a half, he was even more against the PRC because of his bad experiences in jail; he escaped again and succeeded (Personal communication, March 15, 2010).

Several interviewees highlighted political restrictions or the lack of general freedoms as reasons to leave Tibet. As one interviewee emphasised, Tibetans are not allowed to 'struggle' for Tibet, i.e. be politically active on behalf of Tibet in China (Personal communication, December 16, 2015). As an example of this, another interviewee told that the PRCs authorities

found out that he was holding a badge with a Tibetan flag under his jacket, and the imprisonment of several months that followed was the major push factor for his migration (Personal communication, 13 December 2015). Yet another interviewee, who was from Lhasa, told that her major reason to 'escape' was that the PRC officials had taken away her permit to work as a tourist guide because they became somehow suspicious of what she was doing. She had already sent her son to a boarding school in India and besides education from the Tibetan premises, she emphasised the freedoms that many Tibetans seek in India (Personal communication, December 18, 2015):

Here you will get totally freedom wherever you want to go, that is the main point.  
You know, in Tibet, even it's our country, you can not go out of Lhasa. If you will  
for example, if you want to go to see the Mount Everest, you have to get a permit.  
Even you are a Tibetan living in Tibet.

In these cases, the Tibetan situation resonates again with indigenous peoples; it is typical that colonialism continues through modern governance that restricts their ability to defend their lands or protest for their rights (Nash 2002).

An opportunity to study English was among the most important reasons to migrate to India among the younger interviewees, which tells about their international orientation and lack of chances to learn English in Tibetan-inhabited areas in China. A 25-year-old lay Tibetan male explained his motive to migrate as follows (Personal communication, November 15, 2009):

Yeah, my parents can not go pay the university or something like this so I stop school.  
Then after I can not do anything. So I think if I go to India I, yeah, I am sure I get a  
chance to learn some more things. I can learn English, you know. This my hope. So  
therefore I try to come here.

Because of these types of reasons, thousands of Tibetans used to arrive in India per year until 2008, but the number has decreased dramatically. When I visited the Tibetan Refugee Reception Centre last time in December 2015, only few had arrived in that year (Personal communication, December 15, 2015). All official interviewees with whom I discussed the issue mentioned that the most remarkable reason for the decrease is that the PRC's border control policies became stricter after the Tibetan riots in 2008 during the times of the Beijing Olympics, when China got lots of attention globally. Tibetans were frustrated with being marginalised by the massive amounts of Han encouraged to migrate to the major Tibetan cities by the PRC and the riots untypically turned violent in some parts of Lhasa (Fischer 2014; see also Ardley 2002). However, other minor reasons, such as the decreasing number of children in Tibet, might also affect the volume (Anonymous 2017). Yet, the officials expected that much more newcomers will arrive again if the border controls are loosened in the future (Personal communication, December 15, 2015).

Finally, the Tibetan migration motives and migration to India reveal lacking cultural and political rights and unsatisfying opportunities to education and mobility, despite the PRC's modernisation policy, or because of that. However, the Tibetans are also active agencies protesting these inequalities by migrating out of Tibet despite the structural challenges en route, such as the border controls of the PRC.

### **Subaltern Position Triggering Onward Migration**

According to Chen (2012), Tibetans as 'Indian Other' (i.e. the Tibetans in India) have gained less attention than Tibetans as 'Tibetan Other' (i.e. the Tibetans in China) despite the volume of the Tibetan diaspora and the fact that Tibetans tend to experience otherness also in India.



Hence, this chapter concentrates on Tibetans as ‘Indian Other’ although migration of Tibetans from Tibet as a whole is an example of both ‘Tibetan and Indian Other’.

India is often presented as a place of asylum and freedom for the Tibetans (see Choedup 2015; Rolfe 2008), but the realities in the country are often rather different as people of Himalayan origin may face racism (Smith and Gergan 2015; see also Choedup 2015; Lauer 2015). Smith and Gergan (2015) describe Himalayan youth in Indian cities as being part of ‘nonelite and subaltern cosmopolitanism’ even if they have been born in the country (Smith and Gergan 2015, 121). Towards this background, it is not unexpected that Tibetans from Tibet, particularly the newcomers, often feel marginalised. They can be considered to be in a subaltern position firstly as Tibetans in India and secondly within their own community where they sometimes face racism because of their sinicised habits which are culturally distant from the mainstream India and the localised habits of the Indian-born Tibetans (see Chen 2012; Diehl 2002; Houston and Wright 2003; Swank 2011; Yeh 2007). The alienation and subaltern position in diaspora leads also to increasing migration aspirations among the interviewees of this study. One of the newcomers described his onward-migration motives as follows (Personal communication, November 15, 2009):

Actually I don't want to stay here longer cause I am Tibetan-born you know. If I live like this then my life is one day, one day, its gone. Yeah, finished. Its not coming back, right? So I don't want to waste time in here...

The subaltern position of the Tibetans from Tibet in general becomes even clearer as they have fewer opportunities to get higher education and employment than the Himalayan youth born in India. The education that they have does not usually meet the Indian standards for higher education and they do not tend to speak fluent English or Hindi (see Swank 2011). These education-related problems commonly lead to unemployment or to very low-paid jobs

in the tourism sector, for example (see Anonymous 2014; Ruwanpura & al. 2006). One of the NGO managers, working closely with the newcomers, crystallises the Tibetan position in India in general – and the subaltern position of the Tibetans from Tibet particularly – so illustratively that I cite him in detail (Personal communication, March 25, 2011):

The most difficult thing for them is to find a job, to find a job. Because here, being in a country, you know, which does not belong to them, and which does not belong to us, you know. We can not, we can not stay in our own land and start farming, we can not do that. We can not buy land here in the Himachal Pradesh or anywhere in India, we are not allowed to buy that. So in such a situation, you know, there is nothing that they can do, you know. And then, getting a job without any formal education, it's very difficult. And then Tibetan community is a very small community, and the jobs go, you know, the job opportunity is very limited. And most of these jobs go to those who have studied in India, with some formal education, with some proper certificates. And those who came from Tibet, they were nomads in Tibet, some of them were business people in Tibet. So when they come here, there is nothing, there is nothing that they can do. Except maybe start a small roadside business or try to go to the West.

Because of these types of reasons, especially many young men from Tibet who I interviewed were so fascinated about the idea of moving onwards, particularly to the West, that the idea seemed to dominate their actions in Dharamsala. They constantly searched for opportunities to migrate and prepared themselves for that by trying to find money, applying for proper papers, and looking for potential partners or supporters who could help them to migrate.

The representation of the West as the most perfect place to live is connected to the fact that the unequal global power relations are strikingly visible in Dharamsala where wealth is unequally distributed between the locals, the Tibetans, the wealthier tourists, volunteers, and supporters of the Tibetan case. The postcolonial power relations are not manifesting only in

the name McLeod Ganj in Dharamsala; Tibetans are very well aware that wealth and easiness with regard to mobility is accumulated to the West. A manager of an NGO that concentrated on teaching the Tibetan newcomers English and other languages commented on their migration as follows (Personal communication, March 28, 2011):

And there is now a fashion in Tibetan community to go in Western country to earn the money, to earn the better life. So we are giving like a German lessons, like French lessons. Someone like Spanish. So we are giving for them language class. So, you know, the Tibetans in these days; is a fashion to go to the West.

Additionally, one of the interviewees, who has already migrated to Europe, stated what he considers the best thing in Dharamsala (Personal communication, December 30, 2009):

Yeah, for me is the best is if I can get a chance to go to Western country... Because Western is already developing. It's also good, you know, consumption, good consumer, you know. Everyday supper is, you know, really good, satisfies... Everybody, for that reason, everybody wants to Western country.

He continued to explain that one can also get work in the West.

Dharamsala differs from global migration metropolises in the Global South, such as Abu Dhabi or Doha where there is substantial accumulation of global capital and workforce, as the networks in Dharamsala are more grassroots-based and NGO-oriented (see McIlwaine 2008; Mohammad and Sidaway 2012; 2016). As Dharamsala is the centre of Tibetan-related networks, the unequal power relations become visible also in the form of aid agencies, international Buddhist missions, and tourism, all of which have made Dharamsala rather dependent on the West (see Prost 2006; de Voe 2005). One of the interviewees, a co-manager of an NGO that helps Tibetans to find work in Dharamsala, complained about the dependency

and highlighted that Tibetans, Westerners, and other foreigners all participate in creating this dependency. According to her, the Tibetans have got used to getting sponsorships over 50 years, and it has created a state of mind that survival is not possible totally without sponsorships although they are generally wealthier than the Indian slum dwellers, for example (Personal communication, March 23, 2011).

As the families of Tibetans from Tibet tend to stay in Tibet, not in the West (which is more often the case among the Indian-born Tibetans), they seldom get help from any family members in the West. Hence, the sponsorships and international networks are important for Tibetans from Tibet in terms of migration, and their chances of migrating are poor if they do not actively form international networks for themselves. Several of those interviewees who formed strong international networks have managed to migrate onwards; at least seven of the 20 Tibetans from Tibet whom I interviewed in 2009–2011 had migrated out of India by 2015 (four married a foreigner and one of them returned to Tibet). However, as most of the interviewees in their 20s and 30s, who formed the majority, had some kind of onward migration aspirations, it is also evident that migration onwards is difficult for them in general due to the structural and financial challenges that they face. They may not have proper documents that allow them to travel, and getting them demands time-consuming paperwork and language skills beyond Tibetan. It can also be difficult to get a visa as the Identity Certificate that serves as Tibetan passport is not an internationally approved passport as such. Since buying an illegal visa is also very expensive, travelling abroad is often difficult or even impossible for those without any support from abroad.

It is not known how many Tibetans from Tibet in particular manage to migrate onwards yearly, but a CTA official estimated that around 3,000 Tibetans in general manage to migrate out of India per year (Personal Communication 2, December 16, 2015; Personal communication, March 25, 2011). Moreover, the CTA (2010) estimates that approximately

22,000 Tibetans intend to migrate and the number is increasing rapidly, the major destination being the West. According to the CTA (2010), this out-migration trend will cause the biggest demographic change that the Tibetan diaspora has faced.

### **Discussion: Postcolonialism, Migration, and the Subaltern Agency**

As Mains & al. (2013) state, an explicit historical and spatial link exists between colonialism and migration as colonialism has provoked global movements, starting from European movement to the colonies; on the other hand, after the colonies received their independence, movement from the ex-colonies to the colonial cores has been vivid (see also Castles, De Haas, and Miller, 2014). India has provided Tibetans a place to build diasporic communities, but it is also a postcolonial country struggling with its own poor, and it has a significant number of out-migrants, just like many other former colonies in Asia (Koh, 2015). Hence, Tibetan migration does not exist in a historical vacuum; it is rather a Tibetan contribution to migration to the West from the Indian subcontinent.

As Nair (2013, 1) argues, 'the parity between the postcolonial and the migrant brings to light the crucial question of persisting empire in the age of globalisation'. However, as the world order is changing, the notion of an empire should not only be associated with Western powers (see Sidaway, Woon, and Jacobs 2014); claiming so would actually be rather West-centric. Although the 'heartlands of empire' (Nair 2013, 4) to where the Tibetans from Tibet often intend to migrate from the postcolonial India is most often in the West, the Chinese empire also has a major role when exploring their migration as a whole. Both Chinese and Western empires influence their migration motives and aspirations, and the power relations created by the setting that so easily marginalise the minorities actualise in different forms during their migration.

Both empires also easily regard the Tibetans as Others who need their help, whether through modernisation or through assistance based on exoticisation, leaving the Tibetan agency easily overlooked. This manifests in various levels. Besides that the Tibetans have been forced to modernisation by the PRC that tries to pull them out of what it considers more or less backwardness, they have also been seen as innocent victims of the PRC because of their subaltern position in Tibet and as victims of the orientalist 'Shangri-La myth' that particularly the Westerners project to Tibetans (e.g. Anand 2009; Chen 2012; Hartnett 2013). The problem in all these victimising images is that they tend to represent Tibetans (from Tibet) as passive objects (see Choedup 2015). Postcolonial studies on migration challenges these images by paying attention to people's active agency and actions in their migration decisions, as well as during their migratory processes. As Jazeel (2014) argues, it is important to emphasise the agency and resistance of the colonised and see them as active agents, not mere victims.

As Yeh and Lama (2006, 818) state, 'Western sponsors are attracted to supporting Tibetan refugees through a combination of romantic Western images of Tibetans, the ways in which Tibetan Buddhism has travelled to the West, and the discursive practices of the Tibetan government in exile and the Tibet Movement'. Exoticization of nations that have been considered Other is an integral part of the postcolonial, especially if not referring just to former colonies but a set of conditions in different places (Loomba, 1998). However, the above mentioned 'discursive practices' (Yeh and Lama 2006, 818) refer to the fact that diaspora Tibetans have also been active in creating a (neo)orientalist myth of themselves purposely in order to gain international support, both financial and moral (Anand, 2000), and in order to create international networks. Hence, although Westerners have a tendency to exoticise the Tibetan diaspora (Huber, 2001) and explore it with a 'tourist gaze' (Anonymous, 2015; Urry, 1990), they are in turn often under the gaze of Tibetans for sponsorship or migratory purposes (see Anonymous, 2015; Prost, 2006).

The onward migration aspirations of the Tibetans from Tibet reveal a sort of an ‘imaginative geography’ of the West as a place to migrate onwards (Said 1978, 49; see also Sharp, 2009), which serves as an example of ‘the actual work that systems of cultural representation do’ (Barnett 2015, 174). They are active agents who attract and take advantage of the global interest towards them although they are structurally repressed by their subaltern position and restricted ability to mobility, just like many other minorities in the Global South or ex-colonies. Despite these difficulties, a remarkable number of Tibetans from Tibet manage to migrate onwards. This resonates with Spivak’s (2000, 319) notion that even though the subaltern has been understood as silent or silenced by the (post)colonial system, the subaltern is no longer being ‘cut off from the lines of access to the centre’.

## **Conclusion**

As Mains & al. (2013, 132) state, ‘migrants continue to provide a daily reminder of the spaces and practices of colonial pasts and the necessity for a critical understanding of the postcolonial present (and future)’. Tibetans from Tibet have voted with their feet against the PRC rule in Tibet, alongside more personal reasons, by migrating or ‘escaping’ to India. In India, their active agency actualises in the (neo)orientalistic myth that they maintain in order to gain international support, in their onward migration related actions such as studying foreign languages for migratory purposes, and in their actual onward migration.

Finally, more case studies from the postcolonial perspective would still be needed in order to form a coherent theoretical understanding of migration from this viewpoint (see Mains & al. 2013). Increasing scholarly attention to the (post)colonial conditions or structures that affect the migrants and their active agency to take advantage of them would be welcome. Based on this study, I suggest that a fruitful approach to examine transit migration in particular is to

investigate the (post)colonial power relations that are present in the places wherein the migrants originate and the (post)colonial conditions they encounter during their migratory processes. Exploring where they are heading and why, by paying attention to the roles of these places within the postcolonial hierarchy, is revealing. This kind of approach reveals (post)colonial power structures that still affect migrants around the globe, which means that migration studies can make underlying (post)colonialities increasingly visible in different locations. The approach offers more understanding not only on the migration of the people from the Global South, but also on how the metropolitan cores and the power that they still have over the formerly colonised areas affect migration aspirations. This type of approach could also provide ways to critically evaluate the roles and effects of the empires within global migration in different localities.

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